



דע אַת רעך

**How
to Love
Abother
Jew**

ADAPTED FROM THE ORIGINAL HEBREW דע אַת רעך
BY THE AUTHOR OF "BILVAVI MISHKAN EVNEH"
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דע את רעך - אהבת ישראל

01 | *The Three Levels of Ahavas Yisrael*

Introduction: The Rambam's Words About Ahavas Yisrael

With *siyata d'shmaya* (assistance from Heaven) we are beginning here to study the subject of *ahavas Yisrael*: to love a Jew.

There is a *mitzvah* in the Torah to love a Jew: “*And you shall love your friend as yourself.*”¹ The Rambam (In *Sefer HaMitzvos*²) writes that the *mitzvah* is, “To love our fellow Jews as much as we love ourselves. And one should feel compassion and love for his Jewish brethren just as much one feels compassion and love for oneself. And whatever you desire for yourself, so should you desire for another. And that which is hated to you, you should not do to others. This is the meaning of “*Love your friend as yourself.*”

According to the aforementioned words of the Rambam, the *mitzvah* to love other Jews is defined as loving another Jew, just as much as we love ourselves. The Rambam has explained that this love is expressed through feeling the same compassion for others as you have on yourself.

Elsewhere, the Rambam writes in *Hilchos De'os*³ that there is a *mitzvah* upon each Jew [individually] to love every Jew as much *k'gufu*, “as much as he loves his own body”, and therefore, one should speak of the praise of others and be careful with others' money, just as much as you want your money to be cared about and just as you care for your own honor. Here the Rambam is saying that the *mitzvah* is to love another Jew “as much as one loves his own body”.

Let us now ask the following question. According to the Rambam, when the Torah says to love a Jew “as yourself”, does it mean that you should love another as much as you take care of your own body? Or does it mean that you should love another as much as you love your own soul? In *Sefer HaMitzvos*, the Rambam is implying that you need to love another Jew as much as you love your own “soul.” In *Hilchos De'os*, though, the Rambam is implying that you need to love another Jew to the same extent that you care for your own physical body. What, then, is the *mitzvah* of *ahavas Yisrael*?

Let us explore this issue, so that we begin to deepen our understanding of *ahavas Yisrael*.

1 Vayikra 19:18

2 Rambam Sefer HaMitzvos 206

3 Rambam Hilchos Deos 2:3

What Does It Mean To Love Another Like Yourself?

We first need to understand what it means to love and care for another as much as you care for your own body (*k'gufo*).

This kind of love, *k'gufo*, is described in the statement of the *Gemara*, “One who loves his wife and honors her, even more than his own body”⁴, implying that love in marriage is for a man to care about his wife more than the care and concern he has for his own physical body. What does it mean to love someone else *k'gufo*?

Simply speaking, it means to love another as much as you love your own body, but perhaps we can say that the term *guf* (the physical body) is just being used here as an analogy. The term “*gufo*” can also mean the actuality of something, like we find in the term of the *Gemara*, *gufo shel dovor*, “the body of the thing”, which implies the bodily structure of something, but not the physical body of a person.

However, when we explore this deeper, it is because there are different levels of loving another person. There are altogether three general levels of *ahavas Yisrael*. The Torah says to love another Jew *kamocho*, (lit. “like yourself”), but there are actually three levels of “*kamocho*”, as we shall now explain.

The First Level: Loving Another Similarly To Yourself

The first level of love, which is the lowest, is described by the Ramban⁵, who explained that the word *kamocho* means only “like” yourself, similar to how much you love yourself, but not that you should love a person as much as you love your own self. The Rambam explains that the Torah’s commandment to love every Jew is to try to be at an equal stance with every Jew, but the Torah is not commanding a person to love another Jew more than he loves himself. This is because it is an unchangeable fact of human nature that a person always loves himself more than anyone else.

According to the Ramban, the Torah’s commandment is that you should try to love another Jew as much as you can, as close as possible to the level that you love yourself. The most you can love another person can be similar to the degree of your own self-love, but your love for another person cannot be stronger than the love that you have for yourself. The mitzvah to love another Jew is to love him similar to how much you love yourself – but it can never be on the same level that you love yourself. This is all the first level of *ahavas Yisrael*.

⁴ *Talmud Bavli Yevamos 62a*

⁵ *Ramban on Vayikra 19:18*

The Intermediate Level: Loving Another Equally To Yourself

There is a second, higher level of *ahavas Yisrael*, which is described in the *sefer Mesillas Yesharim*, that when the Torah says to love another Jew *kamocho*, the Torah is commanding you to love another Jew on the same level that you love yourself (*kamocho mamash*). This level is also described in other words of our Sages: To love another Jew equally as much as you love your own self.

The Highest Level: Loving Another More Than Yourself

Finally, there is a third level of *ahavas Yisrael*, which is the highest level of love, and it is exactly the opposite approach of the previous two levels. It is to love another Jew even more than you love yourself.⁶

According to this approach, when the Torah says *kamocho*, the Torah is saying that just as you would want your friend to risk his life for yours and to place your needs before his, so should you love your friend more than you love yourself and place his needs before your own.

This level of love is based on the teaching of *Chazal* that one of the questions a person will be asked in Heaven is, “Did you treat your friend royally and with pleasantness?” In other words, you need to view another Jew as being more important than you. In actuality, this means being *moser nefesh* (self-sacrificing) to do favors and kindnesses for another Jew.

This ability is ingrained in a very deep place in each and every Jew’s soul. A good example of this is the love that parents have for their children: A father and mother love their child more than they love themselves. This is the root of a deep ability in the soul to love another more than you. The highest root of this ability is the soul’s ability to love the Creator even more than you love yourself, but when used on the lower level, it manifests as the ability to love one’s child more than the love that one has for oneself. One can also take this love further and expand it to include the rest of every Jew in *Klal Yisrael*.

(To summarize, there are three levels of loving another Jew (*ahavas Yisrael*), in order of progression: (1) Loving another Jew similar to how you love yourself, but not equally as much as you love yourself. (2) Loving another Jew on the same level that you love yourself. (3) Loving another Jew more than you love yourself.

⁶ The Rav was asked what the source for this is, and the Rav responded that the source is in the Zohar, which teaches that when Moshe prayed for the Jewish people to be forgiven for the sin with the golden calf, Moshe said to Hashem that if the people won’t be forgiven, “Erase Me from Your book”, just as a father has cares about his son more than he cares about himself”, and an additional source is the Gemara (Shabbos 4a) that one should commit a small sin so that his friend should not commit a bigger sin.

Analyzing The First Level of Ahavas Yisrael

Let's analyze this further. What are the roots of these three different levels of love? (If only we can get to even the first and second levels mentioned. And, perhaps, we can touch upon the third level a bit - if not entirely, then at least partially.)

As quoted at the beginning of the lesson, the Rambam's view is that a person should love another *k'guf*, as much as one cares for his own body. Can this be describing the highest level of love, which is to love another more than you love yourself? This cannot be, because the Rambam says *k'guf*, to love another as much as you care for your own *guf* (body), and there is a principle that "Your life takes precedence" (*chayecha kodmin*)⁷, which means that you cannot give importance to another's physical life more than your own.

The *Gemara* gives a famous case: If two people are walking in the desert and one of them has a jug of water, and the other will die if he doesn't give him to drink, he is not obligated to give up his water for the other, if this will mean giving up own his life for the other person. This is because the Torah says "And you shall live by them", which is expounded to mean, "And you shall not die because of them" (following the Torah's commandment of loving another Jew does not obligate you to die for another Jew). When it comes to the life of your physical body, you are commanded to love your own life more than another's.

(The *Gemara* discusses the case where a person only has enough water to quench the thirst of one of them, but our Sages also discussed what the *halachah* will be when it comes to saving the *ruchniyus* (spiritual situation) of another Jew versus saving your own *ruchniyus*. The discussion then becomes very different, because the spiritual world has different rules than the physical world.)

What we learn from the aforementioned *Gemara* is that your physical safety takes precedence over another's. Therefore, when the Rambam says that one must love another *k'guf*, this love has its limits, just as your life comes before another's. Thus, the *ahavas Yisrael* which the Rambam is discussing is to strive to love another like yourself, but not exactly as much as you love yourself.

Note also that the Rambam also says that the *mitzvah* to love all Jews is upon "each Jew", which implies each Jew as an individual, as opposed to all Jews collectively. There is a big difference. Loving each Jew individually will mean that there is room for individuality, and that is why your life would take precedence to another's. From the perspective of the *guf* (body), there is no concept of having a collective love for all of *Klal Yisrael*, because the body views each person separately and it does not see each person as part of a collective whole.

⁷ *Talmud Bavli Bava Metzia 62b*

(Another reason for the Rambam's stress on this "individual" love for each Jew perhaps is also because the Rambam's view is that there is a separate *mitzvah* to love a convert, in addition to loving him because he is a Jew. Therefore the Rambam may have added that the *mitzvah* is to love each and every Jew, to include the *mitzvah* of loving a convert).

In short, the Rambam is describing the lower level of *ahavas Yisrael*, which is from the vantage point of the body, and according to that vantage point, one is not able to love another Jew more than oneself.

Analyzing The Second Level of Ahavas Yisrael

The second level of *ahavas Yisrael* mentioned, described by the *Mesillas Yesharim*, is *kamocho mamash*, to love another Jew as much as you love yourself, in the literal sense.

How can a person love another as much as he loves himself? From where can a person get the power to do this? The principle of *chayecha kodmin*, that your life takes precedence over another, is only with regards to the physical. But in the world of the spiritual, in the world of souls, there is no room for separation, because all souls are connected together and unified. From the view of the soul (the *neshamah*), loving other Jews does not mean to love each Jew in the individual sense, but to love them all collectively, as being a unit of *Klal Yisrael*.

There are two different levels of loving another Jew. The lower level, the view of the body, is to love each Jew separately and on an individual level, to see each Jew as an individual whom you must love. This is the kind of *ahavas Yisrael* which the Rambam and the Ramban are describing. In this level of love, you must love others just like you love yourself. It is where you take the love that you have for yourself and you extend that very self-love onto other individual Jews.

For example, the Rambam wrote that the *mitzvah* of *ahavas Yisrael* is to do kindnesses for others which you want done for yourself, and to want for others what you would want for yourself. You love yourself as an individual, and your *mitzvah* of *ahavas Yisrael* is to also treat others as individuals, whom you should treat just as you want yourself to be treated.

The Sages were asked, what if there is something which your friend wants but which you wouldn't want for yourself? Are you still obligated to do it for your friend, since you wouldn't want it for yourself? This is a separate point, but it only brings out the point further, that the *mitzvah* to love another Jew according to the Rambam and the Ramban, is to desire for another only what you would want for yourself, because it is a love that begins with the individual.

Higher than this level is to love the collective unit of the Jewish people [which extends to loving each of them individually], and this is the level that the *Mesillas Yesharim* is describing, *kamocho mamash*. This is a love that does not begin with yourself, but with being part of a greater whole: The collective unit of *Klal Yisrael*. Of course, it also means to love each Jew, but it is not an extension of your own self-love. It is a love that comes from connecting to the unit of the Jewish people, as opposed to each loving each Jew separately. It is a love that is coming from the collective unit of *Klal Yisrael* as they (and you) exist in the world of souls above. In this level of *ahavas Yisrael*, the root of the love is to love *Klal Yisrael* as a unit, while the “branch” of this love is to love each individual Jew.⁸

This level is also alluded to even in the Rambam’s view, with regards to the *mitzvah* of loving a convert. The Rambam writes that there is a separate *mitzvah* to love a convert, besides for the *mitzvah* of *ahavas Yisrael*, because a convert has “entered under the *Shechinah*.” In other words, besides for loving a convert as an individual, we must love the convert because he is part of the collective unit of souls that is the *Shechinah* (as is well-known from the teachings of our Sages, that the *Shechinah* is the collective root of all Jewish souls). If he wouldn’t be joining the *Shechinah*, there would be no reason to love him. Thus, the entire reason to love him, the root of the love, is because he is part of the collective unit of *Klal Yisrael*.

In short, the intermediate level of *ahavas Yisrael* is to love every Jew both on a collective level and on the individual level, to love a Jew because each Jew is an extension of the collective unit of *Klal Yisrael*.

We can also find support to this “concept from the wording of the verse, “Love your friend like yourself”, where the Torah says “your friend” specifically, as an individual. Why is the Torah using speaking in individual terms, “your friend”? And since the *mitzvah* of *ahavas Yisrael* includes both loving the collective unit of the Jewish people as well loving each individual Jew, why is the Torah only speaking about loving each Jew individually? It is because *ahavas Yisrael* is revealed by loving each Jew individually, but the root of *ahavas Yisrael*, the reason to love each Jew, is because we are all connected together under one unit, in the world of souls.

Analyzing The Third Level of Ahavas Yisrael

The third and highest level of *ahavas Yisrael* mentioned, loving another Jew more than you love for yourself, is the level of the future, after the coming of Mashiach.

⁸ Editor’s Note: The collective unit of *Klal Yisrael*, where all Jewish souls are rooted in, is also referred to as the *Shechinah*

The first level of *ahavas Yisrael* mentioned (loving another almost as much as you love yourself) is the level of the current 6,000 year period we are in the midst of, which generally corresponds to “This World”. The second level of *ahavas Yisrael*, which is the love between souls in the higher realms, corresponds to Gan Eden, which is the bridging point between This World and the Next World.

The third level of *ahavas Yisrael* is the level of the future, and we can have some illumination of it even now. Just as Shabbos is called a “semblance” of the World To Come, so can we have a “semblance” of the level of the World To Come, a small spark of it in our souls. If we can access even a “spark” of the level of the World To Come, we are lucky.

Let us now try to understand, briefly, the depth to this level of *ahavas Yisrael*: when one loves another Jew more than he loves himself. Where does a person get the power to love others more than he loves himself? It is more understandable to love another as much as you love yourself, by viewing all others as equal to you and by sensing the *achdus* (unity) with all other Jews. At best, one can love others on the same level that he loves himself. But how can a person love another *more* than he loves himself?!

It is for the same reason that a person is able to love *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. What is the source in our soul that motivates us to love *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*? On a simple level, this is because “*You are children to Hashem your G-d*”,⁹ there is a reciprocal love of a child to a father because the father loves the child, and therefore, because Hashem is our Father Who loves us as His children, we have a natural love for Him as well.

A father’s love for his child is greater than the child’s love for his father. For example, there is a *halachah* brought in the *Gemara* that an intruder who burrows into someone’s house through a tunnel is deemed a potential murderer to the house owner, even if the intruder is the child of the house owner, because the child might not have mercy on his father. However, if the intruder is the father of the house owner, we assume that the intruder will not want to kill the house owner, who is his child, because of the father’s love and natural compassion for his child. However, in spite of this difference, the child certainly has a love for his father (it is just not as strong as his father’s love for him).

The love that a child has for his father is rooted in the father’s love for his child, which is rooted in Hashem’s love for His children, the Jewish people, for He is “our Father, the Merciful Father.” That is the simple understanding of where we get the strength from to love *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

⁹ *Devarim 14:1*

However, there is also a deeper source of why we are able to love *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. The Hebrew word for love, *ahavah*, is from the word *av*, father. The father always precedes the child, and the father represents the point which preceded the child's existence. The love that a person is able to have for *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* is because He is the root and the source which preceded one's existence, and therefore the love that a person can feel for *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* can actually be greater than the love that one has of himself!

This is all the more so because He is eternal and He preceded us, and we as His creations have an inborn love for Him. His existence preceded our own, and our entire existence is only possible due to His existence (as the Rambam writes in the beginning of *Sefer HaMitzvos*, which is a topic that we will not get into now). Thus our soul's love for Hashem is, on a deeper level, because we love that which came before our own existence, and since He preceded our own existence, we are able to love Him more than we love ourselves. It is very difficult to describe this fully.

In different terms which mean the same thing, the Rambam writes in the introduction to *Sefer Mada* (in his *Mishneh Torah*) that if Hashem would not be in existence, *chas v'shalom*, nothing else can exist, and the fact that Hashem exists does not even necessitate our own existence [Hashem lets us exist only due to His kindness]. Thus, we are able to love *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* more than we love ourselves, because He could have made it that we don't exist. One can realize that his very existence is totally subservient to the Creator's, that there is no existence of his own, and for this reason one is able to love the Creator even more than he loves himself.

This is the root of how a person is able to love that which is besides for his own existence (including other creations), even more than he loves himself. This is also the depth behind the commandment of “*And you shall love Hashem your G-d*”, with all your heart and with all your life and with all your possessions”, which the Sages explained to mean, “Even if He is coming to take your life.”¹⁰ This is the obligation of giving up one's life if one is faced with committing any of the three cardinal sins. It is because one is able to love Hashem more than he loves himself, because there is a deeply rooted ability in the soul to love that which came before one's own existence. It is the power to have *bittul* (self-effacement) to the Creator.

This is also the deeper source of the ability to have *ahavas Yisrael*. The power to love another Jew is really a deep, hidden ability of the soul. It is the ability to say, “I am prepared to give up my very existence, for the sake of another Jew. Even if I don't exist, the other still exists.”

In the external sense, this means that I should give precedence to others and I don't have any superiority over others. There is a *halachah* of *chayecha kodmin*, which is that my life takes precedence over others, such as in the case where there are two people in the desert and one of them

¹⁰ *Mishnah Berachos* 9:5

has a cup of water to drink, where he is not obligated to give up his cup of water to save the other's life. That is true, from the perspective of the physical level of existence. But from the viewpoint of the spiritual, in the world of souls, the *mitzvah* to love another Jew like yourself means that your own existence is not important than another's. From the view of the soul, you are able to love another more than you love yourself. The soul is able to accept that its own existence can be negated, in favor of another's.

Three Levels of Existence: Body, Soul, and G-dliness

Let us now be clearer about this. As long as one is only living at a physical level of existence, his love for himself will be stronger than his love for another, so it will not be possible for him to love another Jew more than he loves himself. Only when one reveals his soul can one find the power to love another Jew as much as he loves himself, because when one reveals his soul, he can have the viewpoint from the world of souls.

Going further, when one is in touch with G-dliness (which is an even higher viewpoint than the world of souls), where one recognizes *Ain Od Milvado*, "There is nothing besides Him", at that level, one is able to love another even more than himself. One's love for the Creator, which can be stronger than the love one has for himself, is able to branch out into a love for all other Jews as well.

What are one's emotional limitations of *ahavas Yisrael*? At best, one can feel that others are equal to him, so he will love others as much as he loves himself. But at that level, one acknowledges that there is a separation between him and another. We have different bodies, different souls, and different soul roots. One cannot love another Jew more than he loves himself, with just *ahavas Yisrael* alone that isn't coming from love for the Creator. He will be able to view others as equal to him, but he won't be able to love them more than he loves himself.

The only way to love another more than you love yourself is when your love for another is an extension of your love for the Creator. As mentioned, one reaches love for the Creator by recognizing the reality that there is nothing else besides for the Creator, which causes him to feel that his own existence is completely nullified by the Creator's. One can reach this level by working on the awareness that there is truly nothing besides for the Creator, simply speaking – as the *Nefesh HaChaim* described at length¹¹: There is no existence of my own, for there is only the Creator. (We won't get into the intricacies of this right now.) Just like you can be prepared to give up your own

¹¹ *Nefesh HaChaim Shaar III*

existence for the Creator's, when you recognize that only He exists and nothing else, so can you be prepared to give up your existence for another human being.

Where do we see this kind of love manifest? As mentioned before, although the higher use of this ability is to love the Creator more than one loves himself, this ability is also used on a lower level, in the love that a father has for his child, where a father loves his child even more than he loves himself. The rule is that a father has more compassion on his child than the child's compassion for his father. The father precedes the child, and later the father leaves the world and the child remains on the world, and the child continues the father's existence. We learn from Yaakov Avinu that as long as children were still living, it was considered as if he was still alive. This is because the children continue the existence of their father, even after the father leaves the world. The father disappears, and he is continued through his children, who inherit him. The father is willing to give up his own existence and all that he has to his children, allowing them to inherit him, because he loves them more than he loves himself.

(On a deeper note, this was actually a result of the first sin. If not for the sin of Adam, a person would love the Creator more than he loves himself. As a result of the sin, when death was decreed upon mankind, this ability of love is no longer used for the Creator, and instead it is used with regards to one's children, where one will love his children more than he loves himself, allowing them to inherit him and take his place and all of his possessions. This ability is really an offshoot of the ability to love the Creator more than one loves himself, and as a result of the sin, the ability is no longer used that much with regards to the Creator, and instead one is usually using this ability with regards to his children. Since that is the case, the love that one feels towards his children can actually prevent a person from having genuine *ahavas Yisrael*, and that is why a person will still need to deepen his *ahavas Yisrael* towards other Jews, and it is not enough that he loves his children).

In summary, there are three levels of *ahavas Yisrael*, loving another Jew. The first level is when you love another Jew, but not as much as you love yourself. The second level is when you love another Jew as much as you love yourself. The third level is when you love another Jew more than you love yourself.

When a person is living from the viewpoint of the physical body alone, it is impossible to reveal love for another Jew. When one is living on the level of the body, if he reveals any love for another Jew, at best, he will love him somewhat, but he will not be able to love the other Jew as much as he loves himself. He will love himself more than he loves another person.

When one lives a life of the soul (the *neshamah*), one will be able to love another Jew equally, as much as he loves himself. And if one merits for the "light of Hashem" to settle upon him (a

revelation of G-dliness, which is a degree of the *Shechinah*), from recognizing *Ain Od Milvado*, one can reach the level of loving another Jew even more than he loves himself.

It is simple and clear that each person has all of these three levels of *ahavas Yisrael* within him, together. Since we have a physical body as well as a soul, we are capable of the first two levels of *ahavas Yisrael* (loving another almost as much as we love ourselves, and loving another equally as much as we love ourselves). And because there is also the revelation of Hashem's Presence deep in our hearts, we are also to expose the third level of *ahavas Yisrael* within us: The ability to love another Jew even more than we love our own selves. These are all different dimensions to one's being, and therefore, all three levels of *ahavas Yisrael* are within reach of every Jew.

These three different levels can also be compared to the three sections of the body. The upper third of the body [which contains the head] represents the most spiritual part of one's being, the level of G-dliness, which is capable of loving another more than oneself, the level of being *moser nefesh* to love another Jew, which can only come from nullifying oneself to the reality that there is nothing besides for Hashem. The middle third of the body [corresponding to the chest and torso] represents the intermediate spiritual level of one's being, corresponding to the soul, which is capable of loving another Jew equally as much as one loves himself. The lower third of the body [from the waist downward] represents physicality, the lowest part of one's being, which is capable of loving another Jew almost as much as one loves himself, but not more than he loves himself.

Practically Speaking

There are times where a person is experiencing the higher level, times when he lives at the intermediate level, and times when he lives at the lower level, of *ahavas Yisrael*. In any case, each person at his current level needs to be in touch with all of these three levels of love, even if the most he gains is a "spark" of these levels and he can't get to them completely.

It is impossible for a person to always love others more than he loves himself, because this will only be possible in the times of Mashiach. We mainly need to work on increasing the first level of *ahavas Yisrael*, which is to strive to love others almost as much we love ourselves. We won't be able to reveal that much of the two higher levels of *ahavas Yisrael* (equality and loving others more than ourselves), but we can still reach some degree of it.

Our practical work in gaining more *ahavas Yisrael* is try to increase each of these three levels of loving another Jew. Even though we can't reach all of these levels completely, every person at his own level needs to be in touch with at least a bit of each of these three different levels, of loving another Jew.

In Conclusion

With *siyata d'shmaya*, this chapter has been an introduction to the beginning of understanding what *ahavas Yisrael* is. In the coming chapters, with the help of Hashem, we will go through each of the levels of *ahavas Yisrael* in more detail.

02 | *Conditional vs. Unconditional Ahavas Yisrael*

Summary of Previous Chapter

We are continuing here, with *siyata d'shmaya*, to learn about *ahavas Yisrael* (loving another Jew), of which the Torah says, “*And you shall love your friend, like yourself.*”

To give a brief description of the subject, in the previous chapter we described three levels of *ahavas Yisrael*. The first level is called *kamocho*, to love another Jew “like” yourself, but not as much as you actually love yourself. This is the lowest level of *ahavas Yisrael*. The second level of *ahavas Yisrael* is called *kamocho mamash*, to love another Jew as much as you love yourself, to consider another Jew equally as important as you. The third and highest level of *ahavas Yisrael* is to love another Jew more than you love yourself, to consider another Jew more important than you, to be *moser nefesh* (self-sacrificing) for another Jew.

It was also explained that three levels correspond to three different levels of our being. The first level of *ahavas Yisrael*, in which we love another Jew but not as much as we love ourselves, corresponds to the *guf* (the body), which is also called the *nefesh habeheimis*, the animal level of the soul (the basest level of our being). The second level of *ahavas Yisrael*, in which we consider another Jew equal to ourselves and we love another Jew as much as we love ourselves, corresponds to the *neshamah* (the Divine soul). The third level of *ahavas Yisrael*, in which we love another Jew more than we love our own self, corresponds to the light of Hashem (also called “G-dliness”, or the spark of the *Shechinah*) which resides deep within a Jew’s heart.

Since we have a physical body, there is a *halachah* that if one only has one cup of water with him in the desert, he is not obligated to give it up to save his friend’s life if he needs it for his own survival. This is the *halachah* known as *chayecha kodmin*, “Your life takes precedence”, meaning that from the perspective of our body, we must consider our own physical body (as well as the animal level of the soul, which is called partner of the body) more important than another’s.

There is also a higher perspective than this: The view from our *neshamah* (Divine soul). From the view of the *neshamah*, every soul is equally important, because in the world of souls above, all souls are bound together under the Throne of Glory (and even higher than that). This is a love that begins from loving the collective unit of the Jewish people, as opposed to loving each individual Jew. From loving the Jewish people on a collective level, you are also able to love each Jew individually, by extension.

In the first level of *ahavas Yisrael* (the view of the body and lower soul), you love each Jew individually, but you do not see him as part of a collective whole, *Klal Yisrael*. In the second kind of *ahavas Yisrael* (the view of the Divine soul), you love each Jew because you see him as part of the greater unit of *Klal Yisrael*.

Finally, there is a higher level of *ahavas Yisrael* than the above, which is a result of revealing the “light of Hashem” (also known as the *Shechinah*, or *Elokus/G-dliness*) within the heart. This is the level where you are willing to sacrifice for another Jew (*mesirus nefesh*) in your love for him. This ability is not coming from the regular human capabilities of the soul. It is an ability that comes from above ourselves, and it is deeply rooted in how we are all “children of Hashem”.

That is a brief outline of the previous lesson.

Love That Is Dependent On Something vs. Love That Is Not Dependent On Anything

As we know, there are always two different levels when it comes to Divine service. There is always the level of serving Hashem *shelo lishmah* (lit. not for the sake of Heaven), which corresponds to the concept of “love that is dependent on something”, and there is a level of serving Hashem *lishmah* (lit. for the sake of Heaven), corresponding to “love that is not dependent on anything.” Let us see how these two general levels apply to *ahavas Yisrael*.

