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The Necessity To Connect With Other People

The sixth of the emotions in our animalistic layer of the soul, which is the last emotion we will examine, is *hiskashrus* – the ability to connect to others and have relationships with them.

Hashem created the world with many different types of people. No one was created for himself; each person is a piece of one collective essence – to be able to connect with others. It is essential for human beings to have relationships with others. People are not meant to be separate and alone, but to become unified. The eventual purpose of this unity is to universally recognize Hashem's existence in the future. Thus, relationships with others are necessary as part of the plan in Creation.

We are not discussing physical relationships in this chapter. We are discussing the ability to have a spiritual connection with another person – to have a soul connection with others.

We will now study this emotion of *hiskashrus* – how it is utilized in a healthy way, and how it can also be detrimental.

Modern Day Relationships Are Inconsistent

Most people only experience connection to others only from time to time. We have relationships with our family, parents, or close friends, but in our daily life, we don't really get to utilize our ability to connect to others.

For example, no one feels any connection whatsoever to a cashier or bank teller. Although we have interactions with people all day, we don't view them as relationships; they are no more than impersonal transactions.

We spend part of our time on our own and part of our time connected, but we are never *constantly* connected to others. Constraints of daily life prevent us from really utilizing our power to connect with others.

In the World to Come, our connection will be constantly activated. This is the way it was supposed to be, and we will return to that state. In our current circumstances, however, we cannot always be connected to others, and there isn't much we can do to change that.

The truth is that, for the time being, it's better this way. We live in a world full of despicable evil, and if we would be constantly connected to everyone in the world, we would find ourselves enmeshed with all the evil that exists today. When the day comes when we can experience that universal connection, the world will be only good and we won't be harmed by our connections. In today's world, it would actually be forbidden to be connected to everyone. We have 365 negative commandments, and the message of our Torah is clear: Stay away from all the evil in this world.

Limiting Our Connections With the World

Some people have weak relationships with others. They aren't close to others, and sometimes not even to their own families. Disconnection from others has its negative side, but it also has, as most things do, an affirmative aspect to it at times. This is because not every connection is good for us.

In this world, there is much wickedness. The more disconnected we are from that evil the more holiness we can draw to ourselves. When a person is very attached to this world, it causes problems – he connects to evil by misusing his innate potential to forge connections.

Where do we find the source of all evil connection? The Sages^[1] tell us that the Snake wanted to kill Adam so it could marry Chava which was of course a desire to have an unsavory connection to her.

Although the source of all connections exists in the healthy part of the soul, they can still be used for evil. It is therefore necessary to create boundaries for the connections one makes; we cannot always connect with others.

For example: A person has the ability to be compassionate toward others, which is a very worthy trait, but compassion needs limitations. The Sages^[2] say that if a person is merciful toward the cruel, he will end up being cruel towards those who are innocent. Generally, a person should be as compassionate as he is able, but he must occasionally withhold it as the situation dictates.

It is more complicated to address the issue of forging negative connections. The opportunity to connect to evil stands before us every second of the day. All day we are confronted with things that we should not be connected to.

An obvious solution to the problem would be to become a loner and escape to a place of solitude, cutting off all our connections, but this is not what Hashem wants from us. We are charged with living among people and dealing with them all the time, but we have to be restrained in where we place our trust. Most of our connections should be limited; only a fragment of our power to connect should be engaged when we deal with the world. These precautions will automatically limit our connections to evil.

Dependency

There is another kind of negative connection which gets its source from the *nefesh habeheimis*, the animalistic layer of the soul. In this case, the problem is not because of whom we are connecting to, but because of the very nature of the connection.

What is the difference between a positive and negative connection with someone else?

Positive connection results in true *achdus* (unity). In a healthy relationship, there exists an unspoken "treaty" between the two to become unified; this is the optimal connection that we should strive for. Negative connection is when, instead of depending on Hashem for everything, the person transfers that dependence to another person, feeling that if he doesn't "have" the other he sees no reason to exist. The relationship then becomes based on dependency.

Healthy connection is to truly be connected to another – to love your friend “like yourself”, as the Torah commands. In a healthy relationship, a person recognizes that even if all his friendships would be severed, he still exists, because the root of our existence is dependent on our connection with our Creator [which always exists].

