



What Is the Key to Hashem's Heart?

IS IT REALLY POSSIBLE TO LOVE OTHERS AS WE LOVE OURSELVES?

In *parshas Kedoshim*, we are commanded, “*V’ahavta lereiacha kamocho*,” love your fellow as yourself. The instinctive response to that is: Impossible. Not gonna happen. It’s just not natural!

A human being’s self-love is the blindest, most forgiving and irrational love that exists. How could we possibly love someone else in the same way?

Two great rabbis offer different explanations of the verse.

According to Rabbi Akiva, *v’ahavta* doesn’t mean to love, it means to treat lovingly. This is actually doable. Hashem wants us to treat others the way we would like to be treated. This is the *halachic* interpretation of the verse.

Rabbi Akiva famously said that this command is *klal gadol baTorah*, a great principle in the Torah. It does not represent all of Torah, but it represents the half of Torah regarding interpersonal relationships, *bein adam l’chavero*.

In contrast, Hillel the Elder said that *v'ahavta lereiacha kamocha* is *kol haTorah kulo*, the entire Torah. Not just half. That means *v'ahavta*... somehow includes keeping Shabbos and kosher and all other *mitzvos* that are *bein adam laMakom* (between man and G-d).

But what does separating wool and linen have to do with *ahavas Yisroel*?

Rashi explains Hillel's statement simply: Hashem is your friend—“*reiacha*”—too. Be nice to Him too. If you love Hashem as you love yourself, you will fulfill all of His *mitzvos*.

Centuries later, Chassidus came along and agreed with Hillel that *ahavas Yisroel* encompasses all of Judaism, not half. Beyond that, Chassidus teaches us that the *mitzvah* to love every Jew is not an allegory. It is real and possible for every single one of us, as the Alter Rebbe explains in Chapter 32 of *Tanya*.

OUR SPIRITUAL DNA

It begins with a paradigm shift.

We are not bodies with souls. We are souls with bodies.

Division stems from the physical world; our bodies, egos, and selfish interests divide us. But on the level of the G-dly soul, there are no separations. We are all one.

According to Kabbalah, Adam and Chava contained within them every Jewish *neshamah* that would ever come to be. They had *neshamos klalios*, “general souls,” which encompassed billions of smaller souls. Just as in a physical body, there are trillions of individual cells that all share the same DNA, so too, every soul on earth is like a unique cell of one body. We are intrinsically, genetically linked. This oneness makes it possible for us to love each other as we love ourselves.

The best example of this is the love between biological relatives, like a parent and child, or siblings. Family members

love each other because they are literally made from the same stuff. When Miriam was ill, Aaron pleaded with Moshe to pray for her recovery, saying: “If you don't pray for her, it will be as if half of you was eaten away.”

In a mystical way, the same is true for all Jewish people. We are brothers and sisters.

Of course, as long as we are blinded by physical reality, it really is impossible to love another person as we love ourselves. That's why *halachah* only requires treating others lovingly. But Chassidus allows us to reach a higher level that makes the impossible possible. We can love others as we love ourselves; we just need to embrace our spiritual identity instead of our physical ones. We need to see ourselves as souls with bodies and see the people around us as the same.

Suddenly, the differences fall away. Suddenly, their suffering is our suffering, and their joy is our joy.

KOL HATORAH KULO

Judaism has two essential purposes: 1) To elevate the G-dly soul over the body, and 2) to bring Hashem down into this world.

In order to become spiritual people who can truly practice *v'ahavta lereiacha kamocha*, we need to embrace the lightness of the soul over the heaviness of the body. This accomplishes the first purpose of Judaism.

The second purpose, bringing Hashem into our physical world, will happen automatically if we have *ahavas Yisroel*. As it says in the *siddur*, “*Barcheinu Avinu kulanu k'echad*.” Hashem's blessing rests where there is *echad*—unity. Some people are claustrophobic; Hashem is division-phobic. He is repelled by arrogance and divisiveness, and He is drawn to *shalom* and love.

Now we can understand what Hillel meant when he said that *ahavas Yisroel* is *kol haTorah kulo*. By working on our *ahavas Yisroel*, we can accomplish the two main purposes of Judaism.

THE EXCEPTION TO THE RULE, AND THE EXCEPTIONS TO THE EXCEPTION

But what about the commandment in Jewish law to hate sinners?

Chabad Rebbeim have long been accused of being delinquents in this commandment. And they weren't ashamed of it. The Rebbe Rashab said regarding the command to hate a *shoteh* (fool), “Can you imagine what kind of compassion we must have for a person whom even the Torah says not to have compassion for?”

Someone once came to the Frieddiker Rebbe and asked, “How can you consider yourself a religious person when you have warm, personal relationships with so many sinners?” The Frieddiker Rebbe responded, “The *Shulchan Aruch* has four sections. The last section of the last of the four books at the very end of it deals with the commandment to hate sinners. To be honest, I haven't reached it yet.”

At the end of *Tanya* Chapter 32, the Alter Rebbe carefully analyzes the *mitzvah* to hate sinners and proves that it is no contradiction to our obligation to have *ahavas Yisroel*.

The commandment comes with rules.

Rule #1: You can only hate another Jew for sinning if you are on the exact same spiritual level as them. If they are greater than you, or weaker than you, who are you to judge? That already excludes most people.

Rule #2: Presuming you find someone who is on the exact same spiritual level as you and is sinning, you can only hate

them after you try to help them and continue trying to help them at least 100 times. That leaves virtually nobody whom you can hate.

Rule #3: Even if you do find someone you are “entitled” to hate, you are only entitled to hate the evil in them while still loving the good in them. We learn this from our forefather Yaakov. When Yaakov was angry at his sons Shimon and Levi, he didn’t curse them; he cursed their anger and impulsiveness.

On top of that, the Alter Rebbe adds, you need to have compassion for the sinner. This creates an imbalance of emotions towards the positive. You love the good in him, feel compassion for his failure, and hate his evil. It’s two against one.

HASHEM’S SOFT SPOT

My grandfather Rabbi Shaul Yechezkel Stern, a”h, was a sincere Yid who loved *shalom*. He often quoted a *midrash* to me that says Hashem has a weakness. A “soft spot,” if you will. Hashem’s weakness is *shalom*. He can’t resist us when we get along. Just take a look at the generation of the *Migdal Bavel*. They were idolaters, blasphemers, and atheists—they hated Hashem so much that they wanted to kill Him! But because they were a united brotherhood, G-d did not punish them. He only scattered them across the world.

Zaide Stern would say that the proof

that *shalom* is so important is in how hard the Satan works to prevent us from getting along.

Because when the Jewish nation joins together in peace and unity, we hold the key to Hashem’s heart. ❧

This article, based on Chapter 32 (Lamed-Bais, or Lev, which means heart) of Tanya, was transcribed and edited by Musia Kaplan from tapes of Rabbi Paltiel’s classes. Women are invited to come learn Chassidus with Rabbi Yossi Paltiel in person. Rabbi Paltiel gives two Chassidus classes Sunday mornings in the 770 women’s section, one beginning at 11 a.m. (Tanya) and one beginning at 11:50 a.m. (Hayom Yom). To check on these classes or for any other information, email info@insidechassidus.org.



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