The first level of *ahavas Yisrael* (loving another almost as much as you love yourself, but not equally) which is from the view of the body, corresponds to “love that is dependent on something.” At this level of love, you are only able to see individual parts without seeing the collective unit of the parts. You can love individual Jews, but you do not see them as part of a greater whole.

For this reason, a person will love another because he sees certain aspects in the person that make him lovable. Therefore, your love is dependent on certain factors. If the lovable aspects of the other person’s character or personality wouldn’t be there, you wouldn’t love him. Since your love for the other begins from loving him as an individual (and not because he is part of the collective unit of the Jewish people), your love is focused on individual aspects of the person, and therefore your love for him will be dependent on certain factors. It is all because your perspective is to view him as an individual, and you don’t see him as a part of a collective unit.

At this level, you will love your friend named Reuven, for example, because he is Reuven, and you will love Shimon because he is Shimon – you love the individual, but you do not love him because he is part of *Klal Yisrael*. If your friend Reuven wouldn’t be Reuven, but someone else, and if your friend Shimon wouldn’t be Shimon, but someone else, you wouldn’t love them. You love this certain individual person, but you don’t love another certain individual.

The second level of *ahavas Yisrael*, which is the higher level, is when your love for another Jew comes from the view of the *neshamah*. At this level of love, you love other Jews because they are all part of the collective unit of *Klal Yisrael*. When that is your perspective, your love for another Jew is not dependent on anything. You will not have a love for a certain person and have a dislike towards another certain person, because your love isn't individual-focused, it is *Klal Yisrael*-focused. Here, your love for other Jews is coming from the reality that Hashem has ingrained in Creation: The intrinsic unity of the Jewish people, in the world of souls above.

However, if we consider the difference between the second, aforementioned level of *ahavas Yisrael* with the third, highest level of *ahavas Yisrael* [loving another Jew more than you love yourself, to the extent that you are willing to sacrifice for another Jew], the second level of *ahavas Yisrael* [loving all Jews equally] has an aspect of being a love that is dependent on something. How? Ultimately, the second level of *ahavas Yisrael* is dependent on some factor: The fact that all Jewish souls are one collective unit. On the other hand, compared to the first level of *ahavas Yisrael* [loving another almost as much as you love yourself, but not equally], which is very dependent on certain factors, the second level of *ahavas Yisrael* can definitely be viewed as love that is not dependent on any factor, since it is a love that does not depend on any external factors.

It is not simply that whenever one level is compared to a higher level, it is seen as a love dependent on something, and when compared to a lower level, it is seen as a love not dependent on something. It is because there are both external and inner levels to being dependent or not being dependent on something. Meaning to say, even if love is not dependent on something, there is both an external level and an internal level to it. Love may not be dependent on something external, but it still depends on something internal.

For example, in the second level of *ahavas Yisrael*, one does not love another person as an individual or based on certain qualities the other one has, but because he is part of *Klal Yisrael*. The love doesn't depend on external factors, such as having certain qualities, but on an internal factor: The fact that all Jewish souls are one unit.

In different terms which mean the same thing, love that is dependent on something begins from the factor that it depends on, whereas love not dependent on anything does not begin from the factor that it depends on, but on the person who we must love. With love dependent on a certain reason [i.e. when someone has a likeable personality], even if I love the person as a result, the love ultimately depends on the reason that I love the person, so it does not depend on the person. My love for the person is because of a certain factor that makes the person lovable to me, and therefore, the love is dependent on that factor, because if that factor wouldn't be in the equation, I wouldn't love the person.

What, then, is love that isn't dependent on anything? It is to love the person himself, as opposed to loving the reason or the factor that makes him lovable. Unconditional *ahavas Yisrael* is to love another Jew because he is part of *Klal Yisrael*, even if I have no special reason to love this person as an individual. There is no specific reason to love another Jew. Another Jew should be loved by me simply because at our root in Heaven, all Jewish souls are one unit, *Klal Yisrael*. It is to love another Jew intrinsically, and not due to any factors that are circumstantial.

Thus, love that is dependent on something (the first level of *ahavas Yisrael*, which is to love each Jew as an individual) is essentially a circumstantial kind of love, where I love another Jew because he happens to have certain qualities that make him lovable, whereas love not dependent on anything (the second level of *ahavas Yisrael*, to love each Jew because he is part of *Klal Yisrael*) is to love another Jew intrinsically, because all Jews are one, intrinsic unit, which is not dependent on any external factors.

A Deeper Understanding of the Difference Between The Three Different Levels of Ahavas Yisrael

Now we can also understand with greater depth the difference between the first level of *ahavas Yisrael* (which is the view of the body), where loving another Jew *kamocho* (like yourself) is not meant literally and you don't love another Jew as much as yourself – with the second level of *ahavas Yisrael*, where *kamocho* is literal and you love another Jew equally as much as you love yourself. In order to love another Jew equally as much as you love yourself, there cannot be any differentiation between one Jew and another. Only when you love all Jews collectively, and not individually, are you loving others Jew with an unconditional love that doesn't depend on any factors.

Certainly the third and highest level of *ahavas Yisrael*, which comes from the revelation of G-dliness (or the light of the *Shechinah*) in one's soul, is a more absolute level of unconditional love for all Jews. Not only is it a love that doesn't depend on anything, it does not attribute any importance to any factor at all.

Thus, the first level of *ahavas Yisrael*, which is a conditional kind of love, is a love that begins from the factor that it is dependent on. The second level of *ahavas Yisrael* is unconditional, and it is a love that begins with the person, and not with any factors that make the person lovable. At this level of *ahavas Yisrael*, any factors that make a person lovable can certainly increase one's love towards the other, as a 'bonus', but the love doesn't depend on those extra factors.

In fact, even in the second level of *ahavas Yisrael*, which is unconditional love, a person will also love another Jew based on certain factors that make the other lovable. This is because, ultimately, we all have a *guf* (body) and a *neshamah* (soul), and the body needs a compelling reason to love another

person, even if a person has already revealed the perspective of his soul. So even if a person loves another Jew conditionally, there are also some elements in his love which are dependent on certain factors, because even if he is mainly experiencing the soul's perspective, he will also be experiencing the body's perspective. Since we live on This World, where we live in a body, we will also need to find reasons to love another Jew (elements of conditional love) even if we have the soul's perspective (unconditional love).

At the third and highest level of *ahavas Yisrael*, though, our love for another Jew is so unconditional, that there is no way to mix in any other elements of conditional love into it. Since it is the absolute level of unconditional love, there is no room to find any reason or factor to love the other Jew. At this level of complete love for another Jew, there is no importance attributed to any factor that would make this Jew more lovable, because there is no factor that can affect this love in any way. The love here does not start with any factor, nor does it start with the person. It starts from nullifying oneself to the Creator, which dismisses all importance of any details, factors, or reasons that would make a person lovable. In turn, it is a love that sees all individual Jews of *Klal Yisrael* as part of a greater whole, where there are no separate parts, just one collective unit,

In Summary

Let us now summarize and make the topic clearer. The first level of *ahavas Yisrael* is to love each Jew individually, seeing each Jew as an individual that should be loved, and this is a love that begins with loving the Jew as an individual. The second level of *ahavas Yisrael* is to love all Jews collectively, to love *Klal Yisrael* (the collective unit of the Jewish people) and, by extension, to love each individual Jew.

The third level of *ahavas Yisrael*, which is a very lofty level, is when all individual parts become “nullified” to the greater whole, when there is no perception of ‘individual’ Jews, because there is only the collective unit of the Jewish people. Although it certainly requires one to love each Jew individually, in essence it is a kind of love where one views all individual people in *Klal Yisrael* not as individuals, but as one collective unit of *Klal Yisrael*.

When one nullifies his existence to the root of the collective unit that is *Klal Yisrael*, which is the Creator, the result is that when one will love another Jew more than he loves himself, because he has nullified his own private existence. Although this love does not begin with loving each Jew individually, but with being nullified to the Creator, it can still be shined upon each individual Jew, just as with any other great spiritual light, which begins from above but which is able to descend onto this world. If these subtle points about *ahavas Yisrael* have been understood properly, we can continue to the next point.

The Prerequisite To Ahavas Yisrael: Wanting For Others To Have Their Wishes Fulfilled

The Rambam states that the *mitzvah* to love another Jew *kamocho* (like yourself) means that just as you care for your body and your money, so should you be concerned for another's body (his physical needs) and another's money.

What does this mean? Does this mean that if I love a certain kind of food or a certain kind of clothing, I should want my friend to have that food or that clothing? Clearly, this is not what the Rambam meant. One person likes certain things and another person will like other things, because everyone has their own personal preferences. Reuven does not need to give Shimon that which Reuven loves. If Reuven has a favorite food and he gives it Shimon because that is what Reuven loves, but Shimon doesn't like that food, Reuven is not benefitting Shimon, he is bothering him.

What does the Rambam mean, then, that a person should love another Jew by wanting for another Jew what he himself would want? It means that just as you want certain things for yourself and you love those things, so should you want to give to others what they want, no less than when you want something for yourself. The Hebrew word for love, *ahavah*, is from the word *avah*, "I desire." Meaning to say, *ahavah* (love) is that just as you want your own will to be fulfilled, so should you desire to fulfill the will of others. More specifically, it means that just you like want certain things, so should you desire and see to it that another Jew should have what he wants. Each person wants different things, and your *mitzvah* to love each Jew therefore includes desiring and seeing to it that each person should have what he, personally, wants.

In other words, love for another Jew doesn't mean that I should want for others what I would want for myself. This is because *ahavas Yisrael* is not about what I want or about what the other wants. It is not individual-focused. It is about wanting, in general, to fill the void of every person, because that is the higher will, the will of Hashem.

Thus, even the lowest level of *ahavas Yisrael*, where a person doesn't love another Jew as much as he loves himself (the level of love that is from the view of the body, and also the animal level of the soul, which is the "partner of the body"), which is circumstantial love and on the level of *shelo lishmah*, which seems to be individual-focused, is not entirely individual-focused.

Therefore, even the lowest level of *ahavas Yisrael*, in which you do not love another Jew as much as yourself, is still touching upon the higher root of *ahavas Yisrael*, of loving everyone collectively and not as individuals. Since you must want that others should get their wishes met, just as much as you want your wishes met, *ahavas Yisrael* (on any level) is never a completely personal matter. It is always about fulfilling some higher will, which is coming from above, and this is true even about the lowest level of *ahavas Yisrael*.

Taking It Further: Loving The Very Existence of Another Jew

In the first level of *ahavas Yisrael*, even though I don't love another Jew as much as I love myself, I must still want that another should have his wishes met just as I want my wishes met. It is about wanting that the other person should get what he wants, and that is the level of the love. The second level of *ahavas Yisrael* goes even further. It is not love the other person with the very same love that I love myself. As a result, I will also want the other person to get what he wants. But it is mainly about loving the person, and with the same love that I love myself with.

To describe this idea in clearer terms, *ahavah* is equal to *echad*, one. Two people can move towards each other, which is love, and they become one. The first level of *ahavas Yisrael* is when one moves closer to another person by wanting that the other person should get his wishes met, and the second level of *ahavas Yisrael* is by loving the other person because all Jews are one unit in the world of souls: We are all *echad* (one). This is a deeper level of love than merely wanting that another's wants and wishes should become fulfilled. It is a love for the actual person!

Any person is able to reach this inner level of *ahavas Yisrael* in the depths of his soul. Sometimes a person is more conscious of this level of love, and sometimes he is less conscious of it. On the more external layers of our soul, we have our various wants and wishes, and from there we can relate to others' wants and wishes and desire that their wishes should be met, just as we want our own wishes to be met. But at a deeper level of our soul, the root behind all of our wants and wishes is our self-love, and we can use our self-love to love others in the same way that we love ourselves. Just as you love your very existence, so can you love another's existence.

Ahavas Yisrael Requires Basic Self-Awareness

Let us try to understand all of this with more clarity now.

Our soul has external and internal layers within it. On the external layers of the soul, we are separate from others. It can be compared to the physical body, which has separate parts: two hands, two feet, two eyes, etc. Our desires, wishes and wants are also separate from each other, because they are present in the external layer of our soul. In addition, our personal wishes are usually contradictory desires.

Thus, the idea is that in the external layer of our soul, everything is disparate. For that reason, we are not able to reveal genuine *ahavas Yisrael* for another Jew at this level of the soul. If you want two different things that contradict each other, you aren't able to have genuine self-love, because you don't even know what you really want.

Self-love is found at a deeper level in the soul, beyond your wishes, wants, and desires. It is found at the level of the soul where the source of all your wishes and wants are: Your very desire for all your wishes to become actualized and fulfilled. The very will that one has for his wishes to become fulfilled, is an expression of one's self-love. It is not many different and separate desires, but one single desire alone: I want my wishes to be fulfilled.

This brings out the point we have been explaining, that even the most basic level of *ahavas Yisrael* does not begin from my own individual desires, but from a place that includes others, that just as I have a general will for all of my wishes to be fulfilled, so should I have a general will that others should get their wishes fulfilled. My will for my wishes to be fulfilled is coming from the love that I have for myself, and in the same way that I relate to my general will of fulfilling all of my wishes, because I love myself, so should I have a general will that every other Jew should attain all of his wishes.

Why Most People Don't Reveal Genuine Ahavas Yisrael

The above is all true within the first level of *ahavas Yisrael*, but the second level of *ahavas Yisrael* is even deeper than the above. Let us now explain it.

A more genuine love for another is uncovered when we access the love for our very existence, which is beyond the faculty of our will. We would love ourselves even if we wouldn't want anything. This is place of the *havayah* (essence) of our soul, which goes deeper than even our innermost desires. At this deep place in the soul, we love ourselves simply for just existing, and we are able to love others on the same level: We are able to love the mere existence of another Jew. That is the second level of *ahavas Yisrael*, where we are able to regard another Jew equally important as our own existence.

Most people never reach this level of *ahavas Yisrael*. This is because most people are not in touch with their own *havayah*. If they don't consciously love their own existence, they cannot love others for merely existing. Meaning to say, if they don't have a conscious love their very own *havayah*, they will not be able to love the very *havayah* of another human being.

And, in addition to this, most people are not even in touch with their general will (their will for all of their wishes to be fulfilled), and instead they only know of their various wishes and wants. They are only accessing the disparate level of their soul, and they are not in touch with the part in the soul that is able to genuinely unify with others. Most people have different desires [which are usually contradictory], like a child who keeps asking for different things. Although all of these desires

are coming from one single desire - the desire to have all of one's wishes fulfilled - that is only on a subconscious level. Consciously, people are having many different and contradictory desires.

That being the case, most people cannot reveal genuine love for others, because they live with many of their own separate wishes of their own. When they are 'separate' within themselves, they are not able to unify with their own selves, and certainly they won't be able to unify with others. How, then, are they experiencing love for other people? For most people, love is a result of another finding favor (*chein*) in one's eyes. There is something emotionally attractive about another's personality, and this causes a person to feel a love for another. However, this kind of love is not real love (*ahavah*), but desire (*taavah*). It is no different than when a person favors a certain type of food. A person doesn't "love" his favorite dish - he just has a desire for it.

Only when a person is in touch with his innermost desire and he knows what he wants [namely, his primary will, which is the general will that all of his wishes should be fulfilled] is he truly in touch with his will. This is the innermost will of the lower layer of the soul, which is called the *nefesh habehaimis*, the "animal" soul.¹² Once a person is clear about what his general will is [the desire for all of his wishes to be fulfilled], he has unified the separation between all of his various wishes, by finding the root of all of his desires: The fact that he has the very desire for all of his wishes to be fulfilled and actualized. With this clarity about what he wants, one is able to achieve the first level of *ahavas Yisrael*, to wish for others to get their wants and wishes in the same way that your own wants and wishes fulfilled.

If a person does not have a desire for others' wishes to be fulfilled, he is below the first level of *ahavas Yisrael*, so even if he experiences 'love' for others, it cannot be real love (*ahavah*), but desire (*taavah*). In order to reach even the most basic level of *ahavas Yisrael*, a person must be able to want for others to get their wishes fulfilled, because *ahavah* (love) is connected with the concept of *ratzon* (will), since the word *ahavah* is from the word *avah* (desire, or will), and as it has been explained here, this refers to the most basic level of love: To have a desire that others should get their wishes fulfilled.

For this reason, even the first level of *ahavas Yisrael* is far from most people, because most people are experiencing many different and separate desires within them.

¹² Editor's Note: Thus, the innermost will of the *nefesh habehaimis* (animal soul) is the soul's very desire to have all of its wishes fulfilled. These are material desires, which are not necessarily forbidden, but which are not spiritual. This is not to be confused with the "innermost will" of the *nefesh Elohis* (G-dly soul), or the desire of the *neshamah*, which desires to do the will of the Creator.

The First Level of Ahavas Yisrael - Desiring To Fulfill The Wishes of Another Jew

After one rises from his many different personal desires and he is able to relate to the wishes of others and he wants good for others, he still considers himself more important and his friend secondary.

This is the depth behind the *halachah* of *chayecha kodmin*, “Your life takes precedence”¹³, in the case of the *Gemara* where a person only has a little bit of water and he is walking with his friend in the desert. It is very clear that when one is in the desert and he doesn’t have enough water, his desire for water is not a desire for water, but a desire to stay alive. And the *halachah* is, that even though he loves his friend, still, *chayecha kodmin*, “Your life takes precedence”, so if he only has a little bit of water to survive on, his *mitzvah* to love another Jew does not obligate him to give up his water for his friend.

If he doesn’t love his friend in the first place, he is anyhow selfish, and it is obvious that he will not consider saving his friend’s life instead of his own, so he would need this special *halachah* of *chayecha kodmin*. Only a person who can identify with the wishes of others and who wants good for others, who is at least fulfilling the basic level of *ahavas Yisrael*, is one who needs to be told *chayecha kodmin*, “Your life takes precedence”.

Thus, at the first, basic level of *ahavas Yisrael*, a person will love others but he still considers his life more important than another’s life, as we can see from the aforementioned case of the *Gemara* where the person only has enough water to survive and he is not obligated to give it to his friend. The will to live is the greatest natural desire of one’s lower soul (*nefesh habehaimis*, the “animal” level of the soul) and since he is at that level, he is not able to give up his will to live.

The will to live clearly does not come from the *neshamah*, because even if the person dies, the *neshamah* continues to exist. The *neshamah*’s greatest desire is to fulfill the will of Creator. The will to live is clearly the greatest desire of the lower soul, the *nefesh habehaimis*. Since this is the reality of the *nefesh habehaimis*, there is a *halachah* of *chayecha kodmin*: A Jew is not obligated to give up his own life for another Jew, even if he does love the other Jew.

The Second Level of Ahavas Yisrael - Loving The Existence of All Jews

Beyond this level is when a person rises from his own personal wishes and he is able to love his very *havayah* (existence), and once a person has a healthy and proper self-love for his very existence,

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he is able to love another on the same level: Not only does he relate to the wishes of other people, but he values their very existence no less than his own.

Many people are very far from identifying with their own *havayah*, because *havayah* is hidden deep in the soul [therefore, most people are usually not conscious of it]. When one loves his very *havayah*, he has genuine, healthy self-love. Once a person truly loves himself, he can reach a greater depth of loving another Jew *kamocho mamash* (literally as much as he loves himself). Just as he loves his own *havayah*, so can he love the very *havayah* of others.

This is a subtler level of *ahavas Yisrael*, and a much deeper way of relating to another Jew. When you love the *havayah* of all other Jews, this does not mean that you love your own private existence and you also relate to the private existence of another Jew no less than your own. *Havayah* is not a place of separation. It means that you love the collective *havayah* of the Jewish people and, therefore, you love every Jewish soul, seeing them all as one unit. It means that you one is living the reality of the *neshamos* of *Klal Yisrael* and therefore he desires their very existence.

In order to get to this awareness, one first needs to reach his own *havayah*. When one is only living his own *havayah* but not the *havayah* of others, he is at a 'bridging point' between the first and second levels of *ahavas Yisrael* [because he has gone beyond his mere wants and wishes and he is experiencing his very existence, and it is upon him now to work on expanding his self-love by loving the existence of others].

Thus, the second level of *ahavas Yisrael* is reached when one loves his very *havayah* (existence) and he extends this love to others, so that he loves the very *havayah* of others and he desires their existence. Meaning, he loves others from the place of *havayah* in his soul. He sees his own existence is nothing but a part of the collective unit of *Klal Yisrael*.

This deeper level of *ahavas Yisrael* doesn't mean that one becomes more concerned for others or does more acts of kindness for others. It is just a deep will of desiring and loving the very existence of all Jewish souls. Certainly it can lead to doing acts of love for others, but in essence, it is not defined by any actions or even thoughts of concern for another. It is deeper: It is a love for the very existence of another Jew.

Summary of the First Two Levels of Ahavas Yisrael

Now we can be clearer about the difference between the first and second levels of *ahavas Yisrael*.

At the first level of *ahavas Yisrael*, a person wants the innermost will of other Jews to become actualized and fulfilled, just like he wants his own innermost will to become actualized and fulfilled.

However, at this level, one relates to the will (*ratzon*) of others, but he is not yet relating to the *havayah* of others, which is deeper than the *ratzon*. This is *ahavas Yisrael* from the perspective of the *guf* (body) and *nefesh habehaimis* (animal soul).

The second level of *ahavas Yisrael*, which is deeper, is the perspective of the *neshamah* (Divine soul): To love the very *havayah* (existence) of another, no less that one loves his own *havayah*. As mentioned, in order to love the *havayah* of others, one has to love his own *havayah*. This is level is also described with the term *ovdei Hashem b'nishmasam*, “Those who serve Hashem at the level of the *neshamah* (the Divine soul).”

The Third Level of Ahavas Yisrael - Readiness To Forego Our Own Existence For Another Jew

The third and highest level of *ahavas Yisrael*, which is a revelation of Mashiach¹⁴, is the level of the future. Yet, a person can attain a “spark” of this lofty level. No one can reach this level completely, because it is the level that belongs to the future, but when a person reveals the “G-dliness” present in the soul, one is able to touch the level of the future, where *ahavas Yisrael* is to love another Jew even more than you love yourself.

Consider the following: Would you be willing to give up your own existence, for another Jew? How much do you want another Jew to exist, and to what lengths are you willing to go to? Moshe Rabbeinu said to Hashem that if You don't forgive the Jewish people for the sin of the golden calf, “Erase me from Your book which You have written.”¹⁵ As it is clear and simple, Moshe Rabbeinu was not simply willing to get erased from being written in the Torah. He was willing to stop existing altogether, so that *Klal Yisrael* should survive. By being willing to get erased from the Torah, which is the root of the very *havayah* (existence and reality) of Creation, he was willing to give up his own *havayah*, for *Klal Yisrael*.

In Summary

We shall now summarize the three levels of *ahavas Yisrael*, which we have been explaining on a subtler level, in this lesson.

14 Editor's Note: The Rav explains that as a rule, when it comes to any “revelation of the Mashiach”, the level of Mashiach will be fully revealed in the future by Mashiach, but we are able to access it on some level even now. This is because, in the final generations, the “light of Mashiach” begins to shine even before Mashiach's arrival, allowing us to have access to a sliver of the great spiritual revelations of the future. The later volumes of the Rav's “Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh” series (Parts 7,8, 9) are centered on this theme.

15 Shemos 32:32

The basic level of *ahavas Yisrael* is to desire for another Jew's wishes to be fulfilled, just as you want your own wishes to be fulfilled. A deeper level of *ahavas Yisrael* than this is to love another's existence just as much as you love your own existence. The highest level of *ahavas Yisrael* is when you are willing to sacrifice for another Jew.

In the second level of *ahavas Yisrael* mentioned, you recognize your own existence and you love another Jew by extending your self-love to another Jew, loving another Jew's existence as much as you love your own. But in the highest level of *ahavas Yisrael*, you do the very opposite: You do not have any existence of your own, because you are willing to give it up for another Jew. It can be experienced as a yearning to give yourself up for another Jew.

At its root, the highest level of *ahavas Yisrael* (being willing to give up your existence for another Jew's existence) really comes from the yearning of the soul to reveal *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. As mentioned in Chapter 1, this is really linked with the state of *Ain Od Milvado*, "There is nothing besides Him" (literally, as it simply sounds), which is discussed in *sefer Nefesh HaChaim*.¹⁶ There are different manifestations of *Ain Od Milvado*, and with regards to *ahavas Yisrael*, it means that one is willing to give up his existence for another's.

It should be emphasized, however, that this level can be touched upon only after a person first loves his very own existence. Only after one has exposed genuine love for oneself can one love another completely. One cannot reach this level of *ahavas Yisrael* if he has not reached the intermediate level that must come before this: The ability to love oneself and to love another Jew by extension. Only after one identifies his own self-love can he give up his existence for another. This is because you have not yet uncovered the love for your own existence, you have nothing to give up for another. In order to be willing to give yourself up for another, you need to first know what it means to love yourself, to love your very existence. If you don't love yourself, you have nothing to give up, for another.

Only after you love yourself properly, by loving your very own existence, you can receive the inner strength of being willing to give it up for another. The difficulty of sacrificing for another Jew is because, naturally, we love ourselves. It is precisely the self-love for one's very existence which Moshe was willing to give up when he said, "*Erase me from Your book.*" You are able to give up your existence for another to the extent that you have a healthy self-love for your own existence. If you don't love yourself properly in the first place, you can't give it up for another. But if you do love yourself properly, you are able to give up more of yourself, for another. The more you love yourself properly (by loving your very existence), the more you are able to give up for another! That is the depth of having *mesirus nefesh* for *ahavas Yisrael*.

¹⁶ *Sefer Nefesh HaChaim Shaar III*

Thus, only after a person is able to love another Jew's existence in the same way that he loves his own (the intermediate level of *ahavas Yisrael*) is a person able to get the strength to reach the depths of *mesirus nefesh* for another Jew. After one has reached that level, there are two different ways to touch upon the highest level of *ahavas Yisrael*: Either by contemplating the simple meaning of *Ain Od Milvado*, or by being willing to give up one's own existence so that another Jew can exist, out of his love for another Jew.

This really means that you are willing not only to forego your own existence from now and onward, but even to forego your existence from the start, as if you never existed at all! Not in the present, not in the future, and not in the past! It is when one is willing to nullify his existence altogether, as if he has never existed. Sometimes a person touches on this level if, G-d forbid, he is suffering so much to the point that he wishes he wouldn't exist. This is really a spark of a deep spiritual power, the ability to forego your own existence, and it is actually the way to elevate human suffering: When one yearns for the point of non-existence, where there is no private existence of his own.

Thus, the depth of *ahavas Yisrael* can be reached after we first reach proper self-love, which is to love our very own *havayah* (existence), and by extension, we can love the very *havayah* of another Jew. After that, we can touch upon the highest level of *ahavas Yisrael*, to love another Jew beyond the level of our own existence, to love another Jew more than we love our own selves, to go beyond our normal limitations, by being willing to have *mesirus nefesh* for another Jew - by giving up our very own *havayah* for another Jew.