To illustrate the concept, there is a well-known story of one of the great *tzaddikim* who lost his only child. Upon the child’s death, this *tzaddik* said, “Hashem, until now, while my child lived, I had to split my love between You and this child. Now that my child is gone, all of my love is only for You.” This is the epitome of true connection. While the child lived, his father loved him with all his heart. The moment the child died, the father’s connection returned to Hashem. Since the father was not dependent on the relationship he had with his child, he was able to immediately connect to Hashem, in spite of the great love he felt for his child.

Negative connection is just the opposite, since one places all of his love and connection onto another person, instead of channeling this intense dependency for Hashem.

The classic example of dependency is a baby. A baby cannot connect with Hashem at all; he is completely dependent on his mother, via his *nefesh habeheimis*. His *nefesh haElokis* is entirely undeveloped.

Our aim here is not to discuss the dependency of a baby, though, who has no *da’as*. There are even fully grown adults – people who are fully mature and capable of *da’as* – who are still dependent on their mothers for everything. Such a person is emotionally unhealthy, because he has no identity of his own.

The consequence of emotional dependency on another is that the person will feel a loss of identity. He will feel like he needs the other person in order to exist.

The Pain Of A Severed Relationship

In this world, all of us are connected to many things, and while we optimistically form friendships, these connections are often tenuous. We are not living in the state of Adam *Harishon* before the sin, where he basked in the exclusive relationship he had with Hashem.

The question is: How come our relationships with others do not last? What happens to a relationship that causes it to end? This discussion is relevant to all of us, every day of our lives.

Imagine a person who has gone through many disappointments in his life relating to others. He enjoyed many pleasant friendships with others, until eventually, his friends “move on” in life, going their separate ways, and some of these friendships, either as a natural course of events or as a deliberate act, come to an end. When a person finds himself on the short end of broken connections two, three and four times, it gets so frustrating that he is likely to conclude, “That’s it. I’ve had enough of relationships. It’s not worth it to be friends with anyone.”

For example: Reuven is friends with Shimon, and suddenly Shimon wants nothing to do with him. Sometimes this is because Shimon is too busy and has no time for the friendship anymore, and Reuven can judge Shimon favorably that there are no hard feelings between them.

In the worst case scenario, Shimon lets Reuven know – “in a nice way” – that he feels wronged by something Reuven did to him, and therefore doesn’t want to be friends with him anymore.

When Reuven hears the news, he’s devastated. Instead of making new friends, he feels so broken by the severed friendship that he doesn’t ever want to have a connection with another person again.

There is a different way Reuven might react to the news, and it is also detrimental. If Reuven is the kind of person who would rather avoid coming to this unpleasant conclusion, he might try to make a new friend, Levi, imposing on him the same royal treatment he gave Shimon. Because they don't know each other that well, Reuven's attempt to compensate for Shimon's rejection will appear overbearing to Levi. It's like dressing up a child with his father's clothing – such a relationship will not work, because Levi will not be interested in the kind of friendship Reuven wants to have.

This is because Reuven doesn't want to accept that his connection to Shimon has been severed. He cannot find a friend to replace Shimon, because anyone that Reuven attempts to be friends with will feel uncomfortable by the lavish attention they receive from Reuven. Reuven is exhausting his efforts in his friendships and no one has the strength to deal with the kind of friendship that Reuven wants to have, because it is way above what they are capable of handling emotionally. Such friendships do not last, because just like Reuven is doing something that is beyond his capabilities, so does everyone else feel that it's not in their ability to be in such an overbearing friendship. Eventually, his soul will come crashing down around him.

After a relationship is severed, if a person is lucky enough to find someone else on whom to lavish his attention, he will find that his ability to form friendships has remained intact, but he would be the exception to the rule. Most people who have suffered the pain of a severed relationship lose faith in their ability to connect, until it is ultimately destroyed.

All of us can relate to the pain of a severed relationship. Even the strongest relationships – husband and wife, parents and children – are not bound together forever.

Everyone dies eventually, and the relationship dies with them.

There are some friendships that last a little longer than others, but no friendship lasts forever, because no one is eternal. So, all of us at some point have to deal with a close relationship that has, for whatever reason, come to an end.