In Conclusion

We have just gone through explaining each of the levels of *ahavas Yisrael*, in order of lowest level to highest level. Clearly, the highest level of *ahavas Yisrael*, being *moser nefesh* for another Jew, is very distant from us, because it goes beyond normal human abilities. The intermediate level of *ahavas Yisrael*, which is to love another Jew as much as you love yourself, is only accessed by individuals. Even the first level of *ahavas Yisrael*, to want the best for others, is far from reach of most people. This is because, as explained, most people are stuck in their own separate desires, and any love that they experience for others is not on the level of *ahavah* (love), but simply *taavah* (desire), a personal liking for another, which is not genuine love.

These are the progressing order of steps in the *avodah* of *ahavas Yisrael*, from lowest level to the highest level, step after step. Everyone is able to reach some degree of these levels of *ahavas Yisrael*, according to their current capabilities, as per their particular soul root and personal spiritual role, on this world.

03 | *Doing For Others vs. Avoiding Negative Behaviors*

Two Parts To Ahavas Yisrael: Doing Good For Others and Not Being Bad Towards Others

The Rambam codifies that the *mitzvah* of *ahavas Yisrael* includes two parts: Doing for another Jew that which you would want done for yourself, and not to do to others what you don't like done to you.¹⁷ This is based on words of the sage Hilel, who said, "What is hated to you, do not do to others."¹⁸ Thus, *ahavas Yisrael* includes two opposite aspects: Being proactive by doing for others, and being passive, by not doing negative behaviors to others.

In our soul, there are higher faculties (closer to the spiritual) and lower faculties (closer to the physical). The higher powers of the soul are called *havayah* (the essence of the soul), *emunah* (the faculty of believing), and *taanug* (pleasure). Which of these faculties of the soul correspond to *ahavas Yisrael*? Is our *ahavas Yisrael* mainly using our faculty of *havayah*, or *taanug*?

The question really divides into three different questions, because it was explained in the previous chapters that there are really three levels of *ahavas Yisrael* (in order of lowest level to highest level). (1) Loving another almost as much as you love yourself, but not totally as much as you love yourself. (2) Loving another equally as much as you love yourself. (3) Loving another more than you love yourself.

The first level of *ahavas Yisrael*, where you love another Jew but not as much as you love yourself, corresponds to the faculty of *taanug*/pleasure (as will be explained later in this lesson). The second level of *ahavas Yisrael*, loving another Jew as much as you love yourself, corresponds to the soul faculty of *havayah*. The third and highest level of *ahavas Yisrael* - having *mesirus nefesh* for another Jew – is an even higher use than *havayah*. It is rooted in the revelation of G-dliness, which is above the *havayah* of the soul.

The first level of *ahavas Yisrael* – loving another Jew, but not as much as you love yourself - is the ability of *taanug* (pleasure), because one is not able to love another Jew as much as he loves himself if it is not pleasurable for him to do so. The second level, which is to love another Jew like yourself, (*kamocho mamash*), is using the ability of *havayah*, because in order to love another like yourself, you need to love your own *havayah* first, and then you can love the collective *havayah* of all *neshamos* of *Klal Yisrael*. The third level, to love another Jew more than you love yourself, is really rooted in

¹⁷ Rambam Hilchos De'os 2:3

¹⁸ Talmud Bavli Shabbos 31a

the ability to love Hashem, to the extent that one is willing to give up his life for Hashem. This is the ability of revealing G-dliness in oneself, which is above the *havayah* of the soul.

The First Level of Ahavas Yisrael: Taanug and Shelo Lishmah

Let us first discuss the first level of *ahavas Yisrael*, which corresponds to the soul faculty of *taanug*, pleasure.

Chazal taught “There is nothing good beyond *oneg* (pleasure), and there is nothing bad that is below *nega* (lit. “affliction”, which means suffering).”¹⁹ The first part of this statement, which teaches about *taanug* (pleasure), refers to the “proactive” part of *ahavas Yisrael*, doing for others what you want done to you, which is the level of *taanug*. The second part of this statement, which teaches about *nega* (the opposite of *taanug*), refers to the “passive” part of *ahavas Yisrael*, which is to avoid doing the things that you hate, to others.

The first level of *ahavas Yisrael*, which is on the level of *taanug*, corresponds to the level of *shelo lishmah*, because *shelo lishmah* is all about seeking *taanug*. The Ramchal explains in *Mesillas Yesharim* that when a person serves Hashem because he gets *taanug* (spiritual pleasure) from it, his *avodah* is incomplete, because he is not serving Hashem *lishmah*. Although it is commendable for a person to get *taanug* out of his *avodas Hashem*, a person should not remain at that level, and he should strive to serve Hashem more *lishmah*. (On a subtler level, when people serve Hashem *shelo lishmah*, not only is a person doing it for *taanug*/pleasure, but there is also a trace of *gaavah* (conceit), because his “I” is very much at the center of his *avodas Hashem*).

At the first level of *ahavas Yisrael*, one loves oneself more than another, which shows that he is living at the level of *shelo lishmah* (self-interest), or *taanug* (pleasure). Thus, *ahavas Yisrael* on the level of *taanug* and *shelo lishmah* is, as the Rambam explains, by doing for others what you would want done for you, and also to avoid doing to others what you don’t want done to you, because otherwise, it would interfere with your pleasure.

Examples In The Gemara of Avoiding Disgustful Behavior Towards Others

The Rambam has explained that there are the two sides to *ahavas Yisrael*: Doing actions that create love, and avoiding things that cause disgust to other people.

¹⁹ *Sefer Yetzirah* 2:4

In the *Gemara*, though, we mainly find *ahavas Yisrael* explained in the context of “passive” *ahavas Yisrael*: Avoiding things that cause disgust to people. For example, the *Gemara* in Tractate Kiddushin says that it is forbidden for a man to betroth a woman unless he first sees her,²⁰ because if he marries her and finds her unattractive, he will feel disgust towards her, and this will get in the way of his love towards her. The *Gemara* says that the source for this is the verse of the Torah, “*And you shall love your friend like yourself*”.

The *Gemara* also says that even when a person deserves capital punishment by Beis Din, the death sentence should be carried out in a way that preserves his dignity,²¹ because the Torah says, “*And you shall love your friend like yourself*.” In other places as well, the *Gemara* uses this verse, “*And you shall love your friend like yourself*”, in the context of avoiding doing things to another Jew which creates disgust, to avoid doing that which you wouldn’t want done to you. Thus, it is mainly the “passive” level of *ahavas Yisrael* which is very much explained: The fact that one should not to do to others what his hated to him.

As for the “proactive” part of *ahavas Yisrael* - doing for others what you would want done to you - that part seems to be the hidden, unexplained part of this *mitzvah*. The *Gemara* always explains the “passive” part of *ahavas Yisrael*, by bringing different examples of avoiding negative and disgustful behavior towards others, but the “proactive” part of *ahavas Yisrael*, to do good things for others, is not explained by the *Gemara*. [This requires some explanation.]

This World vs. The Next World

Why is “passive” *ahavas Yisrael* explained by the *Gemara*, but “proactive” *ahavas Yisrael* is not explained by the *Gemara*?

The *sefarim hakedoshim* that the Next World is for *taanug* (pleasure), whereas This World is mainly about running away from the opposite of *taanug*, which is called “*nega*” (evil). Simply speaking, this is because the Next World is the world of the spiritual, and that is where true pleasure is, because true pleasure lies in the spiritual world. But a deeper reason why true pleasure is only in the Next World is because of the rule that the Next World is mainly for *taanug*, while This World is mainly about running away from evil (*nega*).

As an example of this concept, *Chazal* taught that This World is “mostly bad, with a little good.”²² The little “good” that there is on this world is the little bit of true *taanug* that is available on

²⁰ *Talmud Bavli Kiddushin 41a*

²¹ *Talmud Bavli Bava Kamma 51a*

²² Cited in *sefer Tzidkas HaTzaddik: 170*

This World, while the “mostly bad” part of life of This World is the *nega* (evil, or pursuing material pleasures) that fills most of This World.

On this world, one is usually running from *nega* (evil or faulty pleasure), and that is what our main *bechirah* on this world is. Rarely does a person experience true *taanug* on this world. While we are able to use our *bechirah* (power of free will) to connect ourselves to true, spiritual *taanug* on this world, our main use of *bechirah* lays in the area of running away from “*nega*”, by keeping a distance from anything which tarnishes our soul. We can only experience true *taanug* on this world after we are doing our main task on this world, which is: To keep our distance from evil, from *nega*.

The *Mesillas Yescharim* says that the place for true *taanug* is in the Next World, and one of the reasons for this is because of what we are explaining here: The Next World is totally good, whereas This World is mostly bad, with only a little bit of good. This world cannot be the place where true *taanug* is found, because it is mostly bad (most our lives needs to be spent running away from *nega/evil*), with only very little good/*taanug* to be found on this world.

On our world, where we are mainly found at the level of *shelo lishmah* (self-serving interests), are we mainly choosing to connect ourselves to true *taanug*, or are we mainly running away from *nega* (faulty pleasures) of this world? Clearly, our main *avodah* on this world is to run away from *nega*, from faulty pleasures and from anything evil that defiles the purity of the soul.

Why The First Part of Ahavas Yisrael Is To Avoid Negative Behavior Towards Others

Applying this concept to *ahavas Yisrael*, this will mean that we first begin to have *ahavas Yisrael* only when we are avoiding doing evil and disgusting acts towards another Jew, which is essentially the *avodah* of “running away from *nega*.” Only after we are not doing negative behaviors towards other Jews (passive *ahavas Yisrael*) can we strive to fulfill the next part of *ahavas Yisrael*, “proactive” *ahavas Yisrael*, by doing good for others.

In anything that we do on this world, there are always elements of *shelo lishmah* (self-serving motivations) and *lishmah* (pure, altruistic motivations), on varying levels. On a simple level, *shelo lishmah* and *lishmah* are about how pure our motivations are, if they are ego-focused or not. However, there is a deeper difference. *Shelo lishmah* implies that “it is not about the thing”, which means that whenever we are trying to remove something that is getting in the way of our goal, it is called *shelo lishmah*. By contrast, *lishmah*, which means “for the sake of thing”, is about trying to connect to something.

When one wants to do good acts for other Jews, this is the *lishmah* aspect of *ahavas Yisrael*, because he is trying to connect other Jews. Therefore, one cannot attempt to have *ahavas Yisrael* by

starting to do good things for other Jews, because one does not start out at the level of *lishmah*. One first needs to traverse the stage of *shelo lishmah*, in order to get to *lishmah*. Therefore, one needs to begin having *ahavas Yisrael* specifically by “removing” the obstacles that get in the way of *ahavas Yisrael*. He needs to first “run away from *nega*”, by avoiding disgustful behavior towards others.

Thus, at the first level of *ahavas Yisrael*, where a person can love another Jew but not as much as he loves himself, a person is at the level of *shelo lishmah*. At this level, one’s work is mainly to avoid doing hateful behavior to others, and in doing so, one is “running away from *nega*”, by avoiding evil and removing the evil in his way. Essentially, the first stage of *ahavas Yisrael* is mainly about constantly removing “*nega*” from ourselves. It is about continuously removing our ego, so that we can out of our love for ourselves and to eventually arrive at the next level of *ahavas Yisrael*: to love another Jew as much as we love our own selves.

Of course, even at the first level of *ahavas Yisrael*, a person can still do good things for other Jews and to try to create more love towards other Jews, but the main part of one’s work at the first stage of *ahavas Yisrael* is to stop doing hurtful behavior towards other Jews.

The Second and Third Levels of Ahavas Yisrael – After The Ego Has Been Removed

The goal of the first level of *ahavas Yisrael* is to learn how to remove our ego, the self-serving love that we have for ourselves.²³ The second level of *ahavas Yisrael*, to love another Jew like yourself, is to reach your *havayah*, your very existence, and to love others in the same way that you love your own *havayah*. This is the opposite *avodah* than the first level of *ahavas Yisrael*. It is mainly about doing for others, as opposed to removing *nega* from ourselves. It is about connecting ourselves with the *neshamos* of *Klal Yisrael*. This is about “connecting”, which corresponds to the level of *lishmah*.

The third level of *ahavas Yisrael*, which is to have *mesirus nefesh* for another Jew, is to forego one’s very *havayah* for another Jew. This is also being done out of connecting to good, as opposed to removing the ego. Although it involves removing one’s sense of self, it is not for the purpose of removing the self. It is for the purpose of doing something for another Jew, which is proactive, not passive. Whereas the first level is to remove the ego, the second level is to reveal a healthy sense of self and to include others in the love for one’s very self, and the third level is to remove one’s sense of self altogether, for the purpose of doing good for another Jew.

23 Editor’s Note: The ego, which is called ahavas atzmo (egoistic self-love), is not to be confused with one’s havayah, the inner essence of the soul, which is also called the soul faculty of “existence.” The ego is the false “I”, a selfish kind of self-love, where one’s havayah (existence) is the true “I”, the source of healthy self-love. Both, however, need to become nullified. Nullifying the ego is a more basic level, whereas nullifying one’s havayah (his very “I” altogether) is a much higher level. This will be explained further.

In summary, the first level of *ahavas Yisrael* is about negating our egoistic self-love. The second level of *ahavas Yisrael* is to reach healthy self-love, by loving our very existence (*havayah*) and then loving the very existence of others. The third level of *ahavas Yisrael* is that after one has reached his own *havayah*, he now has an *avodah* to remove his very *havayah* for another Jew, by being willing to have *mesirus nefesh* for another Jew – to love another Jew even more than he loves himself.

How Should One Begin To Have Ahavas Yisrael?

Bringing these concepts down to a practical level, what should be the balance in our *ahavas Yisrael*? How much should we be focusing on doing good things for other Jews, and how much should we be focused on avoiding hurtful behavior to others? How much of each do we need to be doing?

The answer to this is subtle. It depends on what level a person is living on and connected to: This World, or the Next World.

The more a person is living on the level of This World, his *avodah* of *ahavas Yisrael* must begin mainly with avoiding hurtful behavior towards others (which is the *avodah* of removing *nega* from himself). He can also increase his good acts for other Jews, but that will not be the main part of his work, when he is first trying to increase his *ahavas Yisrael*.

The more that a person is connected to the level of the Next World²⁴, though, by living more spiritually and internally, his *avodah* changes entirely! He becomes a *ben olam haba*, one who is connected to the World To Come, and the order of *avodah* changes for him. Such a person can start to increase his *ahavas Yisrael* by mainly doing good for others, which is the level of *taanug*/the Next World, and to become more connected to other Jews. [After that, his work will be to avoid hurtful behavior to others.]

(It should be noted that one may be interested in *taanug*/pleasure, by pursuing all kinds of desires on this world, but this usually does not come from a desire for the *taanug* of the Next World. It is

²⁴ Editor's Note: The Rav later clarified (after the lesson) that this refers to those whose *avodah* is *m'leila l'sata*, those who "start from above and descend to below." This was mentioned briefly, but the Rav has an entire sefer devoted to this level of *avodah* (*m'leila l'sata*). Refer to sefer *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh* Part 8. In short, it refers to those whose main *avodah* is to start from the area of *emunah* on the level of *Ain Od Milvado*, also known as the "Yechidah" level of the soul. Furthermore, the Rav clarified in *Reaching Your Essence* (chapter 15) that most people need to first develop properly the lower levels of the soul (*Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah*) before they can work on the "Yechidah" level of the soul, but there are those who can begin from the "Yechidah" level of the soul: (1) Those who were born with the ability to go very deep into their souls, beyond their ego. (2) Those who went through very deep experiences in life which caused them to expose the deepest part of their self that is beyond the ego. (3) Those who became "enlightened" from methods of the Far East, which was an impure way of accessing their deepest self, now have an *avodah* to learn the Torah methods of how to attain deeper consciousness.

just *taavah* (lust), which desires *oneg*/pleasure, but this is not coming from the soul's desire to run away from *nega*/evil pleasure and to find true *oneg*/true pleasure. Rather, this comes from an impaired element of "water" in one's "animal soul" (*nefesh habehaimis*), and it does not show that the person's main *avodah* is to start from *oneg*.)

In Summary and Conclusion

In any case, one needs to begin *ahavas Yisrael* depending on what his current level is. If one's current level is *shelo lishmah* [meaning that he mainly sees himself as connected to This World and less connected to the state of the Next World], then he needs to start the *avodah* of *ahavas Yisrael* mainly by avoiding hurtful behavior to others. This because is the main *avodah* of such a person is to remove himself from *nega*.

If one's current level is closer to *lishmah*, he should start *ahavas Yisrael* by doing good for others and thereby becoming more connected with other Jews. This is because by living internally and being more connected to the state of the Next World, his main *avodah* is to start with true *taanug*, spiritual pleasure, which is the state of the Next World.

To clarify, this doesn't mean that he lives on the actual level of the Next World. We are on This World, not on the Next World. Rather, it means that a person is living on this world in the state that resembles the World To Come. This is called *me'in olam haBa*, a "semblance" of the World To Come.

In short, depending on if one's level is mainly This World or the Next World, one will begin his *ahavas Yisrael* mainly avoid doing evil to others or mainly do good for others. One needs to act according to his level, and then his *ahavas Yisrael* will become more precise.

04 | *Levels of Connection To Another Jew*

Reiacha – Turning Each Jew Into Your Friend

With *siyata d'shamaya* we will continue to discuss more about *ahavas Yisrael*, which is the *mitzvah* of *V'ahavta l'reiacha kamocho*, “And you shall love your friend like yourself.” We have so far explained in general about three levels of *ahavas Yisrael*, with regards to the obligation of *kamocho*, to love a Jew like yourself.

In the previous chapters, we discussed three levels of *kamocho*, loving another Jew “like yourself”. There is also another aspect of *ahavas Yisrael* we need to understand: The fact that you must love “your friend”, *reiacha* (your fellow Jew). Just as there are three levels to *kamocho*, so are there three levels to *reiacha*.

Friendship Without Love

The lowest level of *reiacha* (loving your friend) is when there is some connection to another, but there is not yet love. The word *reia* (friend) is from the word *raua*, shaky, implying that when someone is just your “friend”, this connection is lacking and therefore it is shaky and fragile.

The *mitzvah* of *ahavas Yisrael*, “To love your friend like yourself”, is essentially that we must turn a friend into someone who is not just a “friend” to us in the superficial sense, but someone whom we actually love.

Chazal teach that the word “*reiacha*” means *reiacha b'mitzvos*, to love only those who keep the *mitzvos*. The depth of this is that when one connects to another only at the level of a “friend”, it is not a connection of love, and the connection between them is very limited. At this superficial level of connection with another, one will certainly love himself more than he loves his friend, because the very connection is shaky to begin with, since it is missing love.

Friends can do things for each other, but that is where their connection begins and ends – it is all about doing certain actions for each other. If they never reveal a love for each other, their connection is on the level of the “world of action” alone, which is temporary and shaky. It is not likely to last, because their very connection is shaky to begin with, when there is no real love between them and it is all about what they “do” for each other.

Love – An Outcome of Intellectual Connection With Others

A second, higher level of loving your fellow Jew is when you reveal a sense of connection and a sense of oneness with another Jew. At this level, one is able to love another Jew equally as much as he loves himself. This is a level of connection that reveals an actual feeling of love for another Jew, where the connection graduates from friendship to love.

However, love is not just an emotion. At its essence, love comes from mature understanding (*daas*). The Rambam refers to all proper *middos* and emotions as “*Hilchos De’os*”, the laws of *daas* (mature understanding).²⁵ This is because the essence of all of the *middos* and emotions is the concept of *daas*.

As opposed to connecting to others through action, it is a connection to others on an intellectual level, which leads to an emotional connection. As a hint, the word *reiacha* (your friend) is from the word *raayon*, which means “idea”, referring to the intellectual abilities of the mind. When one connects to the different ways of thinking (*de’os*) of other Jews, it is a deeper connection than when people simply do favors for each other. Although everyone has a different way of thinking, for the Sages teach that “Just as all faces are different from each other, so are all ways of thinking different from each other”²⁶, the Torah commands us to love every Jew, in spite of our many different ways of thinking. The Torah is really requiring us to connect with the different ways of thinking of everyone and to be connected with them on an intellectual level, and this will lead to love.

Although this level of connection is a feeling of love, it is not beginning from the emotion of love, but from connecting to the *daas* (ways of thinking) of another. Hence, love really comes when there is a connection of *daas* between people – when people connect with each other intellectually.

Love Beyond Logical Reasoning

The highest level of “loving your friend” is the level of *mesirus nefesh*, when you love another Jew more than you love yourself. This level is called “above reasoning and logical understanding” (*l’maalah m’taam v’daas*). There is no logical reason to love someone more than you. Why would you love another person more than you love yourself? You gain nothing from it. Such love is not coming from logical understanding, from *daas*, but from a more inner source, a very deep place in the soul that is beyond our own *daas*.

This kind of love comes from the soul’s *ratzon* (the inner, subconscious will), which is beyond the plane of logic. [At the inner recesses of our soul, our faculties of *daas* are on the more external level,

²⁵ see Rambam *Hilchos De’os* 1:1

²⁶ Talmud Bavli *Berachos* 58a

and deeper in the soul is the *ratzon*, the inner subconscious will.] All of our *daas* (logical understanding and thinking) is really a revelation of our *ratzon* (will), because we think about what we want.

At the depths of our soul, “It is our will to do Your will”²⁷, which means that our inner will is always pure. If we are worthy, our inner will becomes utilized for choosing wisely and utilizing our *daas* (logical understanding), where we can live a life of *chochmah* (wisdom) and our thinking is sensible and aligned with truth. Otherwise, our inner will becomes turned into the “spirit of folly” that leads to sin.²⁸

When our will is revealed, it will either manifest itself as a “garment” of either wisdom or foolishness [depending on how we utilize our power of free choice]. But our actual will itself is beyond the plane of comprehension, because it is deep underneath our consciousness.

Thus, true love really comes from a point in the soul that is beyond comprehension. This is the subconscious will, the inner *ratzon* in the soul that is beyond one’s *daas*. The level of having *mesirus nefesh* out of love for another Jew can only come from this deep unconscious will of the soul. For this reason, the Hebrew word for love, *ahavah*, is from the word *avah*, “desire”, because love is connected with the *ratzon* (inner desire) of the soul that is beyond one’s *daas*/conscious thinking.

The *ratzon* is also known as the “hidden beginning point” in the soul. Where the more “revealed” beginning point of one’s soul faculties is *daas*, our logical thinking which we can be conscious of, there is also a deeper “beginning point” which is more hidden, and it is the soul’s faculty of *ratzon*, the subconscious will that is beyond the area of our logical thinking.

Summary of the Three Levels of Friendship

In summation, the first level of friendship with others is when we are connected to each through the “world of action”, by doing things for each other and doing things together. The second level of friendship, which is deeper, is when we are revealing a feeling of love for another. As explained, the feeling of love really has its source in *daas*, in our mature thinking abilities. The third and highest level of friendship is when we have love for another Jew that comes from the subconscious will beyond understanding, and this is the root of the ability to have *mesirus nefesh* for another Jew.

²⁷ Talmud Bavli Berachos 17b

²⁸ Talmud Bavli Sotah 2a: “A person does not sin unless a spirit of folly entered him.”

Relationships of Action

As we have begun to explain, *ahavas Yisrael* [is not just a *mitzvah* to simply love another Jew]. It is about revealing a connection and a sense of oneness with the many different souls of the Jewish people. However, before we consider the factor of “love” in this *mitzvah* and how to develop it further, we first need to define the different kinds of relationships that can exist between people, which is the stage that comes before love.

We can see that the most basic level of connection between people is when people are involved with each other in the realm of action, business, exchanging favors with each other, doing things with each other and for each other, etc. Although this is a form of connection, it is not yet love. People can do things for each other, but this doesn't yet show that they love each other.

When we do actions for each other, we become connected, but it is not yet love. The Hebrew word for “friend”, *yedid*, is from the word *yad*, “hand”, which implies action and doing. The implication is that friendships with others are formed through doing things together or doing things for each other. When a person is living at the level of “action” and he hasn't yet developed his deeper inner abilities, such as emotion and thought, if he wants to reveal love towards others, his work is to start doing good deeds for other people. Regarding this level, *Chazal* teach, “If you want to love your friend, be involved with doing good for your friend, and this will lead you to love him.” Through doing good deeds for other people, the actions we do for others will lead us to love others.

This is also because there is a rule, “The heart is pulled after the actions”²⁹, so whenever we do action, it awakens the heart. Based on this rule, when we do good actions for others, our heart becomes awakened to love others. However, what kind of heart will we reveal, by doing actions for others? It will be a heart that loves others on the level of “action”, by doing things for others. That is where the love begins and ends. It is not yet the developed feeling of love. It is much better than not loving someone at all, but it is far from the depth of love.

When our love for others is only on the level of “action”, meaning that our love is defined by doing things for each other, our love for others will be limited. At this level, one feels that his own life is more important than others. And for this reason, there is a reality of *chayecha kodmin*, that “Your life takes precedence.” This rule applies because, when a person is living on the level of “actions” alone, he will ultimately place his own life before others, even if he loves them. Although doing things for others creates love, because “the heart is pulled after the actions” (our good actions for others awaken our hearts to love others), this love is limited to the level of “the world of action”,

²⁹ *Sefer HaChinuch* 16

the lowest realm of spiritual existence.³⁰ And because one's love is limited when it is at this level, one will love himself more than another person.

Another way of understanding it is because it is “love that is dependent on something” [which eventually ceases]. It is a love that depends on our actions with each other. To the extent that we are giving, there is love, and when there is no giving, we do not create love towards others. When people connect to each other through doing good actions for each other and doing things together, their love to each other is on the level of “action” alone, which is the lowest of the spiritual realms. Even if they feel love to each other, their love ultimately depends on the actions and giving that they do for each other.

There are also instances where some people, because of doing good things for others, will have difficulty revealing love to another. Since the person is found entirely at the realm of action, which is a lower realm than emotion, his actions alone can prevent him from rising to the emotion of love. When a person has difficulty revealing love for others, even when he is doing a lot of good things for others, he is very far from *ahavas Yisrael*! That is why there are people who can do a lot of good things and kindnesses for others, but their love for others has its limits. They are entirely on the level of *chayecha kodmin* – they love themselves very clearly more than they love others.

Worse is when people don't even try to reveal love at all, but we are not addressing that. Here we are speaking even about those who do good things for each other, and as much as they try to increase their love others by doing things for others, they don't succeed at becoming more loving towards other Jews. It is because they are living in the “realm of action” alone, and they haven't yet learned how to develop their internal world of richly developed feelings and emotions.³¹

Relationship of Love

The second level is friendship is when there is an actual feeling of love for the other. However, we are not referring here to raw emotion that is not founded on some understanding with the other. As mentioned earlier, love comes from *daas*, a mature kind of understanding. Externally, love appears simply to be an emotion, but it is not just an emotion. Although love is the root of all the emotions

30 Editor's Note: There are four spiritual realms, or levels of existence, in order of lowest level to highest level: (1) Asiyah – corresponding to actions and the “Nefesh” level of the soul. (2) Yetzirah – corresponding to emotions and the “Ruach” level of the soul. (3) Beriah – corresponding to intellect and the “Neshamah” level of the soul. (4) Atzilus – corresponding to attachment with G-d and the “Chayah” and “Yechidah” levels of the soul.

31 Editor's Note: The Rav explains how to develop the quality of our emotions in the book “Getting To Know Your Feelings”

of the soul, the beginning of love does not come from emotion alone.³² It is coming from a connection with another.

For example, at a wedding or a happy occasion, people will dance with each other and they will feel more open to others, because they are allowing their emotions to connect to another and become synchronized with others.

Some people will do favors and kindnesses for each other, and this will lead them to love those whom they are giving to. Others will work in the opposite way: They will first reveal a feeling of love for another, which leads them to doing favors and kindnesses for others. [This is the deeper level, as it will soon be explained.] When people are living at the level of emotion, meaning that they have revealed their inner world of emotions and feelings, the main thing that they will usually value is the emotion of love that they have developed for others, as opposed to “doing” things for others. They can certainly do kindnesses for other people, but it is not simply because they want to do favors for others. They have a deeper motivation. It is because they are aiming to reveal a sense of love for others.

This is an example of “love not dependent on something.” When the emphasis is on creating love and not on how much we do for each other, our love for others will remain in place, even when we are no longer doing things for others [or when others aren’t doing things for us]. This is because the connection with others is about the love [and the love remains in place once it has been created], as opposed to a connection based on action [which are temporary].

Love Without Daas vs. Love Coming From Daas

To clarify, love is not limited to just being a raw emotion. It is a feeling that comes from a certain mature understanding, *daas*. If people just feel love other but it isn’t coming from any kind of connection to other person, this is the level of ignoramuses, who are missing adequate *daas*. But when people are connected in their *daas* with each other, this leads to genuine love.

It should be noted that there is a difference between men and women, when it comes to this. *Chazal* teach that “Women have light *daas*”³³, meaning that their ability of *daas* is deficient. Women are more emotional by their very makeup, and their *avodah* is mainly to work with their raw

32 Editor’s Note: There are a myriad amount of different emotions in the soul. There are seven primary emotions, and from these seven, the two root emotions are love (ahavah) and fear (yirah). Alternatively, they are known as chessed (kindness) and gevurah (restraint). The two root emotions, love and fear, are ultimately rooted in love. The Rav explains elsewhere that love is the root emotion because without love, a soul withers and loses its vitality, and none of the other emotions in the soul can thrive.

33 Talmud Bavli Kiddushin 8b

emotions, but not with their *daas*. Because of this, women do not connect to others through intellectual connection with others, they connect to each other through raw emotion.

However, the love for another Jew which a man should strive to reach, which is the level of the Torah scholars, is to learn how to connect to others through intellectually connecting to others. By connecting to the ways of thinking (*de'os*) of others, one will love others, and such love will be coming from a connection of *daas* with others.

This doesn't mean that a Torah scholar can only love another person when other shares a similar view to him and therefore he feels more intellectually connected with the other person. Intellectual connection with others is not limited to like-minded thinking. Even when Torah scholars have opposing views or opposite ways of thinking from each other, they can still love each other immensely. They don't care if they disagree with each other, they love each other and find a sense of equality with each other, because it makes no difference to them when they both know that they are both trying to understand the same words of Torah which are always true.

How is it that we are able to connect with others who have an opposite way of thinking than us? It is because there is a rule that "Two opposites bear the same root." When one encounters a person who has an opposite view from his thinking, he can actually feel intellectually connected with the other even though they have differing views. People connect to each other either through having similar ways of thinking or even by having opposite ways of thinking! From understanding the ways of thinking of others, even when others disagree with us, we can feel intellectually connected to another, and this leads to an actual feeling of love for the other.

Torah scholars, in general, are associated with the ability of *daas*, the ability of mature thinking that is aligned with the Torah's way of thinking, as a result of their Torah learning and their constant analysis of the Torah, which develops their *daas* further and further. When a Torah scholar connects to the ways of thinking of everyone he encounters, his developed ability of *daas* produces a feeling of love for others. His love for others may look like a mere feeling of love, and it may also lead him into doing actions of love for others, but it is really a result of connecting to the *daas* of others.

Where there is just a raw emotion of love, it will just lead to feelings of love or doing things for others. If the emotion of love is coming from *daas*, though, it is a result of connecting to the minds of other people, which leads to an actual feeling of love, and which can eventually lead to doing good things for other people as well.

The Highest Level - Relationship of Self-Effacement Towards Another Jew

The third and highest level of a relationship towards another Jew, which is mainly the level of the future after Mashiach comes, is the level where one loves another Jew more than he loves himself.

An example of this relationship is what the *Gemara* says about the students of Hillel, who would first introduce their teachings by quoting the words of the students of Shamai³⁴, who always disagreed with their teacher Hillel's view. The students of Hillel loved the students of Shamai even though the latter always disagreed with them, but even more so, they first accorded respect to Shamai's students before saying their own view. This was not simply respectful behavior. It was a spark of the level of love that will be more commonplace in the future, after Mashiach. It is a level where one is able to acknowledge that "Another person's way of thinking is more prominent than my way of thinking". It is essentially when one loves another Jew more than he loves himself, and when he loves and values another Jew's viewpoint even more than he loves and values his own viewpoint.

This kind of relationship towards another is achieved when one undergoes self-effacement (*bittul*) of oneself for another. There is *bittul* which one can feel towards the Creator, and there is also *bittul* that one can feel towards other Jews. When one feels *bittul* to another Jew, he is able to have *mesirus nefesh* in his love for another Jew, because by nullifying his own worth, he can love another Jew more than he loves himself.

This is a level of connection to another that is beyond logic and reasoning. To have some idea of this, the Torah says that when Noach was born, he would find favor (*chein*) in the eyes of everyone. There is no logical reason why a person appears charismatic to others. It is something that cannot be rationally explained. It is love itself. It is not a love that is being defined based on doing certain actions for another, or on having a feeling of love for others, or intellectually connecting to others and thereby feeling closer to them. It is an intrinsic connection which does not depend on anything.

In deeper language, it is a love that comes from intrinsic oneness of souls that existed in state of "before Creation." [Just as there was a point in time before Hashem created the universe, when His name was One and the entire Creation was in one unit before Hashem divided it into the Creation that it is today], there is a state of "before Creation" in the soul. It is a point that is beyond logic and reasoning, an intrinsic connection between all of the *neshamos* of *Klal Yisrael*, in the original state, when all of our souls were undivided from each other.

This dimension exists in a very deep place in the soul, and it is from this place in the soul where we can have *mesirus nefesh* for another Jew. By recognizing this intrinsic level of connection with all other Jews, we can uncover a deep love for each Jew, even more than we love ourselves - from a place in ourselves that is beyond understanding. It is love itself.

³⁴ *Talmud Bavli Eruvin 13b*

The feeling of love, doing actions of love for others, and feeling intellectually connected with others can certainly strengthen this love further, and in fact, they are needed, in order to complete this love and perfect it.

In Summary and In Conclusion

In summary, the levels of “loving your friend like yourself”, from highest to lowest, are:

(1) When we are only connected to other Jew in the realm of actions, by doing things together with others and doing good deeds for others. This is a shaky level of connection. At this level, we are connected with other Jews, but it is only at the level of friendship and connection, and it is not a loving connection. It is a love dependent on something, which does not last.

(2) A deeper level of friendship and connection with another Jew is when we are revealing a feeling of love for others, as a result of connecting to the ways of thinking (*de'os*) of others.

(3) The highest level of friendship and connection with another Jew is when we have *mesirus nefesh* for another Jew, when we nullify our own self in order to love another more Jew than we love ourselves. Such a love comes from the inner will that lies beneath the consciousness of the soul, beyond logical understanding. (At its root, this means to love *Klal Yisrael* collectively because there is an intrinsic connection between all souls of *Klal Yisrael*, and when this ability is used on a more specific level, it means to love each individual Jew on an intrinsic level, from a place in the soul that is beyond logic.

05 | *The Origins of Ahavas Yisrael*

Summary of Previous Chapters

It has been explained so far that there are three general levels of *ahavas Yisrael*. The first level, explained by the Ramban, is when one loves another Jew only “like” himself, “as if” he loves himself, but not actually as much as he loves himself. A higher level of *ahavas Yisrael*, explained by the *Mesillas Yescharim*, is when one loves another Jew *kamocho mamash*, as much as one actually loves himself. The third level is when one loves another Jew more than he loves himself.

Love For The Creator, The Torah, and the Jewish People

At Har Sinai, when the Jewish people were preparing to receive the Torah, Everyone stood “as one man, with one heart.”³⁵ At this great moment, all of their hearts were united in their love for each other. It was a time of revealed *ahavas Yisrael*.

There are three kinds of “loves” which we must have. We must love the Creator, the Torah, and the Jewish people. There is also a “container” which holds all of these three loves together: *Eretz Yisrael*. [Later, this will be explained more.]

At the giving of the Torah, there was a revelation of the Creator, when Hashem descended onto Har Sinai. The Torah was being given, and this was another revelation: the Torah. And the entire nation was connected together with one heart.

On a simple level, love for the Creator is the loftiest level of love, and from loving the Creator we are able to love the Torah that He gave to us, and finally, from loving the Torah, we can love the Jewish people, whom the Torah was given.

However, we all stood together with one heart before the Torah was given. We say in the *Hagaddah*, “Had we just been drawn close to Har Sinai and we wouldn’t have been given the Torah, it would have been enough.”³⁶ When we all stood together with one heart before we received the Torah, this showed that we were able to love the Jewish people even before we had the Torah.

³⁵ *Rashi to Shemos 19:2*

³⁶ *Recited in the “Dayeinu” of the Pesach Hagaddah*

All people are different, everyone has a different way of thinking³⁷, and therefore we cannot love everyone equally. There are levels of importance within the Jewish people. There are elders, princes, the *Kohen Gadol*, *Kohanim*, *Leviim*, etc. When *ahavas Yisrael* comes from loving the Jewish people alone, this will mean that one acknowledges the different ranks of importance within the Jewish people, and that will mean that one cannot love everyone on the same level.

For this reason, when one loves different people on different levels and his love varies depending on what the status of the other person is, one will not be able to love others equally as much as he loves himself. As a result, one will love himself more than he loves others. One will first give priority to his family and his relatives, etc. There are levels of priority within his love for others. He won't be able to love all others equally. At the lowest possible level, one lives totally at the level of *shelo lishmah* and he will always love himself more than he loves others.

Thus, at the giving of the Torah, though everyone stood with together one heart and there was *ahavas Yisrael*, it was not complete yet. They didn't love others yet as much as they loved themselves. It was *ahavas Yisrael* based on loving the Jewish people alone, and at this level, one 'inevitably' will have to love himself more than he loves others, and he cannot love another Jew as much as he loves himself.

This is also represented by the level of *chayecha kodmin*, "Your life takes precedence."³⁸ This is a *halachah* that when one two people are traveling in the desert and one of them has enough water to sustain only one person, the owner of the water is not obligated to give up his water to save his friend's life, because his own life comes first. A hint to this *halachah* is that when the Jewish people were travelling in the desert before the giving of the Torah and they didn't have what to drink, they weren't yet on the level of *ahavas Yisrael* of loving everyone equally – they were only at the level of *chayecha kodmin*.

The Intermediate Level: When Ahavas Yisrael Comes From Loving The Torah

Higher than the aforementioned level of *ahavas Yisrael* is when one's love for the Jewish people is a result of loving the Torah.

There are 600,000 letters in the Torah, corresponding to the 600,000 general souls of the Jewish people.³⁹ In the Torah, each letter is equally important. Although a *parshah* of *tefillin* and a *mezuzah*

³⁷ *Talmud Bavli Berachos 58a*

³⁸ *Talmud Bavli Bava Metziah 62a*

³⁹ *Zohar I 170b*

by itself is treated with more holiness, that is only because it is not part of a *sefer Torah*. But when all *parshiyos* are together in the Torah, in one *sefer Torah*, all letters of the Torah are equally holy.

This represents the second level of *ahavas Yisrael*, which is *kamocho mamash* – to love another Jew equally as much as you love yourself. It is *ahavas Yisrael* on the level of loving the Torah. Love that comes from loving the Torah is a love that reveals how every Jew is equal. When everyone stood at Sinai, although their hearts were united, there were different ranks of importance. All of this was because they were in the midst of preparing for the Torah but they didn't yet have the Torah. When the Torah was given, a new depth was revealed in having one heart with each other. *Ahavas Yisrael* on the level of the giving of the Torah was to love everyone equally.

Ahavas Yisrael That Comes From Love For The Creator

The third and highest level of *ahavas Yisrael* comes from loving the Creator.

When Hashem descended on Har Sinai, this was the revelation of the Creator, and we gained a love for the Creator then, to the point that we were willing to die to hear the word of Hashem by the giving of the Torah.

Loving Hashem really means to have *mesirus nefesh* for the Creator. It is when is willing to give up his very existence for Hashem, and this is the implication of “*Love Hashem...with all your heart and with all your soul*”,⁴⁰ which means that one must give up his life for Hashem (such as when one is faced with having to commit any of the three cardinal sins which one must get killed for, rather than sin⁴¹). This *mesirus nefesh* that one can reveal in his love for Hashem can also lead to the greatest level of *ahavas Yisrael*, of having *mesirus nefesh* for another Jew.

The depth of the giving of the Torah was that their souls flew out of them for every word of Torah they heard. This was *mesirus nefesh* for their love of Hashem, they were willing to die for Hashem's word, and that was the true level of the giving of the Torah. This leads to a level of *ahavas Yisrael* where one can love another Jew more than he loves himself.

At the sin of the golden calf, Moshe said that if You don't forgive them, “*Erase me from Your book.*”⁴² Now that the Torah was given, Moshe could have *mesirus nefesh* in his *ahavas Yisrael* for the Jewish people. When Moshe received the first set of *Luchos*, it was the original level of Torah, which enabled him to achieve *mesirus nefesh* for *ahavas Yisrael*. His *mesirus nefesh* for *Klal Yisrael* was not simply because he loved the Jewish people, but because of Moshe's love and *mesirus nefesh* for the

⁴⁰ Devarim 4:29

⁴¹ Mishnayos Berachos 9:5

⁴² Shemos 32:32

Torah, which had now been given to the Jewish people. That is the depth of why Moshe said, “*Erase me from Your book*”,⁴³ hinting to the Torah.

That is also the depth what Hashem said that when He is giving the Torah to Moshe, “I am giving to you My soul, in writing” (*ana nafshi kesavis yehavis*).⁴⁴ When Hashem gave the Torah, He was giving of His “soul”, so to speak [in the figurative sense, and not to be understood literally], and this was *mesirus nefesh* from Hashem’s perspective. From the viewpoint of our perspective, the *mesirus nefesh* for *Klal Yisrael* which we had was when Moshe (the root of all souls of the Jewish people) was willing to die for *Klal Yisrael* in order that they be forgiven and to get the Torah again, out of his love for the Torah, which comes from *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem.

In Summary

In summary, there were three levels of *ahavas Yisrael* revealed by the giving of the Torah. The first level was when they were preparing to get the Torah, where they all stood with one heart. At this level, they couldn’t yet love each other equally. Each person still loved himself more than another. The second level was revealed at the giving of the Torah, when they were all equal. The third level is when Hashem descended to Har Sinai and they were willing to die for Hashem. This enabled them to have the highest level of *ahavas Yisrael*: To have *mesirus nefesh* for another Jew.

The Depth of Loving Eretz Yisrael

There is also a fourth level, mentioned at the beginning of this lesson. This is the love for Eretz Yisrael⁴⁵, which is the “container” that holds together the three loves of loving the Creator, loving the Torah and loving the Jewish people.

Loving Eretz Yisrael was not revealed at the giving of the Torah, it seems. They were in the desert, not in Eretz Yisrael. However, at Har Sinai, they were forced to accept the Torah, when Hashem suspended the mountain over them and said “If you don’t accept the Torah, you will be buried there”⁴⁶, and there is an inner viewpoint that this mountain represented Eretz Yisrael. They

⁴³ *Shemos*

⁴⁴ *Talmud Bavli Shabbos 105a*

⁴⁵ *Editor’s Note: After the lesson, the Rav was asked if this means having mesirus nefesh to live in Eretz Yisrael. The Rav answered that the level of having mesirus nefesh to Eretz Yisrael was the mistake committed by the tribe of Ephraim when they tried to leave Egypt early, out of their love for Eretz Yisrael. Love for Eretz Yisrael should only be viewed as a container that enables one to love Hashem, the Torah, and the Jewish people on a greater level – and not for the sake of living in Eretz Yisrael as a purpose unto itself.*

⁴⁶ *Talmud Bavli Shabbos 88a*

were all together under the mountain, thus the “mountain”, which was Eretz Yisrael, was uniting them all together in one place.

On a subtler level, the Sages teach that Hashem uprooted Har HaMoriah from Yerushalayim and brought it to Har Sinai when the Torah was being given⁴⁷, and therefore when the mountain was suspended over them, there was also Har HaMoriah above them. Har HaMoriah is the central spiritual point of Eretz Yisrael – it represents the root of the entire Eretz Yisrael. Thus, it was also Har HaMoriah, Eretz Yisrael, which was uniting them all together to receive the Torah.

There is also another aspect here to consider. Eretz Yisrael is divided between the 12 tribes, and the *Gemara* argues if Yerushalayim was divided or not between the tribes. One view is that it was divided between Yehudah and Binyamin.⁴⁸ As with any argument in the *Gemara*, both views are always true.⁴⁹ How so? It is because there is a part of Yerushalayim which is not divided between the tribes, and a part which is divided between the tribes. This also represents the three different levels of *ahavas Yisrael* – as follows.

The first level of *ahavas Yisrael* is where there are different “levels” of importance within the Jewish people, where each person has different views and no one is equal to each other, as the Sages teach, “Just as their faces are different from each other, so are their ways of thinking different from each other.”⁵⁰ When the land was divided, it was an outcome of conquering the 7 gentile nations who had occupied the land before then, so the division of land was an outcome of war, which is all about division. It resulted in a division of spoils, which could not be equal for everyone. Some tribes received more land from others. It was a division of portions, and by very definition it could not be equal for everyone. The dividing of Eretz Yisrael therefore represents the first level of *ahavas Yisrael* where there is division and different ranks within the Jewish people.

However, at the same time, Eretz Yisrael is the place in our world which unites the entire *Klal Yisrael* together as one unit. Therefore, it is also a land that unites the entire people together, and this is why Eretz Yisrael is the “container” that connects the Jewish people together.

As mentioned, according to one of the views of the Sages, Yerushalayim was not divided amongst the tribes. Yerushalayim is the root of Eretz Yisrael, because “From Zion [Jerusalem] the world is sustained”⁵¹ (which is especially true about the site of land where the *Beis HaMikdash* was). There is

47 *Yalkut Reuveni*

48 *Talmud Bavli Megillah*

49 See *Talmud Bavli Gittin 6b*, “Their words, and their words, are the words of the living G-d.” (Editor’s Note: From the perspective of *pnimiyus haTorah* (the inner dimension of Torah, based on the knowledge of Kaballah, the secret and mystical area of Torah, the Rav often will explain how both views in an “argument” between the Sages are true, because from the perspective of *pnimiyus haTorah*, everything in the Torah is strung together as parts of the same whole.)

50 *Talmud Bavli Berachos 58a*

51 *Zohar Chadash II Rus 27b*

also a higher “*Beis HaMikdash*”, in Heaven⁵², which is certainly not divided between the tribes, according to all views. The lower *Beis HaMikdash*, on earth, was a semblance of the Heavenly *Beis HaMikdash*.

Thus, Yerushalayim (in particular, the *Beis HaMikdash*, the central point and the root of Yerushalayim) contains two aspects to it. It is a paradox of both division and equality – there are different portions of land allotted to each of the tribes, but there was also an aspect of Yerushalayim which was equally for everyone (since it represented the Heavenly *Beis HaMikdash*, which is not divided). Whereas the first two Batei Mikdash were built brick by brick, the third *Beis HaMikdash* will descend from Heaven complete in one piece, because the third *Beis HaMikdash* is a complete manifestation of the Heavenly *Beis HaMikdash*, which cannot be divided.

Thus, the concept of love for Eretz Yisrael represents two different levels of *ahavas Yisrael*. There is a level where each Jew has his individual place in Eretz Yisrael, and for this reason, one will love other Jews with a certain order of priorities, loving more those who are more important, loving his family and relatives more than he loves other Jews, etc. It is love, but it is not yet equality with others. This is all represented by the division of portions of land between all the tribes in Eretz Yisrael. A deeper level of love is where there is equality amongst all Jews and each Jew loves another as much as he loves himself, where everyone is connected together. This is represented by the uniting factor of Eretz Yisrael, the fact that Eretz Yisrael serves to unite all of the Jewish people on one land.

In summary, Eretz Yisrael on a lower level is about division (and, accordingly, loving other Jews at varying levels) as well as unity (and having an equal love for all Jews on the same level).

The Unity of Yerushalayim At Har Sinai

Although the Jewish people were in the desert when the Torah was given, they still had “Eretz Yisrael” with them, which served to connect them all together. This happened when “Har HaMoriah” was suspended over them. It made the Jewish people into one unit, when they all said together *Naaseh* and *Nishma* (We will do and we will hear), when they were all forced together to accept the Torah. Where there had previously been division and differing ranks amidst the Jewish people, even as they all stood “with one heart” at Har Sinai, now they were all equal, when they were united together as they were being forced to accept the Torah.

Furthermore, when Har HaMoriah was suspended over them along with Har Sinai, it was really the Heavenly Yerushalayim which was suspended over them. This was because, as explained earlier,

⁵² *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 4:6, *Pesikta Rabbasi* 20

Har HaMoriah is the central place in Yerushalayim for it housed the *Beis HaMikdash*, and the *Beis HaMikdash* was a semblance of the Heavenly *Beis HaMikdash*.

When the people were being forced to accept the Torah, they also showed *mesirus nefesh*, the highest level of love for the Creator, when they were willing to die to hear the word of Hashem. Their souls flew out of their bodies for each word of Torah they heard, and they were willing to do this, in order to receive the Torah. It came from their love for Hashem. And accordingly, the level of *ahavas Yisrael* which they were on now was on the level of *mesirus nefesh*. Now that they had revealed *mesirus nefesh* in their love for Hashem and for the Torah, they received the level of having *mesirus nefesh* in their love for another Jew.

Thus, Har HaMoriah, the root of Yerushalayim, was with the people when they received the Torah, enabling them to achieve the highest level of *ahavas Yisrael*: the level of *mesirus nefesh*. The giving of the Torah therefore represented the highest level of *ahavas Yisrael*.

Later with the *Erev Rav*⁵³ influencing the Jewish people to commit the sin with the golden calf, the Jewish people lost this lofty level of love. But during the time when they received the Torah, they had the total level of *ahavas Yisrael*, with no traces of the *Erev Rav*, for the Ramban says that the *Erev Rav* stood apart from the nation. Thus, at the giving of the Torah it was a complete *ahavas Yisrael* with no influences of *Erev Rav*. It was one time in history when everything was perfect – when our love for the Creator, for the Torah, and for the Jewish people, was complete.

In Conclusion

Thus, the time of the giving of the Torah revealed all three levels of *ahavas Yisrael*, from lowest level to highest level. When we prepared to receive the Torah, we revealed the first level of *ahavas Yisrael*. We had one heart, but we didn't yet love each other equally. We loved certain people more than others. At the actual giving of the Torah, we loved each other equally. There were no differentiations then. This was the level of *kamocho mamash*. And, finally, when Hashem descended on Har Sinai and our souls flew out of our bodies to hear the word of Hashem, we showed *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem and for the Torah, which gave us the ability to have *mesirus nefesh* for another Jew.

⁵³ *The Mixed Multitude (non-Jews who left the Jewish people at the exodus from Egypt, who were not interested in joining Judaism or accepting the Torah). They left Egypt due because they were afraid of retribution from G-d. Moshe accepted them into the Jewish people in the hope that they would accept the Torah upon them, but in reality, they had no such plans. Their presence continuously made trouble for the Jewish people, and they were constantly the cause of any sins committed by the Jewish people in the desert, by stirring up fear, disorientation, and confusion within the Jewish people.*

06 | *Active Ahavas Yisrael*

Analyzing The First Level of Ahavas Yisrael

We have been explaining so far that there are three levels of *ahavas Yisrael*. The first level is to love another almost as much as you love yourself, the second level is to love another as much as you love yourself, and the third level is to love another more than you love yourself.

Let us now delve more into the first level of *ahavas Yisrael*. Simply speaking, this when you love another Jew but not on the same level as you love yourself. Upon deeper analysis, however, we will see that there is more depth which we can reveal, even at this level of love, the elementary level of *ahavas Yisrael*.

Ahavas Yisrael - The Heart-Dependent Mitzvah Which Elevates The Rest of Our Mitzvos

The 613 *mitzvos* which we are commanded with are mostly actions. This is because we live in a “world of action”. However, the world of action we live on is nothing but an offshoot of higher worlds, which (from lowest to highest) include the realms of emotion, thought, *d'veykus* (attachment with G-d), and finally, *havayah* (oneness with G-d).⁵⁴ Therefore, although we live on a world of action, our actions can ultimately become connected with the higher realms, and thereby elevated.

Besides for the action-dependent *mitzvos*, there are also *mitzvos* that are “heart-dependent”⁵⁵ and there also *mitzvos* that are thought-dependent (i.e. Torah study). The heart-dependent *mitzvos* are the intermediate level between our action-dependent *mitzvos* and our thought-dependent *mitzvos*. The *mitzvos* have two parts to them – a part which is closer to the lower realms and a part which is closer to the higher realms. The *mitzvos* closer to the higher realms are *emunah* and learning Torah, which are *d'veykus*-related and thought-dependent *mitzvos*, while the *mitzvos* connected to lower realms include *ahavas Yisrael*, which is the world of all inner spiritual feelings, because love is the root of all emotion.

Doing actions for others is the trait of *chessed* (kindness), but at the core of the trait of *chessed* is the emotion of *ahavah*, love. The Sage Rabbi Akiva said that the *mitzvah* to “Love your friend like

⁵⁴ Action corresponds to the lowest realm, “Asiyah”. Higher than “Asiyah” is the realm of emotion, “Yetzirah”. Higher than “Yetzirah” is the realm of thought, “Beriah”. Higher than Beriah is the realm of *d'veykus*, closeness and attachment with G-d, called “Atzilus”. The highest realm is Adam Kadmon, corresponding to oneness with G-d, or *emunah* on the level of *Ain Od Milvado*.

⁵⁵ see *Sefer Chareidim*

yourself” (*ahavas Yisrael*) is the root of all the *mitzvos* of the Torah, which leads to all other *mitzvos*.⁵⁶ Since *ahavas Yisrael* is a heart-dependent *mitzvah*, and represents the entire realm of emotion, the *mitzvah* of *ahavas Yisrael* is therefore the intermediate level between action-dependent *mitzvos* and thought-dependent *mitzvos*. It is the heart-dependent *mitzvah* of *ahavas Yisrael* which connects all our *mitzvah* acts on this realm of action we live on, to a higher realm, the realm of holy thought, which is Torah study.