So what happens when we experience the end of a relationship? We feel like there's no one else left for us to have such a friendship with. As the Sages say, "Either a friend or death."^[3] It's like man who has a plant in his house that he waters every day. After a while, he stops watering it, and the plant shrivels up and dies. Similarly, it's not only the relationship that dies when it is painfully severed; the desire for any relationships at all dies with it.

Superficial Friendships Don't Last

A person only suffers from a severed relationship when there was a deep connection to begin with.

Some people rarely attain that level. Most of their relationships are superficial at best, and they don't have an issue ending the friendship and seeking new friends. This isn't a lofty concept, it is just a fact. Children also play with each other one minute and then forget about each other the next minute, because they never formed a friendship with their playmate to begin with.

Many adults as well have friends who aren't really friends, just a give-and-take relationship. They have no problem disconnecting from each other, because there was never a deep connection between them.

There are people who have been working at the same job for twenty years, yet as soon as they find a better job they get up and leave with no problem at all. They have been sitting there all those years, having conversations with everyone there, being together with them and eating meals with them – yet never once forged a close relationship with anyone.

Such “friendships” were really little more than acquaintances; they were never friendships to begin with, and it is very easy to leave them behind, if you are this type of person.

Someone who forms genuine, meaningful friendships with others, however, truly suffers when he such a relationship is severed, so our discussion will be geared towards this type of person.

The Outer And Inner Layers Of The Relationship

As a result of a severed relationship some people will decide that it’s not worth it to form relationships with others at all. They do not understand the damage they will be causing themselves by destroying a basic force in the soul, the ability to connect. This is detrimental to the soul, and we must therefore learn how to recover our ability to reconnect after having gone through such a thing.

Of course, there are certain situations where a person must sever the relationship, as we spoke of in the beginning of this chapter, but since the reality is that we are involved with people all the time, we still have to learn how to expose our ability to connect, even when we are vulnerable.

How do we get over a severed relationship?

When a person connects to another, there are two layers to the connection. The inner layer is the connection itself, and the outer layer is the relationship we experience. Thus, the relationship is only a “garment” of the connection.

To illustrate what we mean, in a marriage, a wife is bound up emotionally with her husband. The wife feels dependent on her husband, as Chavah was told, *“And to your husband you shall desire.”* When a man dies, the *Gemara* says⁴⁹ that his wife suffers the most from his death, because her entire being was dependent on him. This is a powerful connection. Can anything be deeper than this?

The answer is: yes. There exists in our souls an even deeper connection – the bond between us and our Creator. The quality of how we will connect to others will be influenced to the degree of our relationship with Hashem.

When we are in a relationship, our ability to connect to another person is the garment of the relationship. When the relationship is severed, all we need to do is remove the garment from the one we placed it on, and return it to Hashem. Our relationship with Hashem remains constant and never wavers, no matter how many friendships we form.

Healing Yourself Of A Broken Friendship

Let’s say Reuven has three friends – Shimon, Levi, and Yehudah. Reuven is very good friends with Shimon. Reuven is a little less friendly with Levi, but they are still friends. Reuven is also friends with Yehudah, but his friendship with him has weakened over time.

When his friendship with Yehudah weakens, Reuven may be bothered by it but it doesn’t break him. He continues to maintain his friendships with Shimon and Levi. If Levi now stops being friends with Reuven, it will bother him, more than when Yehudah stopped being friends with him. But he is still fine, because he is still friends with Shimon.

If Shimon now ends his friendship with Reuven, Reuven is broken. The one lasting friendship that he had, the main friend in his life, is no more. The pain is tremendous.

If the only connection a person knows of is his friendships with people – and not with Hashem – then such a severed friendship shakes up a person so much that he doesn’t want to make connections

anymore. Reuven never knew of anything deeper than his friendship with Shimon, and now that the friendship is over, he loses belief in the whole concept of connection and basically gives up.

But if a person has a deep relationship with the Creator, and that is the deepest connection that he knows of, then even if he experiences a severed relationship with a friend, the root of the relationship – his actual ability in the soul to connect – remains intact. The outer “layer” of his connection has been hit hard, but the foundation – his connection to Hashem – is unharmed.