The *mitzvos* of the heart (*ahavas Yisrael*) and the *mitzvos* of the mind (Torah study) both serve to connect our *mitzvah* acts to the higher spiritual realms. Usually, the *mitzvos* of both the heart and mind become manifest and in our world of action, and this is because the purpose of heart-dependent and thought-dependent *mitzvos* is to connect the world of action with the higher realms.

For this reason, although the *mitzvah* of *ahavas Yisrael* is a *mitzvah* that involves the emotion of love, which is an emotion, the *mitzvah* of *ahavas Yisrael* is not actually fulfilled through just having feelings of love in our heart for another Jew, but only when we do actions for them, which brings us to love them. When we don’t do actions of love for others, we aren’t able to reveal *ahavas Yisrael*, because *ahavas Yisrael* serves as the connecting point between our world of action with the higher spiritual realms, and therefore *ahavas Yisrael* needs to be clothed in actions, which serve as a garment for *ahavas Yisrael* to settle upon and be manifest.

Revealing Ahavas Yisrael For Others

The Sages taught in the *Sifrei*, “If you want to connect to your friend, be involved with doing good for him, for this will lead you to love him.” In this teaching, the Sages are defining the *mitzvah* of *ahavas Yisrael* as doing good deeds for other Jews, which will lead one to love them. Why does a person need to do actions in order to fulfill *ahavas Yisrael*? Why can’t he just love them in his heart? It is because heart-dependent *mitzvos* usually require action, in order to be manifest. The *mitzvah* of *ahavas Yisrael* is therefore fulfilled only when we are doing actions which lead us to love other Jews.

How do we make our *ahavas Yisrael* active? How do we fulfill this *mitzvah*? There are two different approaches. One way is to contemplate the love we must have for other Jews, and then to internalize this knowledge in our hearts, which will bring us to actually love another Jew. Another way, as mentioned from the teaching of the *Sifrei*, is to do actions that bring you to love your friend. When we do actions for others, these actions become “garments” for the love we want to acquire for others. In slightly different terminology, doing good things for others are “tools” which we can use,

⁵⁶ *Talmud Bavli Shabbos 31a*

to bring us to love others. By consistently doing good things for others, these actions help us create love for others.

Why Active Ahavas Yisrael Is Limited

However, there is also a disadvantage that comes along with doing actions of *ahavas Yisrael* for others. Although *ahavas Yisrael* needs to be actualized in the area of doing good for others, because actions are the “garment” for *ahavas Yisrael* to be “clothed” in, these good deeds for others will also conceal our *ahavas Yisrael* at the same time.

To give an analogy, a garment will cover something it is placed upon, and it will hide what’s underneath it. In the same way, when actions serve as a “garment” for our *ahavas Yisrael*, they will “cover over” our *ahavas Yisrael* at the same time. Although doing good deeds for others fulfills the *mitzvah* of *ahavas Yisrael*, at the same time, it can cover and restrain our emotion of love.

For example, no matter how much we do for another person, we will never be able to have unlimited love for that person. As long as our *ahavas Yisrael* is being achieved just through doing good things for others, our actions are limiting our *ahavas Yisrael* for others, because we are limited in what we can do for others. The world of action which we live, by its very definition, has its boundaries and limitations.⁵⁷ As long as our love for others is coming from good deeds that we do for them, our love for others will be limited.

So although *ahavas Yisrael* is fulfilled *halachically* through doing good deeds for others, our *ahavas Yisrael* also becomes concealed in the process. At the level of action alone, we will always love always more than we love ourselves, placing ourselves before others. We cannot reach unlimited *ahavas Yisrael* towards others, which is the level of *mesirus nefesh* for another Jew. And through actions alone, we won’t even be able to reach the second level of *ahavas Yisrael*, which is *kamocho mamash*, the ability to love another Jew as much as we love ourselves. We will always feel a greater love for ourselves, when our love is limited to doing good things for others.

Why Actions of Ahavas Yisrael Don’t Create Lasting Love

There is also another reason why merely doing good deeds for others makes our *ahavas Yisrael* limited: It is because when our love for others is based on actions, the love will be conditional and it won’t last. We shall explain why.

⁵⁷ Sefer Yetzirah 2:5

Chazal explain that when love is dependent on something, the love does not last, and when love does not depend on something, the love will always remain.⁵⁸ The simple meaning of *Chazal*'s teaching about conditional and unconditional love is that when the receiver stops getting what he wants, he stops loving the other person. But there is also a way to understand it from the giver's perspective: When the giver stops giving, he also stops loving the person whom he is giving to, because his love is dependent on his giving. The giver will love the receiver depending on how much he gives to him, and the more he gives, the more he will love. This is because giving creates love, as Rav Dessler explained.⁵⁹ But ultimately, this love will cease if the giver stops giving.⁶⁰

This is because the love needs something being given in order for the love to thrive, because the love is entirely on the level of actions, and once these actions cease, there is no love. The love will be limited even while one is giving, but when the giving disappears the love will cease totally. (There is also love based on speech, such as saying words that express love to another. This is a higher level than love based on actions.)

For this reason, when one is loving others merely as a result of doing good things for them, he will still love himself more than he loves others. On a simple level, this is because he is not willing to nullify himself to others. But from a deeper understanding, one's self-love is greater than his capacity to love for others, because his love for others depends on doing things for them. It is a nature that Hashem has placed into each person to love oneself more than others. Love for others usually doesn't come from the same place as loving ourselves. We love ourselves for no reason at all, but we love others depending on some factor. Thus, our self-love is greater than our love for others.

Simply speaking, this is part of the *katnus* (immaturity) in the soul, but it is more than that. It is because the loves are different, and therefore love for others cannot be as strong as the love we have for ourselves. We love ourselves not depending on any action, not for any reason at all. We would love ourselves even if we had no reason. But our love for others depends on some reason. That is the depth of why our self-love is greater than our love for others, and that is why there is a *halachah* of *chayecha kodmin*, the fact that one is not obligated to give up his own life for another person.⁶¹

58 *Avos* 5:19

59 *Michtav M'Eliyahu* vol. I: *Kuntres HaChessed* (adapted into english in "Strive For Truth", Volume 1, "Essay on Lovingkindness")

60 Rav Dessler also makes this point, in the aforementioned source: "From the moment you stop giving to each other, know that all your love for each other will cease."

61 *Talmud Bavli Bava Metzia* 62a

Uncovering True Ahavas Yisrael Through Acts of Giving

Rabbi Akiva taught that the *mitzvah* of *ahavas Yisrael* is what leads to all the other *mitzvos*. Why is *ahavas Yisrael* the root of all the *mitzvos*?

Simply speaking, the receiver loves his benefactor when he receives, and the giver loves the receiver because by giving to him, he is making a treaty with the other and this itself creates love.

But the deeper reason is rooted in the Creator's love. The Creator's love is behind all of the goodness that Hashem bestows on His creations. *Ahavah* (love) is the root of why Hashem created the world in His kindness. Hashem made the world in His kindness, which was rooted in His love for His creations, and that is why He did the kindness of creating them. If not for His love, there would be nothing upholding Creation. His love keeps everything in existence. That is the deep root behind all conditional love between people – it is really an offshoot of the Creator's love, which allows His creations to receive kindnesses and be sustained.

When a person gives to another, why is there love between a receiver and giver? Simply it is because there is something connecting them now. But that is not the depth of it. The deeper reason it is being given out of love. Although it appears to us that the love between a giver and receiver is being caused by that which the receiver is getting, that is only how it appears to us, and that is not what is creating the love. The love is coming from the act of giving itself, and not from that which is being given. Since Hashem gave everything to the world out of His love, the love between people is also an offshoot of Hashem's love, which is the actual love itself that is created from giving.

This is a way for a person to see the love of Hashem that is contained in each thing, and how His love keeps everything going. From a simple perspective, when a person sees something being given or received, a person only sees the coarse physicality of it, the object itself, which is comprised of any of the four elements in creation. But from an inner viewpoint, we can learn to see the love of Hashem in each thing and how He wills each thing to keep in existence, because He loves His creations. When one receives from another, there is love not because of the object he receives, but because Hashem's love has allowed for him to receive, since His love is keeping everything in existence.

This is the deeper meaning of “love dependent on something” – all of our love depends on Hashem's love for Creation, which allows for Creation to exist. (If the thing wouldn't exist anymore, the love of Hashem that was keeping this thing in existence would become returned to its source above). Thus, the essence of all conditional love is that there is love of the giver behind that which is being given, and this is coming from the love of Hashem that enables each thing to be given, out of His love to keep His creations in existence.

Uncovering Lishmah Within Shelo Lishmah In Our Ahavas Yisrael

In this way, one can actually use his conditional love for others (via the act of giving) as a way to uncover unconditional love for others.

Essentially, all of this is a way of how one can go from the level of *shelo lishmah* (acting for self-serving motivations) to the level of *lishmah* (acting for pure motivations).

Chazal taught that one should learn Torah and do *mitzvos* even *shelo lishmah*, because from acting *shelo lishmah* a person is led to *lishmah*.⁶² Doing the *mitzvos shelo lishmah* mainly applies to *ahavas Yisrael*, because *ahavas Yisrael* is the root that leads to all other *mitzvos*. Thus, through loving someone *shelo lishmah* one can be led to loving another Jew *lishmah*.

One starts off at a level that is self-serving (*l'garnei*), and one must begin to love another person *shelo lishmah*, in order to get to *ahavas Yisrael* that is *lishmah*. This is not simply by loving another person even though one really loves himself more. It is by uncovering the *pnimiyus*.⁶³ within our *shelo lishmah*, which is by finding Hashem's love within the acts of giving that one does for another. The inner essence of anything is always the good, pure part of something, and that is why in *shelo lishmah* we can find the *pnimiyus* of it – the “dependent” love that comes from Hashem, which everything in Creation depends on – and when we have this awareness as we love someone *shelo lishmah*, we are led to loving someone *lishmah*.

The Vilna Gaon says that even when one begins to learn and do *mitzvos shelo lishmah*, he should have a spark of *lishmah* in it, meaning that even within the *shelo lishmah* there should be *lishmah* already from the start. The depth of this is not simply that one reveals *lishmah* at the start, but that one can find *lishmah* even within *shelo lishmah*, by awakening the inner essence of *shelo lishmah*, and from there one will find the level of *lishmah*. Thus, loving another Jew *shelo lishmah* is really about finding the *lishmah* within the *shelo lishmah*.

The first level of *ahavas Yisrael*, in which we love another Jew but not as much as we love ourselves - is for the purpose of getting to the second level of *ahavas Yisrael*: To love another Jew as much as we love ourselves. Thus, it is precisely from self-love, where one loves himself more than another – the level of *shelo lishmah* - which enables one to arrive at the level of loving another Jew as much as he loves himself - the level of *lishmah*.

The depth of graduating from *shelo lishmah* to *lishmah* when it comes to *ahavas Yisrael*, then, is to discover the love of the Creator for others, which is contained in all of our acts of giving to others, for our ability to give to others is ultimately an offshoot of the Creator's kindness and love to His

⁶² *Talmud Bavli Pesachim 50b*

⁶³ *inner spiritual dimension*

creations. Our own *middos* are a reflection of the Creator's. And, as explained, loving someone *shelo lishmah* is also the case with one who gives to others: By giving to others, one is still at the level of loving others *shelo lishmah*, but within his self-love that he has for himself, he can uncover the love of Hashem for all creations, and in this way, the giver can uncover the hidden *lishmah* aspect even within his *shelo lishmah*.

In that way, when one gives to another, his love won't be dependent on the giving, because he is revealing Hashem's love in his acts of giving. The more a person deepens this awareness as he gives, giving from his *pnimiyus* to others, by realizing that his love and giving for others really stems from the Creator's love for His creations, one will be able to go from the level of loving himself more than he loves others, to the level of loving others as much as he loves himself. From one's very self-love - in which one loves himself more than others - one is able to come to uncover true love with others, loving them as much as he loves himself.

This is the depth of why *ahavas Yisrael* brings you to all of the *mitzvos*. It is because acting *shelo lishmah* leads a person into *lishmah*. By first reaching your own self-love, you can then love others. Of course, if one lives externally and superficially, he will never uncover true love with all others, because his entire self-love is self-centered and he does not love others at all. But when one becomes connected to the depth within himself, to his true "I" which is a healthy source of self-love, one can then build upon his self-love and be able to uncover true love towards others. This is not the only way to reach love with others, but it is a very fundamental way to reach love with others.

When most people love themselves more than others, it is usually not because they have reached true self-love. Those who do reach true self-love, though, are able to have a genuine, lasting love for themselves, and from there, they can go from *shelo lishmah* (the level of healthy self-love) to *lishmah* (loving others as much as they love themselves).

In Summary and In Conclusion

Although acting *shelo lishmah* leads to *lishmah* by all of the *mitzvos*, it is mostly applicable to *ahavas Yisrael*, which is the root of all *mitzvos* (because *ahavas Yisrael* leads to all other *mitzvos*). Thus, it is precisely from loving oneself, the level of *shelo lishmah*, that one come to true *ahavas Yisrael* that is *lishmah*, loving others as much as one loves himself. That is *ahavas Yisrael* at its purest level.

07 | *The Interdependency of Klal Yisrael*

A Deeper Understanding of “Love That Is Dependent On Something”

Previously we explained the first level of *ahavas Yisrael* where one loves himself more than another, which is also called “love that is dependent on something” (*ahavah ha-teluyah b’dovor*).⁶⁴ There is more to understand about this love.

The depth of the concept of “love that is dependent on something” is that every single creation’s existence depends on something else, in order for it to remain in existence. Either a person will feel “dependent” on that which is above him – Hashem – or, a person will be dependent on those who are parallel to him, such as his spouse and friends, or a person will feel dependent on those lower than him: his children or students. But every person feels dependent on something.

The very design of Creation is that all creations depend on other creations in order to survive. If people wouldn’t be kind to each other or do things for each other, nobody in Creation can survive. Societies survived throughout history only because everyone depended on each other to do anything. This nature of universal “dependency” is the design which Hashem has implanted into the entire Creation, as a rule for its survival, but it is especially true about human beings, and it is even truer about *Klal Yisrael*, the Jewish people. The unit of the Jewish people is an interdependent unit, and therefore, each Jew depends on every other Jew’s existence.

“Love that is dependent on something” can be experienced both by the one who receives the love as well as by the one who gives this love (as explained in the previous chapter). But in addition to this, “love dependent on something” also means that everything in the Creation is dependent on something else. Hashem created a world of kindness, in which everyone needs to be kind to each other in for the world to survive, and this is especially true about the relationships between people, and all the more so for the Jewish people. Every Jew is truly “dependent” on the existence of every other Jew.

Thus, we need to know, and internalize, that the depth of “love dependent on something” is referring to the interdependency of *Klal Yisrael*, who all depend on each other, as per Hashem’s design of Creation. Therefore, even at the first level of *ahavas Yisrael*, where one loves another Jew but not as much he loves himself, and he loves another Jew only on the level of “love that is dependent on something”, this really means that he still depends on the existence of another Jew, because all of *Klal Yisrael* has this built-in interdependency.

⁶⁴ *Avos 5:19*

For example, the Sages said that even if one Jewish soul would have been absent at Har Sinai, the Torah could not have been given. There are 600,000 letters of the Torah, each corresponding to one of the 600,000 souls of the Jewish people.⁶⁵ Just as one letter missing from a *sefer Torah* makes it invalid, so is *Klal Yisrael* unable to exist if even one Jewish soul is missing. Each Jew truly depends on the existence of another Jew's soul.⁶⁶

“Love dependent on something”, from a deeper understanding, really means that the very structure of *Klal Yisrael* is to depend on each Jew. Even if one Jew doesn't actually receive anything good from another Jew, he still depends on that Jew, because his existence is only enabled through every other Jew's existence. Since we need every other Jew to exist, each of us depends on each Jew, whether we are receiving love from other Jews or not, because we are all interdependent on each other, by our very design. So there is a built-in “love that is dependent on something” within the unit of *Klal Yisrael*: Every Jew needs each other in order to exist.

Love From Interdependency Never Ceases

Therefore, we have so far learned that there three kinds of “love that is dependent on something”.

There is love dependent on something which comes from physical acts of giving and receiving: By giving things to others, or by receiving things from others, this can create love. There is also love dependent on something which comes from spiritual giving and receiving: When we give something spiritual to others [i.e. teaching Torah to others], this can create love, and when we receive something spiritual from others [i.e. learning Torah from others], this also creates love. These are both examples of love dependent on something, and in any of these cases, the love ceases when the reason for the love ceases.

As we are explaining here, there is also a deeper kind of “love that is dependent on something”: The love which comes from the interdependency of *Klal Yisrael*, the fact that each Jew is ultimately dependent on every other Jew, by the very design that Hashem has created us with. Although it is a love that is “dependent” on something (we each depend on another Jew's existence), it is a love that never ceases. We shall explain why.

⁶⁵ *Zohar I 170b, Zohar II 165b*

⁶⁶ Editor's Note: This includes even the worst *reshaim* (wicked sinners) of the Jewish people, such as the wicked kings in the Tanach. However, as the Rav has mentioned in many places, there is no *ahavas Yisrael* towards “souls of the Erev Rav”, the soul reincarnations of non-Jews who left Egypt together with the Jewish people, who are able to be born Jewish but who do not have a Jewish soul. These are evil souls throughout history whose entire mission was to seek spiritual destruction of Jewish souls. Rav Elchonon Wasserman zt”l said, for example, that the “*Yevekstias*” (a movement of Jewish Russians who sought religious persecution of Jews in Russia) were the wicked souls of the “Erev Rav”. The *Gra* in *Tikkunei HaZohar (41a)* gives general signs of how to identify a soul of Erev Rav. Refer to the pdf “Erev Rav Talks.”

“Love dependent on something”, by very definition, is that it is an absolute dependency at all times. On an external level, it is when people love each other for some external reason, and when the reason for the love ceases, the love ceases with it as well. The reason for the love ceases, then the love ceases, and the dependency ceases.

But there is also an inner level to “love that is dependent on something”, in which there will be a dependency at all times, even after the reason for the love ceases. At the inner depths of “love dependent on something”, which is the interdependency between all the souls of *Klal Yisrael*, the love never ceases. This is because by very design, the unit of *Klal Yisrael* is interdependent on each other, and that is something that can never cease.

The Bridge Between The First and Second Levels of Ahavas Yisrael

This level of *ahavas Yisrael* – loving each Jew because we realize that we are ultimately dependent on each other - is essentially a bridging level between the first level of *ahavas Yisrael* (loving yourself more than you love another Jew), and the second level of *ahavas Yisrael* (loving another Jew as much as you love yourself). Although it is not yet on the level of loving another Jew as much as you love yourself, it is the point where you begin to leave your self-love behind and you enter into the unit of the Jewish people.

That is why it is called *ahavah teluyah b'dovor*, love “depending” on something, which also means love that “hangs” on something – it is a love that “hangs” between the first and second levels of *ahavas Yisrael*. When you recognize that all Jewish souls depend on each other and that this love cannot cease, this is the bridging point between the first level of *ahavas Yisrael* (loving yourself more than you love another Jew) to the second level of *ahavas Yisrael*: loving another Jew as much as you love yourself.

The Depth of Ahavas Yisrael: I Cannot Exist Without Another Jew

This perspective offers an entirely new depth to the concept of loving others, namely *ahavas Yisrael*. The simple understanding of *ahavas Yisrael* is the first level of love, which we have been explaining in the previous two chapters, which is essentially self-focused. It is to love others in spite of the fact that you love yourself more. It is like the words of Rav Shimon Shkop, who explained that love means to expand your own self-love to include others.⁶⁷ But the second level of *ahavas Yisrael*, to love another Jew as much as you love yourself, *kamocho mamash* as the *Mesillas Yesharim*

⁶⁷ *Hakdamah to sefer Shaarei Yosher*

describes, is a higher level of *ahavas Yisrael*. It is essentially to feel that you have no existence of your own, since you depend on all other Jews in order to exist. It is to feel a sense of *bittul* (self-nullification) to another Jew, because you know that you need him in order to exist.

The level we are describing here, the bridge between the first and second levels of *ahavas Yisrael* is that each Jew needs to feel that how his continued existence depends on every single Jew, and this awareness is how one can rise from the first level of *ahavas Yisrael* (where *kamocho* is not *mamash*) to the second level of *ahavas Yisrael* (where *kamocho* is *mamash*).

At the first level of *ahavas Yisrael*, I love another Jew and I recognize his importance, but I only have an external awareness of the interdependency of the Jewish people. At this level, I will love myself more, because I don't feel that my existence depends on another Jew's.

Compare it to a little child, who feels dependent on his mother for everything, but the child doesn't feel that his existence depends on his mother. He considers his own existence more important than his mother's, even though he feels dependent on his mother. This analogy represents the first level of *ahavas Yisrael*: Even though the continued existence of my soul depends on other Jews, I feel that I can still exist even if another Jew wouldn't exist. There is no *bittul* to other Jews, at this level.

The second level of *ahavas Yisrael* takes the interdependency further. It is the awareness that if not for the other Jew's existence, I would cease to exist – since we are all interdependent on each other. It is when one feels that he has no existence of my own, if not another Jew. This brings one to feel a sense of *bittul* self-nullification towards other Jews: I have no complete existence of my own, because I need every other Jew in order to exist.

This is the depth of *ahavas Yisrael*. Even when I don't receive anything from other Jews or when I am no longer giving anything to others, my very continued existence still depends on another Jew, and therefore I have no existence of my own without another Jew. This perspective is really touching upon the second level of *ahavas Yisrael*, to love another Jew *kamocho mamash*, and that is why it is the way by which one can rise from the first level of *ahavas Yisrael* (loving myself more than I love another Jew) to the second level of *ahavas Yisrael* (loving another Jew as much as I love myself): When I am aware that I have no existence of my own, since I need every other Jew in order for me to exist.

Avraham Avinu was the absolute revelation of this trait. He was called “Avraham, My beloved”⁶⁸, because he earned Hashem's greatest love by being the personification on this world of Hashem's love for all people. On a simple level, it was because he showed love to all people by always inviting

68 *Yeshayahu* 41:8

guests into his home and showing kindness to every person, even washing their feet when they entered his home. But there was more to his love. The Midrash states (according to one interpretation) that the world was created just for the sake of Avraham.⁶⁹ The depth of this was that he felt no existence of his own, because he felt that he depended on the existence of others.

Through the awareness of this perspective – realizing that we have no existence of our own, because our existence depends on all other creations - one can reach the inner depths of his soul, getting past his own private existence, and realizing how his very existence is dependent on the existence of every other Jew, bringing one to the awareness that how he has no independent existence of his own. This brings a person to love another Jew on the same level that he loves himself, feeling a sense of *hishtavus* (equality) with all other Jews, as a result of feeling *bittul* to every Jew: When one becomes aware that he cannot exist without another Jew.

The Highest Level of Ahavas Yisrael: Feeling Bittul To Those Who Are Below Your Level

One can also use take this perspective further and even feel how much he depends on those who are “below” him. It is more natural to feel *bittul* to someone who is above you (or even parallel or on the same level as you), but there is also deeper use of *bittul*: To feel nullified even to those who are “below” you. It almost sounds like a curse, such as when a slave is ruling his master. However, the idea of nullifying yourself to that which is “lower” than you is actually an offshoot of the Creator’s ability, so to speak, of nullifying Himself to His creations.

Chazal said, “*HaKadosh Baruch Hu* desired to have a dwelling below.”⁷⁰ Simply this is because the purpose of Creation is that G-dliness should be revealed on earth. But the depth of this is that because Hashem has *bittul* (so to speak) to that which is lower than Him. That is the higher root of every Jew’s ability to have *bittul* even to those who are “lower” than oneself – to feel *bittul* even to those who are on a lower spiritual level than you.

This concept is not only with regards to having *bittul* towards other souls, but even towards inanimate objects in creation. For example, every person feels somewhat dependent on his money and possessions. The Sages speak about this kind of dependency. A person would feel like he cannot live if he were to lose all his money and possessions. People naturally feel dependent on their money. Although this is mundane, it actually comes from a deep ability to feel nullified to something which is lower than you. (On a deeper note, this is because there are sparks of one’s soul contained in his money, and that is why one must be careful with his money.) The idea of this is that a person is

⁶⁹ *Beraishis Rabbah* 12:8

⁷⁰ *Midrash Tanchuma Naso* 16

supposed to feel a sense of *bittul* towards all of Creation (because of the concept that everything in Creation is interdependent on each other).

Having *bittul* to that which is lower than you is also a spark of the third level of *ahavas Yisrael*: Loving another Jew more than you love yourself, to the extent that you are willing to have *mesirus nefesh* for another Jew.

Even at the level of “love that is dependent on something”, one is able to reveal *bittul* to those who are below him, which is a form of *mesirus nefesh*, because it is much greater *mesirus nefesh* for a person to have *bittul* to that which is below you than when you have *bittul* to what’s above you. This is because there is a nature in each thing that it yearns to return to its root above, to have *bittul* to that which is higher than oneself. But it is not natural for a person to have *bittul* to that which is below him. Therefore, it is deeper kind of *bittul*, and therefore it is *mesirus nefesh*, when one has *ahavas Yisrael* to that which is below him.

When one realizes that he depends even on souls who are below him, and that if not for those other Jewish souls he cannot exist, he is having *bittul* to those who are below him.

To illustrate the idea, a father is dependent on his children because he needs them to continue his existence and legacy after he dies. And when the children are alive and fulfilling the father’s will, the father is also considered alive, even after the father dies. In death, the father is having *bittul* to his children. If not for children continuing their father’s legacy, the father is considered dead, and when they continue his legacy, they are continuing their father’s life. As an example, the Sages taught that Yaakov Avinu was considered alive even after he passed away, as long as his children were alive.⁷¹

Thus, a person’s continued existence depends on those who are lower than him – namely, his children. But this is not only true with regards to one’s children, it is true for all of the Jewish people: Each Jew depends on those who are lower than him, because each of us needs to have the entire Jewish people intact in order for us to continue existing. And because of that reality, each Jew is therefore able to love other Jews who are “below” his level, and to love them even more than he loves himself – for when he realizes that his existence depends on them, he can feel *bittul* towards them.

In Summary and In Conclusion

The truest level of *bittul* to other Jews, therefore, is to feel a sense of *bittul* to those who are “below” you [not on the same spiritual level as you]. This is the depth of *ahavas Yisrael*, where even

⁷¹ *Talmud Bavli Taanis 5b*

ahavah teluyah b'dovor (love that is dependent on something) becomes a tool to reveal the greatest level of love: By realizing that we all “depend” on each Jew’s existence, we can come to a sense of *bittul* to each Jew, even to those who are at a lower level than us, just as father loves his child even though they are lower than him, and he feels a sense of *bittul* towards his child because he knows that his continued existence depends on his child.

In summary, it is the awareness that another Jew is more important than me, even if he is at a lower level than me, because I ultimately need him in *Klal Yisrael* if I am to exist. And from recognizing that you depend on each Jew’s existence, you can feel nullified to each Jew and come to love him even more than you love yourself, even if he is at a lower level than you.

This deep perspective can lead a person to the highest level of *ahavas Yisrael*, to love another Jew more than you love yourself. Loving another more than yourself is not only in the case of a parent’s love for his child, but towards the rest of the Jewish people as well. One can come to love all other Jews, more than he loves himself - even if the other Jew is at a lower level than him.....

08 | *Practically Achieving Kamocha*

The Ramban's View on Ahavas Yisrael

In the previous lessons, we have mainly been discussing the first level of *ahavas Yisrael*, described by the Ramban⁷², which is that when the Torah says that you are commanded to love another Jew *kamocha* (like yourself), the Torah only means to love another “like” yourself, but not totally like yourself.

This is because, according to the Ramban's view, it is human nature that one will always love himself more than another. According to the Ramban, the Torah is not requiring of a person to do something that it is not within his natural capabilities. Therefore, the Ramban's view is that the *mitzvah* to love another Jew “*kamocha*” is to try to be at an equal stance with another Jew and to love him almost as much as yourself.

The Ramban is really describing the first level of *ahavas Yisrael*: To love another Jew, but not as much as you actually love yourself.⁷³

In the previous chapters, we have mainly been discussing the intellectual understanding of this level. In this lesson, we will try to draw this concept closer to practicality.

Practicing Ahavas Yisrael Every Day – The External Aspect

The Sages taught (in *Derech Eretz Zuta* and in the *Sifrei*) that “If you want to love your friend, be involved with doing good things for him, and this will bring you to love him.” Understandably, on a practical level this means that you should do good things for others. But *ahavas Yisrael* is a heart-dependent *mitzvah*, so it is not just about actions, it is a *mitzvah* that involves heart. Therefore, while you certainly need to do acts of *ahavas Yisrael* for others, you also need to put your heart and thoughts into it.

Practically speaking, the very thing to do, in order to develop the most basic level of *ahavas Yisrael*, is that there shouldn't be a day that goes by in which you don't do something for another person. Every day, try to do something for another Jew.

If you can't do anything active for another Jew, try to say a kind word to another Jew. And if you don't do that, at the very least, try to think of doing something good for another Jew. If possible, try

⁷² Ramban on Vayikra 18:19

⁷³ As mentioned in previous lessons, there are higher levels of *ahavas Yisrael* than this. According to the *Mesillas Yescharim*, *ahavas Yisrael* is to love another Jew “*kamocha mamash*” - as much as you love yourself. This will be explained in Chapters 9-10. And there is also a higher level of *ahavas Yisrael*: to love another Jew more than you love yourself, which is the level of *mesirus nefesh*. This will be explained more in Chapter 11.

to do all of the above every day: Do something good, say something nice, and think about what you can do, for another Jew.

In any case, don't go to sleep before you have done something good for another. Every day, make sure that you have either: (1) Done something or that you have given something to another person (action), (2) Said a kind word that made someone feel good, or smiled at someone, or *davened* for someone (speech), (3) Thought about what you can do for another person.

This is the first actual thing you should do, every day, to increase your *ahavas Yisrael* and fulfill the mitzvah of loving another Jew *kamocho*. Just like a day shouldn't go by where you didn't learn any Torah that day and you made sure to *daven* all 3 *tefillos* that day, so shouldn't yet let a day go by where you haven't done some form of *chessed* for another Jew.⁷⁴

(Certainly you can do more even more than *chessed* than this, as long as this doesn't interfere with the balance in your areas of *avodas Hashem*, and as long as increasing your acts of *chessed* is something that is aligned with your soul root⁷⁵ and if it is your personal *avodah*.)

Practicing Ahavas Yisrael Every Day – The Internal Aspect

The above concerns the external aspect. The more inner aspect is that when you do *chessed* for another person, it should be something that the other person really needs. Before doing something nice for another person or giving something, think: "What can the person use? What does he really need?"

Sometimes people give things to others because that is what they have, so they give it, but the other person doesn't need it. Or, a person will give to others what he likes to get. There are also people who do *chessed* also because it is a *segulah* to be kind to others, so they do all kinds of random acts of kindness for people, because they want to get *zechusim*, or they will *daven* for others because Chazal say that if one wants his prayers to be answered, he should *daven* for someone else. (In such a case, the *chessed* is being done for themselves, not for others...) Certainly a person can do *chessed shelo lishmah* (for ulterior motivations), so that a person will eventually do *chessed* that is *lishmah*, and it is certainly better than not doing *chessed* at all. But the ideal situation is to do *chessed* for the sake of benefitting the other person, by giving a person what he truly needs.

If it is too difficult for a person to do this, then one can start doing *chessed* for others even if he is doing it *shelo lishmah* (i.e. because he wants *zechusim*, etc.).

⁷⁴ Editor's Note: The Mishnah teaches that the three pillars of the world are Torah, *avodah* (*korbonos*, which is prayer nowadays), and *chessed*. Just like we understand that Torah and *tefillah* are pillars of our *avodas Hashem* and that a day can't go by in which we didn't learn and *daven*, so should we make sure that a day hasn't gone by in which we didn't do *chessed* for someone.

⁷⁵ Meaning that increasing your *chessed* is only an *avodah* for one whose soul root is *ahavah/love*, meaning that his primary good trait of to reveal love to others]

To summarize thus far, a person should be doing something at least once a day for another person, and a person should also be thinking about what the other person truly needs.

The Subtle Balance

We should point out that if one only gives what he's comfortable giving, he is not connecting to the other person. However, one cannot give too much of himself either, if it beyond his emotional capacity to do so, because this would upset the balance in his soul. Therefore, it is a very subtle balance: Give according to your emotional capacity and what you're capable of giving, but make sure to also give the other person what he truly needs, and not only what you're comfortable giving.

Graduating From External Chessed To Internal Ahavas Yisrael

When one gives in this way to another, he is not merely doing acts of *chessed*, he is coming out of his own life and getting closer to the inner world of another person, when he thinks about the needs of others - whether their physical needs, or their emotional needs. Just by thinking about the needs of others, one is entering into love for another Jew.

As we are explaining, doing good things for others is only the external layer of *chessed*. The internal way to do *chessed* is when is beginning to truly love another Jew - not just by thinking of the best way to do something for others, but by thinking about what another really needs. Certainly, this should be done sensibly and with sensitivity, and it should not be done in a way that is intrusive on others.

We have so far learned that the first level of *kamocha*, doing constructive actions for another Jew, includes two levels: An external level and an internal level. The external part is to do good things, to say kind words, and to think about doing good things, for another Jew. The inner part is to do *chessed* in a way that is attuned to others' needs, whether their physical or emotional needs.

When one gives in this way to another, he will be giving of himself to others. He will be giving from an inner place in himself: he is giving from his soul. When one thinks about what others really need, he is giving to others not just in an active sense, which is external, but also in the inner sense, by giving from an inner place of himself, truly giving of himself to others – giving to others from his heart.

Compassion/Rachamim vs. Love/Abavah and Kindness/Chessed

Most people give to others out of a sense of compassion for others, which is the trait of *rachamim*. People usually give to another person when the other is lacking something, such as if the other needs money or some form of charity. But when we give to others, it needs to come from love, not just from compassion. There is a very big difference.

Compassion (*rachamim*) is a spark of love, but it is not love itself. Love itself is when we give to others even when they are not lacking. Avraham was the embodiment of *chessed* (kindness) to others, and this stemmed from his love for all of Hashem's creations, and not because he just felt sorry for others and he was taking pity of them. He loved giving to others even if they didn't need anything, and he was giving to them for the sake of giving to them and loving them.

Usually, when a person first starts to do *chessed*, it is usually mixed with *rachamim*. He equates kindness with compassion for others, so he will start doing *chessed* by giving *tzedakah* to poor people. This is *rachamim*, not *chessed*, because he is taking pity on others. *Chessed* would be if he is being kind even to wealthy people, or people who don't need his kindnesses, and he still finds ways to give to them in some way. *Tzedakah* is only for the poor, but *chessed* is even for wealthy people. *Rachamim* is when one gives because there is reason to give to other, while *Chessed* is when one gives to another even when there is no reason, other than a yearning to give.

Giving From A Sense of Love

Thus, giving to others needs to come from a love for others. However, in order to genuinely love others, you first need to love yourself properly, and then you will have greater capacity to love others.

We are not referring to egoistic self-love, which is unhealthy. We are referring to a genuine, healthy self-love, which means to love your very *havayah* (existence), which is the intrinsically pure part of oneself. Loving your very *havayah* means that you feel a deep pleasure in your very existence. To the extent that you can feel pleasure in your very existence, you are revealing a healthy self-love, and after that, one's *avodah* is to come out of his inner world, and enter into the lives of others, by giving to them. Then one will be giving to others from a place of healthy of self-love, from his *havayah*, and he will have greater capacity to love others and give to others out of a love for them.

What if a person hasn't yet reached a love for his very *havayah*, and he doesn't have a healthy self-love for himself? If a person hasn't yet reached genuine self-love, his *avodah* is to identify whatever love he does have for another person, and then to give to others from whatever degree of love you do feel for another person. The pure, complete level of *avodah* is only after you can love your own *havayah*, and that is the ideal way situation. But if you are not there yet, you can still love others at your current level (even though your love for others will be very limited), and that can suffice for the time being, until you develop a genuine self-love for yourself.

Since we are all descendants of Avraham *Avinu*, we inherited the trait of love from him, and therefore, every Jew is able to feel loving towards others, at different levels. In addition, every Jewish soul has three natural traits: We are naturally bashful, we are naturally compassionate, and we are naturally kind.⁷⁶ The natural *chessed* (kindness) which we have for others is essentially that we have a natural love for other Jews, because *chessed* is an outcome of *ahavah* (love).

⁷⁶ *Talmud Bavli Yevamos 79a*

When we reveal our inner self, our *havayah*, we are able to love others on a much deeper level. From reaching genuine self-love for others, our love for ourselves can flow onto others and we will be able to genuinely love others. It can be compared to a river flooding its banks, which nourishes the ground for miles, once the water level reaches its maximum height. But if we haven't yet reached genuine self-love for ourselves yet, and we only have an egoistic love for ourselves and not because we crave our very existence, our love for others will be very limited, because we aren't really loving ourselves and therefore our love isn't powerful enough to extend to others.

However, even when that is the case, we can still love others at our current level, because we always have a spark of love for others. We need to identify it in ourselves, and then we need to expand it further, so that we can give to others out of some love for them.

In Summary

In summary, the first level of *ahavas Yisrael*, which is called *kamocha*, is practically achieved when we are giving to others every day, either by means of kind deeds, kind words, or thoughtfulness towards others (or all of the above), and by thinking about what another's needs are (whether physical or emotional needs).

And, finally, when we give to others what they need, either we can give to others from a place of genuine self-love for ourselves, which can be extended to others (this is the ideal way), or, if one is not at that level, one can still give to others from any small degree of love for others that he identifies. When that is the case, one should find the spark of love in himself that he has for others, and then he should bring it to the fore, by giving to others out of any love that he feels towards them and increasing these acts of giving.

Expansion of the Soul Enables A Person To Be More Loving and Giving

Human nature is that when people are in a joyous state, they are naturally more giving to others. This is because joy is an emotion that causes the soul to expand. When the soul expands, one is able to go beyond the self and include others in his life, and he is able to be more loving and give more to others. For example, when a person is in the midst of making a wedding, his joy causes his soul to expand, and he will find it more natural to express love towards others.

Of course, there is also a negative side to expansion, because the increased joy may cause a person to feel conceited or to seek honor, which is a negative kind of expansion. But we are not addressing that issue here. Here we are discussing a pure kind of soul-expansion, the capacity to be more giving and more loving to others, when a person is in a state of great joy and celebration.

During a time of joy, or while being in the midst of making a celebration, a person should make sure to utilize his "expanded" state to reveal more *ahavas Yisrael*. When one is in a very joyous state, it is natural for one to feel genuine self-love, but it is also more natural then for a person to reveal

more *ahavas Yisrael*, since he has greater capacity then to be more loving. Therefore, if you are amidst making a celebration and you find yourself being kinder to others, you should become aware that your increased capacity to give to others is coming from the increased capacity to have more *ahavas Yisrael* then, because joy expands the soul, enabling a person to be more loving towards others. With this awareness, you can utilize celebrations and times of joy as a means of revealing more *ahavas Yisrael*.

In short, giving to others needs to come from revealing a love towards others. Ideally, in order to give to others out of a sense of love of them, you first need to love yourself properly, which is when you love your *havayah* (existence), and then you can extend this healthy self-love towards others. If you haven't yet reached this genuine self-love, your *avodah* is to increase your giving and love towards others during a time when you are naturally more loving, such as during a time of joy or celebration. This is the way to fulfill the first step of *ahavas Yisrael*, the level of *kamocho*, as described by the Ramban.

Building Your Feelings of Love For Others

Even more so, though, practical *ahavas Yisrael* is not just about giving to others. On the world we live on, which is the “world of action”, *ahavas Yisrael* needs to be manifest in doing good deeds for another Jew. But there is also an inner world within the physical world that we live on, which is beyond the level of action. It is the realm of emotion.⁷⁷

The realm of emotion corresponds to the “lower *Gan Eden*”, which is the bridging point between This World and the Next World. In *Gan Eden*, there are “friends who listen to each other”, referring to Torah scholars who are called “friends”, because their company is always pleasant.⁷⁸ The true implication of “friends” refers to people who live in an inner world of feelings and heart. When one lives only at the lowest level of existence, which is the world of action, he can only love others on the level of action, doing kind deeds for others. When one only lives the inner world, the world of deep feelings which corresponds to lower *Gan Eden*, one only has feelings but there are no actions.

The ideal way to live is to balance both realms of existence together as we live on this world: We need both actions, and feelings, of *ahavas Yisrael*. There is a part of our *ahavas Yisrael* which needs to be manifest in actions for others, and there is a part of our *ahavas Yisrael* which does not need to be actualized (at least in the practical, active sense), but which needs to be manifest in the realm of pure emotion: Developing pure feelings of love for another Jew, regardless of how much we are doing for others.

When most people experience pure emotion, it is just inspiration that comes and goes, which doesn't lead to anything. The Ramban says that one should act upon his inspiration right away, or

⁷⁷ The world of action is called *Asiyah*, and the world of emotion is called *Yetzirah*.

⁷⁸ Commentary of Rambam on Mishnah Tractate *Demai*

else the inspiration wanes.⁷⁹ When people don't do anything with their feelings and inspiration, it is "light" without a "container", which disappears because it has nothing to settle upon. Many people will experience deep spiritual feelings, but the feelings soon disappear and nothing comes from them. In our world of action, feelings without action don't amount to anything. So we need to act upon our good feelings of inspiration.

But in addition, after we are able to do that, we also need to experience the world of emotion unattached to action, by building our world of emotion, especially love, the root of all good emotions. It should be emphasize that this is the second step, not the first step. It can only be worked on once a person is making sure to do actions of *ahavas Yisrael* for others.

It seems that simply building the world of our feelings, when there is no action involved, is nothing but the imagination. However, the *sefer Moreh HaPerishus Madrich HaPeshitus*, a grandson of the Rambam, wrote that there is a life of deep emotion which one can live. One can be living in an entire world of emotion within himself. This is how one can connect to others and love others.

Most people cannot identify with this, because most people are living at this world of action, where feelings need to be actualized, or else they are useless. For most people, feelings of love are not love but *taavah* (desire), which needs something physical in order to settle upon. For example, when most people experience love for another, they will want to give a gift to another, in order to express their love. This is feelings that are being manifest through action.

If a person lives at a higher level than action, which is the world of speech, he will be able to express his love for another in the form of speech, which is a more spiritual way of expressing love than giving a gift. Of course, if one only expresses love to another but he will never give a gift, he is missing the first step of love, which is action. Love should not be expressed solely through words with no action. But once actions are in place, we need to express love through speech as well, which is a higher and deeper form of love.

Feeling Another's Existence

Once we can do actions of love for others, we need to live in our feelings of love for another, and this is love on the level of lower Gan Eden, from expanding our own self-love to include others in our love.

Just as a person can feel his own reality, so can he feel the reality of others. When a person lives at the level of action alone he cannot identify with this, because even his relation to others will only be doing things for others but he doesn't identify their reality. When a person becomes inwardly purified and rises to the level of heart, to the inner world of emotion, he can feel feelings unattached with action, and he can actually sense it no less real than the real world around him. It becomes a real world to him, and just as he feels his existence beyond actions so can he connect to others on that level, feeling the other as he actually is.

⁷⁹ Ramban in *Sefer HaEmunah V'HaBitachon* 19

This is the true love for others – first feeling one’s existence and loving oneself as such, and extending this awareness to love others. This is how one can actually feel his friend. Just like one can feel something physical by touching it, so can a person touch his friend by feeling his existence. That is where the main part of *ahavas Yisrael* on the level of “*kamocho*” is. Again, as emphasized, actions of love need to come first, but after you are doing things for others, you can deepen your feelings of love to them and grow and nurture your love for others even when you aren’t actually doing anything for them.

Just as you can love your inner reality and experience it, so can you love another’s inner reality. From loving your friend and recognizing his existence, you can now give to him emotionally and know what his emotional needs are. You need to think about what he needs also, as the first step mentioned earlier, but you can feel his reality, which is a deeper awareness of another’s emotional needs.

The Difficulty With Loving “Emotionally Closed” People

There can be a difficulty with this sometimes, because some people are more “closed” in their souls, they are not as open to emotion, and it is harder for one to love them because these people are not opened in their souls, so it is harder to feel their very existence. Some are more opened in their souls and it is easier to feel them, while others are more closed in their souls and therefore it’s harder for you to feel them.

Compare it to giving sefarim to a bar mitzvah boy without wrapping paper, where you can see what is being given, to sefarim wrapped in many different wrappers. You need to keep pulling off many layers. So too, if another person’s soul is very covered over, it is hard to feel him, even if your soul is opened. If two people have opened souls, they can naturally feel each other’s existence.

One will still love himself more, of course, and he won’t be able to judge his friend until he is in his place, as the Kotker taught, that you will never be in your friend’s place. He is still at the level of loving himself more, the first level of *kamocho* as the Ramban explains. One still has a sharper awareness of himself. But the more one opens his soul and becomes inwardly purified, the more one can feel another’s existence, *ahavas Yisrael* that is *kamocho*.

It is harder to love others when their emotions are closed off. For example, parents don’t feel as much love to their child when he isn’t talking or expressing himself yet, and he is like a golem (a body without expression), because the child is closed and they can’t connect with the child. There is a natural love of parents for children, but they don’t know their child yet, so they don’t feel a connection to their child. So too, people have a hard time loving others when others are closed up. It is harder to naturally connect to them, to feel love towards them.

In spite of the above issue, the main part of *ahavas Yisrael* is that from a healthy self-love for yourself, you should feel your friend’s existence and love his very existence, just as you feel and love your own existence. In this way, you are truly entering the soul of your friend.

Understandably, one should not be intrusive to others and do this with sensitivity, giving others their space, and not invading their privacy.

In Conclusion

Loving others, by feeling their very existence, is the deeper meaning of the state of Gan Eden, when Adam and Chavah were “beloved friends” to each other. When two souls are both opened to their inner world, they can each love their own existence and also feel each other’s existence, and this is like living on the level of “lower *Gan Eden*” on this world. As mentioned, this cannot happen if one friend is opened and the other is closed off, and certainly not if both of them are closed.

The more that a person lives in “lower *Gan Eden*” on this world, living in the inner world of feelings that is the deeper dimension of this world of action that we live on, the love that one has for his friend will feel more real, no less real than the world of action around him, because he is able to experience the world of deep feeling, as a reality.

09 | *Kamocha Mamash (Part 1): Hishtavus- Equality*

The Level of Kamocha Mamash: Loving All Jews Equally

We are continuing further, with *siyata d'shmaya*, to explain about *ahavas Yisrael*. Previously, we mentioned the intermediate level of *ahavas Yisrael*, explained in *sefer Mesillas Yescharim*, which is called *kamocha mamash* – to love another Jew on an equal level as much as you love yourself.

It was explained that this does not mean to love another “individual” Jew as much as you love yourself, but to love all Jews collectively, on the same level. This is because, as the Sages taught, each person is uniquely different, and no two people are the same: “Just as their faces are different from each other, so are all ways of thinking different from each other.”⁸⁰ Therefore, loving all Jews equally does not mean that we love each Jew individually, but to love the collective unit of the Jewish people (which is above Creation). It is only the collective unit of the Jewish people that we are commanded to love *kamocha mamash*, “as much as you love yourself”, because it is only at the collective level of the Jewish people that we are able to love all Jews equally.

Going further into the deeper roots of this, we first need to be able to see past the branches of something, which offers us a limited view of the matter, and to instead get to the root behind all of these branches, which contains a broader, more encompassing view of the matter. With regards to *ahavas Yisrael*, and particularly the level of *kamocha mamash*, in order to love the collective unit of the Jewish people and to love each Jew equally, this is all a “branch” that comes from a certain “root” behind it. Let us try to see what the root behind it is.

Two Different Perspectives – Hadragah (Order) and Hishtavus (Equality)

There are two different and fundamental systems in Creation: *hadragah* (hierarchy) and *hishtavus* (equality).

There is a verse, “*I am Hashem and I do not change*”, and this does not only refer to Hashem Himself, but also the way Hashem reveals Himself in Creation: There is an unchanging aspect in Creation, which is known as *hishtavus* (equality), in which everything in Creation is at an equal level, due to Hashem’s light which is equally manifest in each Creation.

On a surface level, Creation is entirely composed of an orderly system, a hierarchy (*hadragah*), in which there are different levels of creations, in order of prominence. But at the inner dimension of Creation is Hashem’s light which is equally manifest in each aspect of Creation.

⁸⁰ *Talmud Bavli Berachos 58a*

Let us see how these two different concepts exist in two different spheres: time, and soul. Let us first see how *hadragah* and *hishtavus* were manifest in time.

In terms of time, there was the first day of Creation, in which Hashem created everything all at once and every aspect of Creation was therefore of equal prominence. This was *hishtavus* – where there is no order, and everything is equal. After Hashem brought everything into existence, Hashem made the orderly progression of the six days of Creation. This was *hadragah*. That was Creation on a surface level, and this was completed with Shabbos. But the inner dimension of Creation, mentioned in Rashi, is that everything was created on the first day.

Thus, from the view of *hadragah*, there were six days of Creation, and from the view of *hishtavus*, the entire Creation was made on the first day. The first day of Creation was an entirely unified state of Creation, in which everything was together in one unit, and therefore each aspect of Creation had equal importance. This was the root state of Creation: *hishtavus*, the “equalized” state of the creations. Only later, with *hadragah*, did there become an orderly progression within Creation: light and darkness on the first day, the skies and the waters on the second day, etc.

Thus, there are two root viewpoints in Creation, which are fundamentally different from each other. The outer dimension of Creation, the surface level, is *hadragah*, where there is an order of importance given to each thing in Creation, and the inner dimension of Creation, *hishtavus*, is the point where all creations are equal.⁸¹

We find that there are differing levels of status within the Jewish people: The Zekainim (Elders), the Kohanim (High Priests), the Nesiim (the Princes of each of the 12 tribes), etc. This is an outcome of the concept of *hadragah*, where there is a certain order of prominence. And there was also the time when the entire Jewish people stood together to hear Moshe deliver his final words, as the Torah says in the beginning of *Parshas Nitzavim*. This is in line with the concept of *hishtavus*, where everyone stands together equally.

These two different perspectives, *hadragah* and *hishtavus*, are also manifest in the status of the many different souls of the Jewish people. (We have so far seen how the two concepts exist in the sphere of time, and now we will see how they apply to the soul.) From the view of *hadragah*, there are certain souls that have more prominence, such as the souls of the Avos and Moshe, and on the bottom of the spectrum, there are souls who come from the lowest soul root [the “bottom of the heel”, which are the souls prior to the coming of Mashiach]. But from the view of *hishtavus*, every soul is equally important and shares the same prominent status.

Abavas Yisrael From The Perspectives of Hadragah and Hishtavus

Applying this now to our own *avodah* (service to Hashem), it is our task to reveal these perspectives in our *avodah*. There is nothing new in our *avodah* that we need to develop – all we

⁸¹ *The inner point in Creation, hishtavus, is still in existence, but it is very hidden.*

need to do is reveal these perspectives from their dormant state. There is an *avodah* that we have based on *hadragah*, and there is an *avodah* we have based on *hishtavus*.

[In the previous chapters, we have been outlining three different levels of *ahavas Yisrael*. The first level of *ahavas Yisrael* is the Ramban's view, which is that you are only commanded to love another Jew "almost" as much as you love yourself, but not more than you love yourself. The intermediate level of *ahavas Yisrael*, explained by the *Mesillas Yesarim*, is *kamocho mamash*, to love each Jew equally, as much as you love yourself. The highest level of *ahavas Yisrael* is to have *mesirus nefesh* for another Jew: To love another Jew more than you love yourself.]

As it is apparent, the concept of *hishtavus* is the root perspective in both the intermediate and higher level of *ahavas Yisrael*. In order to love another Jew *kamocho mamash*, and in order to have *mesirus nefesh* for another Jew, you need to first reveal the perspective of *hishtavus* with all creations, and then you can come to love others on that level. In contrast, the very first level of *ahavas Yisrael*, which is not yet on the level of *kamocho mamash*, is rooted in the view of *hadragah*, because it places your life before others (*chayecha kodmin*).

Kamocho Mamash Is Only Possible When One Reveals The View of Equality

Therefore, as long as one is living only at the perspective of *hadragah*, one cannot come to the depth of *ahavas Yisrael*. You first need to come to the view of *hishtavus*, and from gaining the view of *hishtavus*, you will gain a deeper view on Creation, and then you will be able to deepen your *ahavas Yisrael* to achieve the level of *kamocho mamash*.

When one simply tries to love another Jew *kamocho mamash*, without first gaining the view of *hishtavus*, his attempt will fail, and he will only be imagining that his *ahavas Yisrael* has grown deeper. At best, trying to love another Jew *kamocho mamash* will help a person begin to enter into the perspective of *hishtavus*. In any case, one needs to gain the perspective of *hishtavus* in order to love another Jew *kamocho mamash*.

Thus, *kamocho mamash* first needs an intellectual perspective, the *daas* that we are all equal because of *hishtavus*.

Revealing Hishtavus In Our Torah Learning

In the Torah, each of the 600,000 letters all have the same equal importance, because they are all equally holy. There are 600,000 souls in the Jewish people, with each soul corresponding to one of the 600,000 letters of the Torah.⁸² The Sages taught that the Torah was created before the world.⁸³ Thus, the root of *hishtavus* began with the Torah, which preceded the Creation. The nation of

⁸² *Shelah Beis Chochmah 13a, Midbar Kedaimos (Chida) 10:6, Pnei Yehoshua on Kiddushin 30b*

⁸³ *Beraishis Rabbah 8:2*

Yisrael, the Jewish people, are the root of all creations, for “Yisrael arose first in the thoughts of Hashem”⁸⁴, but Hashem preceded His creations with the Torah. Therefore, *hishtavus* does not begin with the *hishtavus* of *Klal Yisrael*, but with the *hishtavus* of all 600,000 letters of the Torah.