This is a staggering insight into our relationships: all our relationships thrive on the quality of our connection with Hashem!

If a person loves his wife and children more than he loves Hashem, his ability to connect is really in danger, because the love he has towards his family isn't rooted in his relationship with Hashem. If such a person has a very close and loving relationship with his children and then one day, one of his children strays from *Yiddishkeit*, he will be totally devastated. He will mourn his child, and it will go on for a long time.

Of course, when a child goes off the *derech*, the father has every right to be in great pain, but why should he become totally broken? If the deepest connection he knows of is with this child, then the severed contact will destroy him. However, if his connection to Hashem is even stronger than the connection he had toward his child, he can always reconnect to Hashem and be comforted.

This reconnection will not ease all of the pain, as we will see, but at least he is still using his power to connect. He hasn't given up on it, like the father who suffered the death of his child, who can now love Hashem even more than when his child was alive. Only the outer layer has been severed by the death of his child, but the inner root remains. He can still have connections.

Lasting Relationships

We are saying that the relationship two people enjoy with each other is only the external garment of the connection itself, but we must clarify a point here.

Just because this is true, one should not tell his friend, “Since our entire friendship is only an external garment, you can stop being friends with me whenever you want and I'll just go find some other friend.” If a person does this, he's endangering the friendship! Even if he doesn't say this to his friend, if he doesn't value their relationship at all, viewing it as only a garment, then the entire relationship is in any case sorely lacking.

We need to clarify what it means that a relationship between two people is only a “garment” of their connection.

Let's say Reuven loves Shimon. What is the nature of this love?

Chazal state that there are two kinds of love: love that is dependent on something, which doesn't last, and love that is not dependent on anything, which will be a love that endures forever.^[5] If Reuven loves Shimon because Shimon has a certain kind of personality or circumstance that makes him loveable, it is a love that is dependent on something. But if Reuven loves Shimon simply because he loves him, it is a love that is not dependent on anything. On a more subtle note, love that is dependent on something is the garment or outer layer of love, and love that is not dependent on anything is the inner essence of love.

The difference between these two kinds of love becomes apparent if Shimon decides to stop being friends with Reuven. If Reuven only loved Shimon because of a certain reason (fill in whatever reason

you want), all of the “love” he had for him will instantly disappear. But if Reuven loved Shimon with a love that doesn’t depend on anything, then Reuven will still love Shimon even after Shimon has ended their friendship.

How can we tell that love that is dependent on something is only a garment of love, and not actual love? In such a relationship, Reuven only loved Shimon because of some admirable trait he possessed. If Shimon were to change his personality, the relationship would immediately lose its excitement and then dissolve, because the entire basis for the relationship depended on a certain condition. The love in this relationship wasn’t love in its essence, but rather a garment on top of something that is no longer there. Once the garment is removed, there is no more love.

This is a deep perspective that can be applied to all of our relationships.

We are not on such a high level that we can have a relationship that is entirely pure in its motivations, such as the friendship between David and Yehonasan.^[6] In our relationships, there are both ulterior motives and pure motives. If a person cannot identify what his ulterior motives are in the relationship, he will find it very difficult to identify his pure motives as well. But once a person discovers what his ulterior motives are for the relationship, he can choose to be connected to the other through his pure motives as well. This way, even if the ulterior motives fall away, the pure motives within him can continue the love.^[7]

This is a way to have a successful relationship with another, sparing us the grief when the other severs the relationship. Even though the “relationship” is over, the power of connection can still exist. The other might have severed the friendship with you, but because you have decided that you are going to love him no matter what, the connection is still there.

If Reuven loves Shimon because he admires and loves Shimon’s personality, and that is the depth to their whole relationship, then as soon as Shimon changes his personality, Reuven will stop loving him.

But if Reuven only began the friendship with Shimon based on his liking toward Shimon’s personality, and after that Reuven decides that he will love Shimon unconditionally – this is fulfilling what our Sages said, “*M’toch shelo lishma ba lishma*”, Motives that are not for the sake of Heaven will lead to motives that are for the sake of Heaven. In this type of love, Reuven loves *Shimon himself*, and not the reasons that make Shimon loveable. Such a love never ceases. The relationship might be over, but the love is still there. The connection remains.