Thus, in order to reveal the level of *hishtavus* in our *ahavas Yisrael* (the level of *kamocho mamash*), we first need to absorb this perspective well: The Torah precedes our existence, and each word of Torah is equally important. Only when we are aware of the *hishtavus* of the Torah – the root of all *hishtavus* – can we then extend the perspective of *hishtavus* into loving all Jews equally.

(The Torah, which preceded Creation, is the root of *hishtavus*. The six days of Creation was the point where everything became separate. The first day of Creation, which contained every aspect of Creation, was therefore the bridging point between the Torah and the rest of the six days of Creation.)

To practically apply this concept, when we learn Torah, we must feel as if nothing else exists then other than the Torah that we are learning. Since the Torah preceded Creation, the Torah is above the constraints of time, and therefore when one learns Torah, he is above time!

Of course, a person is still obligated in *mitzvos* when he learns Torah, and he must fulfill any *mitzvah* at that time if it cannot be done through anyone else except him. This is because he lives within the zone of time, and he is never fully beyond time. But for the most part, when a person learns Torah, he needs to understand that is involving himself with a dimension that is beyond time, because the Torah precedes time and it is therefore above time. To the extent that a person connects to the level of Torah of before creation as he is learning Torah, he will not feel anything else around him, other than the Torah that he is immersed in.

This is not simply an outcome of being absorbed in his thoughts or ignoring his surroundings. It comes from an inner connection that one can feel to the Torah, a connection which comes from the depths of the *neshamah*. It is like the words of the Chazon Ish, that when a person is immersed in Torah for several hours without interruption, he resembles an angel, during that time. This is because when one is completely immersed in Torah learning and there is nothing else than that matters to him, he is completely separated from physicality [at least for a temporary amount of time, because soon his bodily functions will take over] and therefore, he resembles an angel during those moments.

What is the depth behind being truly immersed in Torah, out of a love for the Torah? It is when one is connected to the level of the Torah which preceded Creation, where all letters of the Torah were equal and they were not put into place yet. When one has the understanding that every word of Torah is equally holy, this is true love for the Torah, and there will be no difference to him between one *sugya* and another *sugya* of Torah, because it is all the same holy Torah.

⁸⁴ *Beraishis Rabbah* 1:4

No one reaches this level completely, but everyone can reach it for a few moments, to the degree of how much he has purified his soul, by absorbing this perspective in his mind, or by striving to reach it with whatever level of purity of soul he has so far attained.

Only after one has reached this *hishtavus* in his Torah learning can one reach the level of *hishtavus* in *ahavas Yisrael*, the level of *kamocho mamash*, which is an extension of the *hishtavus* of the Torah. This is because *hishtavus* towards *Klal Yisrael* is rooted in the very first source of *hishtavus*, the Torah.

Hishtavus When Foregoing Our Honor: The Prerequisite To Kamocho Mamash

By extension, after one has uncovered the perspective of *hishtavus* in the Torah throughout his Torah learning (as explained above), one can also reveal *hishtavus* in the realm of his *middos* and feelings.

The *Chovos HaLevovos* describes the level of the *chassid* (pious one), that whether one is honored or humiliated, it is all the same to him, because he does not feel the difference between honor and humiliation, once he recognizes the fallacy of all honor accorded on this world between people. The *Chovos HaLevovos* describes this as the level of *hishtavus* (equality).⁸⁵ It is *hishtavus* being used with regards to emotions.

One can accept the suffering of humiliation and also run away from honor, because he understands that this will atone for his sins and earn him reward in the World To Come. That is the first level of recognizing the fallacy of honor. At this level, he suffers when he is humiliated, but he is able to avoid retaliating against the abuser because he wants to purify his soul and earn reward. A higher level is when one is able to actually feel pleasure in being humiliated, and he enjoys running away from honor, and he does not suffer from his lack of honor, because he realizes that by diminishing his personal honor on this world, he will receive true honor in the Next World. At this level, one is trying to achieve *bittul* (self-nullification) of the ego.

Finally, there is an even higher level: When one doesn't feel the difference between honor and humiliation, because it is all the same to him – when he receives honor, he recognizes that true honor is only in the World To Come, and when he is humiliated, it is just as enjoyable to him. This is the level of the *chassid*, and it is called the level of *hishtavus*. He has the same level of pleasure in either feelings: Whether he is honored or humiliated. That is the level of the *chassid*: Every emotion is experienced equally by him.

The depth of this is that he is connected to his soul root, which is called *kavod*, for the soul is called *kavod*, as we see from the verse, “So that glory (the soul) will sing to You.”⁸⁶ This is because the soul is rooted in the Throne of Glory, which is the source of the higher and true *kavod*. When one gains the perspective of *hishtavus*, he doesn't feel the enjoyment of *kavod* and therefore he doesn't need to run from it, and for the same reason he doesn't run away from humiliation, because he

⁸⁵ *Chovos HaLevovos Shaar Yichud HaMaaseh: 5*

⁸⁶ *Tehillim 30:13*

doesn't even feel it. Both of these feelings are equal to him, because he is aware that his personal honor is not the real *kavod*, for he is connected to the true *kavod*: The higher *kavod* that is at the root of his soul.

If one tries to jump from the first level (running away from *kavod* and accepting the pain of humiliation) to the highest level (not feeling the difference between honor and humiliation), he will only be imagining his growth. In order to get to the highest level, *hishtavus*, one needs to get through the intermediate stage, the ability to enjoy being humiliated. After he has learned how to enjoy the feeling of embarrassment, he can then find the same exact pleasure in both honor and embarrassment, realizing that both of these feelings are ways that cause him to uncover the true honor, the honor of the soul, because he knows that all honor on this world is futile.

Even when one “reaches” the third level, *hishtavus*, the level of the *chassid*, no one ever reaches it completely. It is a very high level, and we cannot completely overcome our human needs for honor and we cannot always ignore our feelings of humiliation when our pride is being attacked. But although we cannot always be on the level of *hishtavus*, one can reach it for a few moments – to the extent that he is connected with the root of his soul: The higher *kavod*, which is rooted in the Throne of Glory.

The soul, at its root, is referred to as *kavod* (honor), because the very root of the soul is where one finds the true, higher honor that is found in Heaven. When one is humiliated, he has the opportunity to remove the outer layers of the soul (which are all connected with the ego), and when all of the layers are removed he can now get through to the very inner root of his soul: his true *kavod*. He becomes connects to the Throne of Glory, the root of all souls, the inner root behind all feelings of honor. When one reaches it, he does not feel the difference between honor and humiliation, because he is attached to the root of all *kavod*, the root of his soul – the *Kisei HaKavod*, which is the true *kavod*, which exposes the fallacy of all human honor.

That is the level of *hishtavus* which the *Chovos HaLevovos* describes, with regards to overcoming feelings of humiliation. As mentioned, there is no person who can live completely at this level, but anyone can feel how close or how far he is, from this level.

As mentioned, *kavod* (honor) is the root of the soul. All other traits of the soul are the branches of the soul, but honor is the root of all these traits in the soul, because honor is the soul's root. All traits in the soul are an offshoot of the traits of Hashem, which are His “garments”, and the main “garment” Hashem wears is His glory, His *kavod*. The *kavod* of Hashem is the essence behind all of His wisdom and all of His traits.

Although the concept of *hishtavus* has many applications, the root of the concept of *hishtavus* is the higher *kavod* - the root of the soul - which is rooted in the Throne of Glory. Thus, when the author of *Chovos HaLevovos* describes *hishtavus*, he specifically used the example of not feeling the difference between honor and humiliation, because the main application of *hishtavus* is with regards to one's *kavod*. Thus, diminishing one's personal honor is not simply an example of *hishtavus*, but the root of *hishtavus*.

As long as a person can't forego his own personal honor and learn how to find pleasure in humiliation, he cannot reach the level of *kamocho mamash* in *ahavas Yisrael*. This is because *kamocho mamash* requires the perspective of *hishtavus*, and *hishtavus* essentially means that one is connected to the root of his soul, the higher *kavod*, which is attached to the *Kisei HaKavod*.

Without *hishtavus*, one remains attached to his own *kavod*, and this is where all creations become separate from each other: When each person is protecting his own *kavod*. That will certainly prevent one from loving another Jew on the level of *kamocho mamash*.

In Summary

The entire *avodah* of *ahavas Yisrael* on the level of *kamocho mamash* requires the perspective of *hishtavus*, which can only be reached when one is connected to the root of his soul, the higher *kavod* that connects one to the *Kisei haKavod* - which provides a person with the inner strength to let go of his personal *kavod*. That is what connects a person to the unit of *Klal Yisrael* which connects together every individual soul of *Klal Yisrael*, and that is where one can love another Jew on the level of *kamocho mamash*. Thus, *kamocho mamash* does not begin with loving each individual Jew, but with loving the collective unit of the Jewish people. It can certainly cause one to love each individual Jew, but it does not begin with loving each individual Jew, but with loving the unit of the Jewish people.

The more that a person is connected to *hishtavus*, namely, by connecting his Torah learning to *hishtavus* (as explained earlier), one goes above even his own individual share in Torah learning, and to the degree that one is connected to the Torah on this level, one becomes connected to the level where the only *kavod* that exist is the true *kavod*, the *kavod* of the Torah.

This understanding will also refine one's *middos*, to the extent that even when he is humiliated, he lets his own *kavod* fall away and he is able to penetrate to the depth of his soul, which grasps onto the Throne of Glory, the root of all *kavod*, the true *kavod*, which is really the *kavod* of the Torah, the level of Torah before the world was created. He becomes divested of this world, and he doesn't even need to run away from *kavod*, nor does he feel pained when his *kavod* is attacked, because he is found entirely in the true *kavod*. Although one cannot always be at this level, one can be found at this level for at least a few moments.

This awareness can extend to the rest of all of one's *middos* as well. The root of all *middos*, on the external level, is the trait of *chessed* (kindness), and the root behind *chessed* is *ahavah* (love). The innermost root of all *middos* is the higher *kavod* (honor) which is at the root of the soul. Each of the *middos* in the soul are each separate from each other, but the inner *kavod* at the depth of the soul is one unit. The "bridging point" between *kavod* (the root behind all of the soul's *middos*) and all other *middos* of the soul, is *ahavah* (love), which connects the *middos* of the soul with the *kavod* of the soul.

Higher *kavod* is one unit, because it is part of the Heavenly dimension, where everything is unified, whereas the *middos* of the soul are each separate from each other. *Ahavah* bridges these two parts of the soul together. (The highest use of *ahavah* is to love the Creator, and then to love the nation of *Yisrael*, and to love the Torah which connects the nation of *Yisrael* with the Creator (for the Torah is the *bris* between Hashem and the Jewish people), and to love *Eretz Yisrael*, which is the container for these loves.)

The first level of *ahavas Yisrael*, which is not yet *kamocho mamash*, is when the trait of *ahavah* connects one to the *middos* of the soul, which is a place of separation. At that level, one is separate from others and he cannot become one with another Jew, and that is why he cannot love another Jew *kamocho mamash* yet. In contrast, the second level of *ahavas Yisrael*, which is *kamocho mamash*, is when one is unified with others, and this is when the trait of *ahavah* connects one to the higher *kavod* of the soul that is connected with Heaven, where everything is unified.

In summary, the bridging point between the root of the soul (*kavod*/honor) and the rest of the *middos* of the soul is *ahavah*/love, and *ahavah* towards others is rooted in the concept of *hishtavus*. Since the trait of *ahavah*/love is the bridging point between the soul's *middos* and the soul's root (the higher *kavod* which is connected with Heaven), the soul's faculty of *ahavah* can either be used to connect one to the first level of *ahavas Yisrael*, which is on the level of *middos*, or it can be used to bring a person to *hishtavus* - the level of *kamocho mamash*.

In Conclusion

Understandably, the concepts described in this lesson are difficult to attain, let alone grasp. What is in our ability, however, is to learn about these concepts and review them, so that we can absorb them well, and thereby complete our picture of *ahavas Yisrael*, viewing the lowest levels to the highest level. We each need to know what our current level of *ahavas Yisrael* is, but we also need to gain the complete picture of *ahavas Yisrael*, so that we can know whatever levels of *ahavas Yisrael* we have attained so far and whatever levels we haven't yet attained. Each person can merit, at his own level, to attain some degree of each of these levels, and from there, to keep ascending higher.

10 | *Kamocho Mamash (Part 2): Negating The Ego*

Summary of Previous Chapter

In the previous chapter we explained more about the intermediate level of *ahavas Yisrael*, which is called *kamocho mamash*, which is simply translated to mean: to love another exactly as much as you love yourself. It was explained, however, that this doesn't simply mean loving another like yourself, but to love another because you realize that we are all part of one collective soul, where there is no place for separate individuals. It is to love another from the point of *hishtavus* (equality). *Kamocho mamash* is therefore a love for another person that emanates not from the "I", but from a place in the soul that is above the "I" – to love another from a point in the soul that is above all separateness, by acknowledging that all Jews are part of one collective soul.

“What Is Hated To You, Do Not Do To Your Friend”

Kamocho mamash is the intermediate level of *ahavas Yisrael*, and we have so far explained one side of this level: how to proactively love another Jew on the level of *kamocho mamash*, which is through *hishtavus* (equality). But there is also another side to *kamocho mamash*, which is the passive aspect of *kamocho mamash*. We shall explain.

The Sage Hilel taught the convert that the *mitzvah* to love other Jews includes not doing to others what you don't want done to yourself: “What is hated to you, do not do to your friend.”⁸⁷ There is an active role in *ahavas Yisrael* – by loving others – and there is also a passive role in *ahavas Yisrael*: by not doing to others what you don't want done to you. The active aspect of *ahavas Yisrael* is “*Love your friend as you love yourself*”, as the Torah commands, and the passive aspect of *ahavas Yisrael* is Hilel's teaching: “What is hated to you, do not do to your friend.”

The teaching of “What is hated to you, do not do to your friend” was taught specifically to the convert, before he even converted to Judaism. Hilel knew that even a gentile would understand this. Hilel knew that the gentile wasn't capable of understanding the active aspect of *ahavas Yisrael* – loving another Jew like yourself – and therefore Hilel only taught the gentile the passive aspect of *ahavas Yisrael*: To avoid doing negative behavior to others which you don't want done to you. That was something that even a gentile could understand. That is the simple explanation of this *Gemara*.

There is also a deeper understanding of this *Gemara*, which is along the lines of our discussion. Let us explain.

⁸⁷ *Talmud Bavli Shabbos 31a*

Genuine Love For Others Is Only Through First Negating The “I”

Ahavas Yisrael (at its most basic level) begins from one’s personal “I”, whereas the higher level of *ahavas Yisrael*, which is *kamocho mamash* (to love another as much as you love yourself) is an exit from the “I” and to enter into the collective unit of the Jewish people. This is also known as *hishtavus*, the state of “equality” (as explained in the previous chapter).

Hilel’s teaching of “What is hated to you, do not do to your friend” really means that you should hate whenever there is a “you” involved. The “I” itself allows for any possibility of hatred, because it is our sense of “I” which separates us from others, and it is our “I” which we must feel a sense of revulsion towards - if we are to ever love others.

The Hebrew word for hatred, *sinah*, is from the word *shnayim*, two, because when there are two people, there can be hatred. Simply speaking, hatred happens when the hearts of people become apart and full of strife for each other. But it is more than that. Whenever there are two people, two different entities here with two different egos, there is already a potential hatred between them, because *sinah* (hatred) is rooted in the word *shnayim* (two), so as long as there “two” people involved, hatred can take hold.

There is a rule that “From the wound comes the recovery”⁸⁸, and that is why hatred can be fixed by using hatred itself: to hate the very idea of “two”, to hate the very idea that there can be separation between people.

The Self-Absorbed World That We Live In

Now let us see the practical ramifications of this idea of “hatred” for the “I” that we are explaining about.

There are billions of people in the world and almost everyone in the world is concerned entirely for themselves. People are spending the whole day immersed in their own life, worrying about their needs, so much that it’s scary to even think about. I’m not talking about animals, which only care for their own self-preservation. Almost every person will think that everything is revolved around him, and that he is at the center of everything.

A person thinks that he is the center of the universe which everything must serve. When a person stays at that level, it will certainly be the total antithesis to *kamocho mamash*, because when a person thinks that everything begins and ends with his “I” and when he thinks that everything revolves around him, this perspective will bleed into the rest of his life, and will he really think that he is the center of everything. Even if one doesn’t consciously think that way, subconsciously, that is how he thinks and conducts his life.

⁸⁸ cited in *sefarim hakedoshim* (*Alshich, Degel Machneh Efraim, Shem M’Shmuel*) in the name of the Midrash

When a person gets married and he has children and he is supporting his family, he is spending the entire day concerned for his own needs, since caring for his family is the most important aspect of his life. Certainly it is natural for a person to love his children more than he loves himself, and that is what he a person is busy with all day, but that is where being focused on others will begin and end with. A person's entire schedule, from morning until night, is spent on taking care of his own family – so he is really taking care of *himself* the whole day.⁸⁹

If you give this a little bit of thought, you can actually feel disgust, that the entire world is self-absorbed in their own needs, at best caring for their own families and children, but not more than that.

The Alter of Novhardok said that if people would go around collecting money and try to support yeshivos with the money as much as they try to earn money to support their family, each person would be able to build at least 20 yeshivos with the money (and that is what he did). Every person is working very hard to support their families. Some people are more spiritual and they are self-absorbed only in their own selves⁹⁰, but most are worried for their families and spend their day concerned for their family. That is where their life begins and ends.

Although it is all *chessed*, it is only a “spark” of *chessed*, not the actual level of *chessed* itself, because all of the kindnesses that one does for his family is an outcome of being worried and concerned for his own situation. The *Chasam Sofer* said that a person should give *maaser* (a tenth) of his time to others. Only a few do this, but even if one is at this level, a person still thinks that everything revolves around himself. Although people will give *tzedakah* and *maaser* to others and they give of their time to others, it is only because they know that they have to “give” *maaser* and *tzedakah*, so they give it, out of a sense of obligation. Even with all of this giving, the person is still living for himself.⁹¹

Yearning For Redemption – Yearning For A World That Is Not Self-Absorbed

Anyone with a bit of feeling, who searches for truth, can sense how this is all a warped way of living. (On a deeper note, all of this self-absorbed living is all a result of the sin of Adam and its effects on mankind.) When one becomes disgusted at this normal way of living on our world, he can feel disgust, and a sense of revulsion, for the way that human beings live their lives in self-absorption. When one feels this sense of revulsion towards the very way that people are spending their lives concerned only for their own selves, this awakens a deep yearning in the soul for the Redemption.

89 Editor's Note: To clarify, although we cannot say that taking care of a family is being selfish – after all, a parent is clearly not living a selfish kind of existence by caring for his family's needs - it is ultimately in the category of self-concern, because it is caring for one's own family. It is definitely more selfless than not caring for others at all, but the point here is that people will generally not give of themselves past their own inner circle of family and children. Consider the following: How many people will work hard to support another person's family...? That is the point which the Rav is bringing out here.

90 refer to Fixing Your Wind_015_Self-Absorption

91 Editor's Note: To learn how we can turn our acts of giving and caring for our family into a form of avodas Hashem, refer to Bilvavi Part 3 - Chessed

There are different reasons why people yearn for the Redemption. People yearn to go free from their physical problems, to live in a world that is worry-free. People want to go free from their spiritual problems, and live in a world where spirituality will be revealed and openly sensed, where G-dliness will be revealed upon the world, and these are all true and worthy aspirations for Redemption. But there is another deep reason to yearn for the Redemption: Because we should yearn for a world where “Not everything is about you”, a world where everything does not begin and end with our own “I”.

Hatred for the Very Reality of the Self-Serving “I”

This is something that should really pain us, and therefore the first pain we need to feel about this is the sad reality of our world, where everything begins from the “I” of a person, and that a person naturally considers his own “I” to be the beginning point of everything (as opposed to the true “I”, Who is Hashem, for Hashem says, “*I am the beginning and I am the last.*”⁹²)

We can feel pained at this reality that people do not recognize. We can be pained at the way that people live their lives, and even more so, at the very level that Creation is on right now, in which everything is centered around a person’s “I”, where the attitude is always “Me first.”

The Self-Absorbed Reality – A Result of the First Sin

This current reality is all a result of Adam’s sin, which caused man to put himself first before others, and it is not the pure state of mankind. Therefore, on a deeper level, one can feel pained at the sin of Adam which caused all of this.

The *sefer Leshem* explains that originally, all souls were contained in Adam’s soul. The *Talmud Yerushalmi* explains that the *mitzvah* to love another Jew like yourself is that just as you don’t hit your hand if your hand hurts you, so should you not hurt another Jew even if he hurts you, because you and another Jew come from one body. That was the perspective before the sin of Adam. All souls were contained in Adam’s soul, and after Adam sinned, the souls became scattered. Some of the souls remained inside Adam, and some were scattered outside of him.⁹³

This change enabled the possibility of hatred between creations. As a result of the sin, the Serpent was cursed with *avah* (hatred), which alludes to the descent from *ahavah* (love) between creations to *avah* (hatred) between creations. *Aivah* was essentially a fall from the state of oneness, where all souls were unified, and to fall into a state of separation, where is “two” instead of “one”, allowing for

⁹² *Yeshayahu 44:6*

⁹³ *After the class, the Rav added “This is a very deep matter. Some of these souls returned to their root above, some of these souls remained in Adam, some of the souls entered Kayin and some of the souls entered Hevel. From there onward, the souls were reincarnated in other lifetimes.”*

separation and disparity. Ever since the first sin, everything that a person does begins from his personal, self-serving “I”.

As mentioned in previous lessons, there are two different levels in *ahavas Yisrael*, corresponding to *shelo lishmah* (self-serving motivations) and *lishmah* (altruistic motivations). As it was explained, *shelo lishmah* is the motivation behind the first, basic level of *ahavas Yisrael*, explained by the Ramban, where loving another Jew *kamocho* does not mean *kamocho mamash*, because there is a rule of *chayecha kodmin*, “Your life takes precedence.” The higher level of *ahavas Yisrael*, which is *kamocho mamash*, is motivated by the perspective of *lishmah*.

Before the sin of Adam, mankind was on the level of *lishmah*. As a result of the sin, by eating from the *Eitz HaDaas*, everything begins from *shelo lishmah*, from one’s private “I”, and people will do things for others because they are motivated by some personal self-interest. People will either care for their physical needs or their spiritual needs, but in either case they are self-absorbed, and this is all a result of the sin. Before the sin, the state of mankind was that man would begin from a place of collectiveness, from the unit of *Klal Yisrael*, from a collective “I” and not a personal “I” – from the place of *lishmah* in the soul. After the sin, man begins everything from his personal “I”, from the level of *shelo lishmah* in the soul.

When one feels pained at this reality that has been the case ever since the first sin, he can feel true regret for the first sin that was committed, because he can see the repercussions of it. The sin caused our original state of oneness (*echad*) to become split into two (*shnayim*). The depth of doing *teshuvah* for sins is, essentially, to return our state of “two” into the original state of “one”, the state of *echad*.

To the degree that one is pained at the reality of the world today, one minimizes his “I” more and more, so that his ego has less presence, and he is accessing the deep hidden spiritual light in the soul, which is the state before the sin of Adam.

If a person is not in touch with this spiritual light in the soul that resembles the state before the sin of Adam, one will not feel any pain at the reality of our self-absorbed world today. One needs to get to the root, to realize that the state pre-sin exists deep in the soul as a spiritual light that is shining in our times, and this will awaken the soul to feel pained at the reality of the world today, which has become ruined from the sin.

Some people are born with sensitivity to this and they can naturally feel disgust for the self-absorbed world today, while others are born with no sensitivity at all to this concept. In any case, a person can feel disgusted at the reality of self-absorption on this world and how extreme it has become, and this can cause a person to feel pain at the ruined state of Creation today, which will enable one to penetrate deeper and deeper into the soul.

Penetrating To The Level of “Kamocho Mamash” – Through Negating The Ego

Hilel said, “What is hated to you, do not do to your friend”. The depth of Hilel’s teaching was that the very idea of “you” (the private “I”) should be hated by you, and that is how one can reveal

love towards another Jew. Our very private “I”, itself, is enough of a reason to hate the currently on this world, because it is a reality where everyone is concerned mainly for their own “I”. To the degree that one uncovers a disgust and a hatred for this current state of affairs, one is getting closer to the unified state of the Jewish people, the collective “I”, and then one is getting closer to attaining the level of *kamocho mamash*.

One can penetrate to this level of love for others (*kamocho mamash*) either by having *mesirus nefesh* (sacrificing his own interests) for another Jew.⁹⁴ [which is a very high level of *ahavas Yisrael*], or by negating the ego more and more [the way which we are explaining here], so that he leaves behind his self-serving “I” and enters into the collective “I”, the unit of the Jewish people, *Klal Yisrael*, who are unified at their root.

How Collectiveness With The Jewish People Leads To Deeper Understanding of Torah

At the first, basic level of *ahavas Yisrael*, one is mainly concerned for himself before being concerned for others. At the second level of *ahavas Yisrael* (*kamocho mamash*), one first feels the needs of others before he feels his own needs.

When one lives more on the second level, he is living a life that is aligned more with the Torah, and since the source of Torah wisdom is *ayin*, (As the verse says, “*And wisdom, from where is it found?*”⁹⁵ The verse is saying that true Torah wisdom comes “from where”, *m’ayin*, from “*ayin*” – from the realm beyond intellect, where everything is unified). Therefore, when one is living at the level of *kamocho mamash*, his understanding in Torah will be genuine, coming from a true and pure source of understanding that is being poured down from Heaven, from the point of *ayin* that is above thought.

The first level of *ahavas Yisrael*, where one puts himself before others and he thinks about himself before he thinks about others, is essentially when one begins all of his thinking from his own “I”. At that level, all of one’s understanding in Torah will be at the level of the “I”, and as such, all of his understanding in Torah will be limited. He will receive a limited amount of understanding in Torah, because it will all be limited to his personal “I” which he experiences his life from. Since he experiences life from his own individual existence (*prat*), he cannot attain a comprehensive understanding, which comes from being attached with the collective unit of the Jewish people, the *klal*.

In contrast to the above, when one’s *ahavas Yisrael* is at the level of *kamocho mamash* (or to the degree that one is exercising this level), one’s Torah learning is beginning not from his personal “I”, but from a collective “I”, from the unit of *Klal Yisrael*.

⁹⁴ This will be explained more in Chapter 11

⁹⁵ *Iyov* 28:12

Graduating From Private Existence (Prat) To The Collective Unit of the Jewish People (Klal)

The Torah was passed down from Moshe to Yehoshua and then to the Men of Great Assembly.⁹⁶ Moshe had a collective soul, and that is why he was called the “faithful shepherd of the Jewish people.”⁹⁷ Moshe lived for the unit of the Jewish people, and he had no private existence of his own. The Torah began with a unit (Moshe), then given to an individual (Yehoshua) and then to a unit (the Men of Great Assembly), to show that all individuals are meant to become included in a unit, and this is the source of true understanding in Torah.