This solution, of course, doesn’t take away all of the pain that a person experiences from a severed relationship. But it is much better than being left totally broken-hearted. This way, a person can console himself that there is still a bond between them, even if it exists only in his soul.

One time I met an old friend who I hadn’t seen in a long time. We had parted ways many years before. When we finally met after being apart for so many years, he said to me, “*Baruch Hashem*, we have renewed our friendship.” I said to him, “No. We were always friends, and we always will be.”

Maybe we aren’t on as friendly terms as we used to be, and we don’t keep up like we used to, but only the external layer of our friendship is gone. The inner essence of our friendship still remains – it did and it always will.

This will only be true, however, when one has reached unconditional love towards the other.

Children That Say Their Parents Don’t Love Them

Now we can understand more the power of connection that is found in the *nefesh habeheimis*, which

is to love another based on a reason.

We see this all the time in the most extreme example of this kind of love: Many times, when a child doesn't get something he wants from his parents, he will remark bitterly, "My parents don't love me." How does the child come to such a harsh conclusion?

A child only knows of a love that is dependent on something else. Thus, as soon as his parents don't give him what he wants, the entire love falls away, because the child only knows about the "garments" of love. To a child, the garment of love is the essence of love, so he needs a reason to want to love. As soon as the "garment" falls away, the child thinks his parents don't love him. This is because the child doesn't really know what love is.

Children do not know of the deeper kind of love, and thus it is possible for them to feel that they were unloved by their parents.

This type of love is the only kind that the *nefesh habeheimis* has to offer. As soon as we stop having a reason to love the other, the love falls away, for it was only a garment, and not the essence of love. The sad result is severed relationships.

For example, Reuven and Shimon were neighbors for ten years and they enjoyed a close and warm relationship. Shimon soon realizes that his family has grown and it's time to move into a bigger house. He puts up a sign that his house is for sale. He sells his house and moves. Reuven's reaction is to be insulted and hurt: "Shimon moves away and leaves me here all alone..." and they stop being friends.

All of the love that was between them was dependent on the fact that they were neighbors and kept each other company. As soon as Shimon leaves, Reuven feels lonely, but if Reuven would love Shimon regardless of whether Shimon leaves him or not, then the connection between them is still there, although they are no longer enjoying their previous relationship.

Loving Those Who Hurt You

With this kind of love, it is possible even to love others who hurt you!

If a person only knows how to love others when he has a reason to love them, then as soon as he experiences a problem in the friendship, he will never want to reconcile with the friend who wronged him. However, if a person works on himself to abandon his ulterior motivations in the friendship and focus only on pure motivations, then even if he experiences a setback in the relationship, it won't be so painful. He will even be able to be kind to someone who has hurt him because when he has pure motives, he loves the person himself, not something about the person, whether for good or for bad.

True Ahavas Yisrael

This is what it means to have true *ahavas Yisrael* (love of Jews). At first, we need to find some reason to love another Jew, but at some point, we need to deepen the love by loving him unconditionally.^[6] With such a love, a person can continue to always love the other, even if the other wrongs him.

In our first solution, where a person recovers from a severed relationship by deepening his love of Hashem, he alleviates his pain, but he doesn't expand his *ahavas Yisrael*.

The second solution is deeper, because it involves *ahavas Yisrael*. Even when my relationship with the other is severed, that is only the outer layer of the friendship, and although it pains me, I still love

the other, because my love to him isn't dependent on anything.

This chapter is geared towards one who considers his relationships very meaningful, and is therefore very pained when he has developed strong friendships with others and they are severed. The words in this chapter can literally save a person's life, because many people find themselves devastated by a severed friendship, and this has shattered their emotional well-being so much to the point that they are in need of professional help. The beneficial solutions given here can give healing to those deep wounds, revitalizing the person to give him a new lead on life – he will feel like he has undergone a personal *techiyas hameisim* (resurrection of the dead)!

^[1] – Yalkut Shimeoni, Shmuel 121

^[2] – Moreh Nevuchim Part 3, Chapter 39

^[3] – Taanis 23a

^[4] – Sanhedrin 22b

^[5] – Avos 5:19

^[6] – ibid

^[7] – See Part Two Chapter Seven

^[8] – See Part Two Chapter Seven