Furthermore, when everyone stood at Sinai with one heart to receive the Torah, they received it as one unit, not as individuals. This showed that the Torah is revealed when one is attached to the collective state of the Jewish people, as opposed to being a private individual.

After the sin with the golden calf, the people fell from their collective state and they fell into being individuals again, and they were not deserving of the Torah, so the *Luchos* had to be broken. Moshe beseeched Hashem to forgive the people, and he was willing to get erase from the Torah if Hashem wouldn't forgive them. He revealed the level of collectiveness, forgoing his own private existence, and this was the root of the atonement for the Jewish people: When there is a *klal*, a collective unit, which transcends all *prat*, when all private existence of individuals.

This is the depth of the “great rule” that Rabbi Akiva taught, the *klal gadol*, that loving another Jew like yourself is the greatest rule of the Torah. It is because when a person graduates from his own private existence and he becomes connected to the great *klal*, to the collective unit of the Jewish people, it leads to true understanding in Torah.

This is also the level of learning Torah *lishmah*. It is when one's thinking begins from the *klal*, from the collective unit of the Jewish people, as opposed to beginning from *prat* (private existence). When one begins his thinking from his own individual existence (*prat*), his Torah learning is the perspective of *shelo lishmah*. But when one begins his learning from being attached with the *klal*, he has the perspective of *lishmah* in his Torah learning.

At Har Sinai, the spirit of impurity (*zuhama*) was removed from the Jewish people⁹⁸ and they returned to the level of before the sin of Adam, when all souls were unified together, as a *klal*. Although they were 600,000 souls, they were all attached together as one unit: They were each connected to the *klal*, to the collective aspect of their existence which is beyond one's private level of existence.

The Sage Hilel was called “the humble one”, and his humility was a resemblance of Moshe's humility. He taught his students to first quote the words of Shamai, who opposed his view, before stating his own opinion. He was the one to teach “What is hated to you, do not do to your friend”, because Hilel in his humility was attached to the collective aspect of the Jewish people, for he lived beyond his own private existence.

⁹⁶ *Avos 1:1*

⁹⁷ *Zohar II Shemos 8b*

⁹⁸ *Talmud Bavli Shabbos 146a*

By negating one's "I", by hating the very idea of having a private existence of our own, one learns how to hate the very concept of "two" and he becomes more attached to the original state, "one", the state of unity between souls, the level of *kamocho mamash*, also known as the level of *hishtavus* (equality). That is how one receives the level of *klal*, collectiveness, and his existence becomes attached with the *klal* of the Jewish people, and he no longer a private existence of his own. He then receives Torah understanding on that level, the level of *klal*, which will be more encompassing. One's very reality then becomes transformed from *prat* (individual existence) into *klal* (collectiveness and unity with the Jewish people).

Klal – The Level of a Ben Olam HaBa and the Future Level of Torah

This is the meaning of being a *ben Olam HaBa*, one who is living an existence that resembles the World To Come. The Next World is a world of light, and when one uses the light of the Next World, by graduating beyond his private existence and living at the level of *klal*, joined with the collective unit of the Jewish people, he is bringing light into this dark world of separation that we live in.

This is also the meaning of the "new Torah" which will be revealed in the future: "*A new Torah will come forth from Me.*"⁹⁹ Unlike the current level of Torah, which is after the breaking of the Luchos, a Torah of individual parts and pieces, the Torah of the future will be a Torah of *klal*, a Torah where all letters and words are connected into one word¹⁰⁰.

In Summary and In Conclusion

Thus, when the sage Rabbi Akiva taught that loving another Jew *kamocho* is the "great rule of the Torah", he was not referring to the first level of *ahavas Yisrael* which is *kamocho* but not *kamocho mamash*. He was referring precisely to the second level of *ahavas Yisrael*, where *kamocho* means *kamocho mamash*, the level of *hishtavus* where one is aware of the equality and unity of the Jewish people: To live at the level of the *klal*, the collective unit of the Jewish people – and to transcend one's own private existence of *prat*.

This will be the revealed level of *ahavas Yisrael* in the future, but one can reach a degree of this level even now, for anyone can taste a "semblance of the World To Come" even as we live now, at our current level, and each person can merit this to the extent that he has purified his level of existence, to go beyond his private existence and become connected with the collective unit of the Jewish people. This is how one can currently reach the level of actually "loving another Jew like yourself" – *kamocho mamash*.

⁹⁹ *Yeshayahu 51:4*

¹⁰⁰ *Baal Shem Tov*

11 | *Loving Another More Than You*

Loving Another More Than You: The Level of Mesirus Nefesh For Another Jew

The highest level of *ahavas Yisrael* (as it was mentioned in the previous lessons) is when your friend is more important than you. At the lowest level of *ahavas Yisrael*, you are more important than your friend. Although you love your friend, you love yourself more. At the intermediate level of *ahavas Yisrael*, you see your friend as equal to you and you love him as much as you love yourself. At the highest level of *ahavas Yisrael*, you love your friend even more than you love yourself, and you consider your friend more important than you.

This highest level of *ahavas Yisrael* is when you have *mesirus nefesh* [lit. “giving the soul”, intense dedication to a cause], when you are willing to sacrifice your own interests for another Jew.

The concept of *mesirus nefesh* is mainly used by a person towards Hashem: When a person is willing to give up his life for Hashem. The *Gemara* says that one should love Hashem so much that even when He is taking away one’s life [at the time of death], he willingly gives up his life for Hashem.¹⁰¹ [which happens by force], or when he one is willing to die rather than commit any of the three cardinal sins.¹⁰² The soul’s love for the Creator – to the point that one is ready to give up his life for Hashem - can be extended with regards to loving His creations on this same level. That is when is willing to give up his life for another.

The most severe sin is *chilul Hashem* (desecrating Hashem’s Name), which requires repentance, Yom Kippur, suffering, and death, in order to atone for the severity of the sin. Why is *chilul Hashem* the worst sin? The deeper root of this matter is because the word *chilul* is rooted in the word *chalal*, the “empty space” which Hashem cleared from His infinite light, in order to make way to create the universe. When Hashem made this *chalal*, He had *mesirus nefesh*, so to speak, by detracting from His complete, infinite Presence. He did this out of His desire to bestow good upon His creations.¹⁰³ from His love for them.

Thus, loving others to the point of having *mesirus nefesh* for them is an ability that has its roots in the earliest roots of Creation: The *mesirus nefesh* which Hashem had (so to speak), when He created the universe, out of His love for His creations.

When one has *mesirus nefesh* in his love for the Creator, he also awakens the ability to have *mesirus nefesh* for another. This is the inner root behind the greatest level of *ahavas Yisrael* for another: It comes from the soul’s love for Hashem.

101 *Talmud Bavli Berachos 60b*

102 *ibid*

103 *Zohar (hakdamah) 5a: “It is the nature of the Creator to bestow good upon His creations.”*

There are three loves: Love for Yisrael, love for the Torah, and love for the Creator, and love for the Creator is the root (and there is also a concept of love for Eretz Yisrael, which can contain all of these three loves). Love for Yisrael (the Jewish people) really comes from love for the Creator, and therefore, being *moser nefesh* in one's love for another Jew really comes from having *mesirus nefesh* in one's love for Hashem.

Examples of a Spark of Mesirus Nefesh

On the lowest level, *mesirus nefesh* is when one cares for another more than he cares for himself, and this is a “spark” of *mesirus nefesh*.

Here are some examples of a “spark” of *mesirus nefesh*. There is a *halachah* that one must feed his slave even better than he feeds himself.¹⁰⁴ Another example is that one should commit a small sin so that his friend shouldn't commit a bigger sin.¹⁰⁵ Another example is the *halachah* that a *tzaddik* buries his fingernails [so that an expectant woman will not walk over them and miscarry], but a higher level than this is when one burns them. When one burns his own fingernails, which were a part of his own body, it is considered like hurting himself so that another shouldn't be harmed.¹⁰⁶ These are examples of a “spark” of *mesirus nefesh*.

These *halachos* are in stark contrast with the *halachah* of *chayecha kodmin*, where one is not obligated to give up his water to quench his friend's thirst. *Chayecha kodmin* applies at the very first level of *ahavas Yisrael*, but when one is willing to do more for another than he would do for himself, it is a spark of *mesirus nefesh*, and hence it is also a spark of the highest level of *ahavas Yisrael*.

The ability of *mesirus nefesh* also appears on a less spiritual level as an ability of the *nefesh habehaimis* (the animal level of the soul), where a parent will love his child more than he loves himself, because he sees his child as an extension of himself. This is deeply rooted in the Creator's love for His creations. Another example is that one should honor his wife more than he honors himself (however, this is honor, not love).¹⁰⁷ This is also a spark of *mesirus nefesh* for another.

Thus, *mesirus nefesh* has higher uses and lower uses. It is rooted in the Creator's *mesirus nefesh* for His creations, and the highest use of our *mesirus nefesh* is to love the Creator more than we love ourselves, then to love His creations more than we love ourselves, and at the lowest level, when we have a natural love for our children more than we love ourselves.

Ahavas Yisrael on the level of *mesirus nefesh* therefore does not simply to make sacrifices for other people. Rather, it is an outcome of accessing the soul's general ability of *mesirus nefesh*. Even more so, the ability to have *mesirus nefesh* for another person is accessed only when one has the root of this

104 Talmud Bavli Kiddushin 20a

105 Talmud Bavli Shabbos 4a

106 Talmud Bavli Moed Katan 18a

107 Talmud Bavli Yevamos 62a

power: loving Hashem and having *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem. Therefore, one can only have *mesirus nefesh* for another Jew when he is living at the level of *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem.

Two Kinds of Mesirus Nefesh – Dying For Hashem vs. Living For Hashem

From a subtler analysis, there are really two levels of *mesirus nefesh*. There is dying *al kiddush Hashem* (to be killed in sanctification of Hashem's name) and there is living *al kiddush Hashem* (to live a life of sanctifying Hashem's Name).

It is explained that living *al kiddush Hashem* is more difficult than dying *al kiddush Hashem*, and therefore, living *al kiddush Hashem* is actually a higher level than dying *al kiddush Hashem*. Although it seems simply that dying *al kiddush Hashem* is loftier, dying *al kiddush Hashem* takes one moment and therefore it is easier, but living *al kiddush Hashem* requires an entire lifetime, so it is much more difficult.

Dying Al Kiddush Hashem

The *mesirus nefesh* of dying *al kiddush Hashem* can be accessed on a potential level, when one is willing to die *al kiddush Hashem*, such as agreeing that one will die rather than commit any of the three cardinal sins one is never allowed to commit. One does this either by (1) Resolving in one's heart to do so, which is "potential" *mesirus nefesh*, or (2) "Active" *mesirus nefesh*, which is when one actually gets killed *al kiddush Hashem*, which is what Jews throughout the generations have always done.

However, the "active" level of *mesirus nefesh* (getting killed *al kiddush Hashem*) was only the *avodah* for individual Jews throughout the generations, during times when the generation faced unusual decrees of *shmad* (spiritual genocide) on the Jewish religion, and they let themselves be killed rather than forsake the Torah. But this is not the *avodah* most of the time for Jews. Most Jews can only access this *mesirus nefesh* only on the "potential" level, by agreeing to die if such a situation would ever present itself to them, and this "potential" *mesirus nefesh* can lead to "active" *mesirus nefesh* in other areas.

Living Al Kiddush Hashem

The above is all with regards to dying *al kiddush Hashem*, but there is also a different kind of *mesirus nefesh*: Living *al kiddush Hashem*. This is accessed either (1) When a person goes above his natural capabilities,¹⁰⁸ or (2) By acting on a level that is above his soul root (*shoresh neshamah*), or (3) By acting above his current spiritual level (*madreigah*).

¹⁰⁸ This ability is explained more about in the series of Getting To Know Your Devotion To Torah (דרכי מסירות נפש)

Rabbi Akiva said, “For all of my days, I awaited when I would be able to fulfill the verse, “*Love Hashem... with all your soul*”,¹⁰⁹ and he said this as he was ready to die *al kiddush Hashem*. Rabbi Akiva “awaited” this for all of his life, meaning that he lived his entire life with *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem, even before he fulfilled it in the active sense.

Living *al kiddush Hashem* is when one lives a life of *mesirus nefesh*. It is not just when one receives some inspiration to have *mesirus nefesh*, which can come from a temporary spiritual illumination that is being shined upon the soul. Any person experience times of increased spiritual illumination, where he is very inspired to act above his level, such as during the days of *Yomim Noraim*, and just as this can happen during certain times, so can the soul get a flash of inspiration to act above one’s current level. This burst of extra inner strength is not the person’s actual level that he stays on, and it is only temporary. In order for a person to be on the actual level of *mesirus nefesh*, one needs to live a life of exercising *mesirus nefesh*.

There are different levels of living with *mesirus nefesh*. First we will explain the lower levels of living with *mesirus nefesh*, and then we will progress to discussing the higher levels.

Step One: Contemplating Dying Al Kiddush Hashem

The first step is to imagine that one is actually giving up his life for Hashem. One can do this during *Kerias Shema*, which is the most appropriate time to contemplate *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem¹¹⁰. One should also try to take this further and contemplate such thoughts throughout the day, training the mind to get used to thinking about giving up one’s life for Hashem.

There are different ways to contemplate it. The sefer *Tzetil Katan* says that one should vividly imagine that he is getting thrown into a furnace to die *al kiddush Hashem* rather than commit a sin. But there are also additional ways of contemplating it, such as agreeing with one’s heart that one is ready to do it, or just thinking that one is ready to do it even without vividly imagining it, or just picturing it faintly without imagining it so strongly.

This all the first step of living on the level of *mesirus nefesh*: By regularly contemplating that one is ready to give up his life for Hashem.

There is a verse, “*For upon You we are being killed all day.*”¹¹¹ This does not only refer to giving up one’s life during a time of *shmad*, but to live a life of *kiddush Hashem*, which is by consistently thinking about having *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem.

109 Talmud Bavli Berachos 61a

110 Shelah HaKadosh

111 Tehillim 44:23

Caution When Using The Imagination

Understandably, when most people think of giving up their life for Hashem, they are only fooling themselves, and they are imagining levels that are way beyond them. When one increasingly uses his imagination, this is harmful to the soul, because heavy use of the imagination causes a person to become delusional, which uproots all stability in the soul. This is because the imagination itself is a jumpy force of the mind, and it is the antithesis of structure and stability. When one makes too much use of imagination, he loses all stability and structure in his soul. This is how imagination breeds destruction.

A person at the least can imagine it during *Kerias Shema*, but when one is taking this *avodah* further and he is thinking about it more consistently throughout the day, there is a danger that the person will become too imaginative and start deluding himself, which is destructive. On the other hand, a person has a lot to gain from this kind of thinking, because it can greatly inspire him to get closer to this level. So it needs to be done very sensibly and with careful thinking: How much should one think about dying *al kiddush Hashem*, and how much should a person not to think about it? It needs to be done carefully, and sensibly.

Step Two: Practicing Basic Mesirus Nefesh Every Day

The above is the step of contemplating dying *al kiddush Hashem*, but the second step is to live *al kiddush Hashem*, which is closer within reach for most people. But it also needs to be done cautiously, as we shall explain. For at least 3-4 times a day or more, do a little more than you are capable of physically or emotionally. Push yourself a little further than you think you are capable of.

Simply speaking, this is because a person is able to temporarily show more strength than he is normally capable of, for a bit of time. When that happens, a person will be exhausted afterwards because he is using way more strength than he can actually handle. But the deeper reason why a person can act above his capabilities for some time is because just as “the *Aron* carried its carriers”¹¹², so is light of the *neshamah* able to carry the body. (And when that is the case, a person will use more strength for some time but it will not leave him exhausted afterwards.)

Living *al kiddush Hashem* is that whenever one does, says, or thinks about something, he tries a little more than he is normally capable of. One should push himself to do a little more, to speak a bit more about Torah, or to exert his mind a bit more in Torah – just a little beyond your current capabilities. One should never act way beyond his level, because that is dangerous. Instead, one should always act a bit above his current level. This is what it means to live on the level of *mesirus nefesh*.

We have so far explained briefly how to progress to the level of *mesirus nefesh*, first by contemplating dying *al kiddush Hashem* and then by living *al kiddush Hashem* (regularly doing a

112 Talmud Bavli Sotah 35b

little more than you are capable of). This enables one to come closer to the level of loving another more than he loves himself, because it is the way to receive the spiritual light of *mesirus nefesh*.

Step Three: Thinking Of What You Can Do For Others

Until now, we have been explaining what the active *avodah* is to get closer to the living of *mesirus nefesh*, which is really a spiritual light above the soul. When a person has reached it and it is shining within his soul, the next step is not active *avodah*, and it is instead a spiritual illumination. This stage requires reflection and thinking, as follows.

One should take some free time (such as when he finds his thoughts wandering) and wonder: “How much do I think about myself, and how much do I think about another person?”

Sometimes we think about others, and sometimes we think about others, and sometimes we even think of how to benefit others. Of course, people spend a lot of time thinking about other people, such as thinking about the faults of others, but how much time does a person spend on thinking of what he can do for others?

One should become aware of how much time he spends a day thinking about himself, versus how much time he spends thinking about what he can do for others. A person may also be thinking a lot of the Torah he is learning, which is not about himself or about another person, but a person also lives among others. How much does a person spend thinking about himself, and how much does a person think about what he can do for others? That is the question to ask oneself.

Most people are so immersed in their own lives that even when they think about others, it is only because of some self-interest that they have. There is usually no genuine love for another person, and even when people do “love” another, it is only a “spark” of love, but not love itself, and even this “spark” of love is subconsciously about the person himself and not about the others. People will think of benefitting others, such as by being interested in helping many people, because they want to earn merits. They are really using other people for their own self-interest. Thinking about benefitting another person, simply for the sake of the other person’s benefit, is scarce. People certainly think a lot about others and benefitting others, but it is usually self-serving in some way, and rarely is it a pure motivation of love and concern for another’s good.

How Practicing Mesirus Nefesh Leads To Loving Others “Lishmah”

The more that a person is accessing the power of *mesirus nefesh* - as explained earlier, by regularly contemplating dying *al kiddush Hashem* and also by living a life of *mesirus nefesh*, through consistently acting a bit above his current capabilities - one slowly peels away his self-serving motivations (which are *shelo lishmah*).

As mentioned earlier, the first level of *ahavas Yisrael* is *shelo lishmah*, and the highest level of *ahavas Yisrael* is *lishmah*. As it was explained, when one's *ahavas Yisrael* is *shelo lishmah*, one experiences love for others only through his "I", because at the level of *shelo lishmah*, everything is experienced through the person's "I". But when lives at the level of *lishmah*, one has no sense of self, and although the person still has an "I", he doesn't feel it.

Loving others at the highest level – loving another more than you love yourself – is an ability that comes from *mesirus nefesh* for the Creator. Therefore, when one is regularly contemplating having *mesirus nefesh* for the Creator and practicing it (as explained earlier in this lesson), this weakens the *shelo lishmah* in one's soul. The result is that one will not think about himself that much, and he will be thinking more about the needs of others.

A person will always be alternating back and forth between acting *lishmah* and *shelo lishmah*, because there is a rule of *ratzu v'shov* (running and retreating), which means that a person cycles back and forth between higher and lower levels of *avodas Hashem*, so even after a person is acting more *lishmah*, there will still be times when he inevitably acts *shelo lishmah*, because no one can live all the time at the level of *lishmah*. However, once a person exposes the power of *lishmah* by consistently acting with *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem, he will be acting *shelo lishmah* a lot less. And as a result, whenever one wants to do something that will either benefit him or others, one will first think of how he can benefit others, before he thinks of how he can benefit himself.

Leaving The Ego

As long as one is first thinking of how he can benefit himself before he thinks about how he can benefit others, one is still living at the level of *shelo lishmah*. His "I" will have a much greater presence and it will serve as a barrier between him and Hashem.

There is a verse, "*I stand between Hashem and you*",¹¹³ and there is a teaching that this verse is hinting on a deeper level that it is the "I" which serves a barrier between a person and the Creator.¹¹⁴ On one hand, the "I" of a person is the greatest tool that one has in order to reveal all spiritual attainments, namely, the revelation of Hashem upon the world. But on the other hand, it is the "I" of a person which, more than anything, can separate a person from the Creator (when one is living at the level of the ego).

However, when a person penetrates to the G-dliness in his soul, which is beyond the ego and which houses the *Shechinah* (the presence of Hashem) deep in the *neshamah*, one will naturally be thinking of benefitting others (as a result of revealing his love for the Creator, the root of this ability) and what he can do for others, before he thinks about how he can benefit himself. This is because when a person is in touch with the G-dliness deep in the soul, he will be actively revealing Hashem's

¹¹³ Devarim 5:5

¹¹⁴ Degel Machneh Ephraim

presence upon the world, through the venue of desiring to bestow good upon others - just as the Creator desires to bestow good upon all of His creations.

Thus, the highest level of *ahavas Yisrael*, the level of having *mesirus nefesh* for another Jew, is really an ability that comes from loving Hashem (as explained earlier). But it is even more than that, based upon what we are now explaining. *Mesirus nefesh* for another Jew is a revelation of love for the Creator for His creations which is being passed onto others, through a purified “I” which is non-ego oriented. It is coming from the *mesirus nefesh* that Hashem has for His creations, which is coming to others via the person who reveals this level of love to others.

At such a level, one is not identifying with his “I”, because he is living above the level of the ego, and instead, he understands that his entire “I” is just borrowed, and that he does not own his “I”, as it were, because he has learned how to nullify the “I”. *Mesirus nefesh* for another Jew therefore does not mean that “I” am loving others so much that I am *moser nefesh* for them just as the Creator loves His creations and is *moser nefesh* for them. It is even more than that! The love is not even coming from my own “I”, because at this level, my “I” is nullified, and it serves merely as a pipeline to transmit the Creator’s love for others. The love is not coming from me, but from the Creator, and it is merely passing through my “I” so that it can be transmitted to others.

This is really a love for others that comes from above Creation. As long as a person is stuck living in his “I”, he can only love others through the experience of his ego, so he will first be thinking of himself before he can think about others. He lives life from the perspective of his “I” and that is why his “I” will always come first. But when a person is living on the level of *mesirus nefesh* (as we are explaining in this lesson), he is getting past his “I” and he will be experiencing life, as well as love for others, from a place that is beyond his “I” [beyond the ego].

Living Life From The Point Above Creation

When one is living above his “I”, one is really living from a point that is above Creation, and he will be experiencing life from there. It is like viewing all of Creation, and everyone in it, from a place above Creation - and outside of it.

This deeper way of viewing life, where we can transcend our own “I” and experience life from above our “I”, is depicted in the words of the *Mesilas Yesarim*, who says that in order for any person to reach his purpose on this world, he needs to be able to see from above the “garden maze”, taking advice from one who can see from above the “garden-maze” of our life. It is essentially a way for one to live at the level of before Creation, viewing the Creation from the point of origin which preceded it.

As opposed to viewing life from experience and from the wisdom of having gone through life – such as the view of an elderly person who has gained wisdom from having gone through life, of whom it can be said “There is no one as wise as one who has experience” - one can have a wise view towards life even without having gone through life, and that is by living from a view that is above the

Creation. Hashem looked into the Torah to create the world”, the Torah is the blueprint of the universe which existed before Creation, and therefore a person can access a view towards Creation by seeing it all from the point of origin that preceded it: From the view of the Torah’s wisdom before the world was created.

This is the deep reason why, on a cosmic level, the concept of *ahavah* (love) really stems from the concept of *chochmah* (wisdom).¹¹⁵ Love, at its deepest root, is coming from a higher dimension before the world was ever created, when there were no people yet to love. This is because Hashem already had a love for His creations even before He created them, and therefore He had a will to create them so that He could bestow His love upon them. The love was already there, and He created them so that would have whom to bestow His love upon.

Love is therefore able to exist on a level that goes beyond our own existence, because our ability to love is an offshoot of the Creator’s love for His creations even before they were created. That is why love really comes from above the Creation. In a human being, the Creator’s love manifests as a desire to love others even if they wouldn’t be in existence, and that is the deep root of why a person can love another more than he loves himself.

This is also the deeper reason why a person would want children. On a simple and superficial level, a person wants children because he is depending on them to take care of him in his old age. But there is also a deeper reason why a person would desire children: To have someone whom one can reveal love towards and express his love to, so that he can bestow love upon others. This is really coming, on a deeper level, from the Creator’s desire to bestow love on His creations.

A parent’s love for his or her children, which eclipses the love that the parent has for himself, is a very profound example of the Creator’s love for His creations that is manifest in the human soul. A parent’s love for his or child is not simply a basic human emotion in our *nefesh habehaimis*, as it seems to be, and it is more than just a spark of the Creator’s love for His creations that is coming through our basic human emotions. It is even deeper than this. A parent’s love for his child is an actual reflection of the Creator’s love, the ability to love others even before they are born, so that we can have someone to bestow our love upon (hence it is actually a reflection of the Creator’s love).¹¹⁶

This is the implication of the verse, “*Even from before, I fashioned you, and already when you were in the stomach I knew you.*”¹¹⁷ Just as the Creator desired to create the world because of His desire to

115 In terms of the Ten Sefiros, the *middos* (character traits) are part of the system known as “Chagat” (an acronym for Chessed, Gevurah, Tiferes), which extend from the system of the *mochin* (thinking abilities) known as “Chabad” (an acronym for Chochmah, Binah, Daas). The root of chessed (*ahavah*) is in Chochmah, the root of Gevurah is in Binah, and the root of Tiferes is in Daas. Hence, *ahavah*/love (another name for chessed) is rooted in the line that extends from Chochmah (wisdom).

116 Editor’s Note: We have no comprehension of the *middos* of Hashem, and Hashem does not have any human emotions, *chas v’shalom*. Rather, the “traits” that Hashem shows are a faint glimpse into His conduct, which He allows us to have some minute understanding of, but of course, we cannot understand G-d, so we cannot think that G-d has human emotions that we are familiar with. For that reason, the “*middos*” of Hashem, which we have no comprehension of, are not “emotions”, and they are way beyond the *middos* that we recognize in ourselves. Our own *middos* are an offshoot of the *middos* of Hashem, but we have no actual comprehension of Hashem’s *middos*.

117 Yirmiyahu 1:5

bestow love upon His creations, so is this concept manifest in the human soul, a desire to create others by bearing children, out of a desire to express one's love for others and to create others so that you can have whom to reveal your love to.

Loving Others More Than You

Thus, in order to reveal the ability to love others more than yourself (the highest level of *ahavas Yisrael*), it will not suffice to simply put others before you, as it sounds. That is only an external definition. It is to live from above your own existence, and it needs to come from a desire to bestow love upon others even if they wouldn't exist. That is how you can love everyone: When you are living life from the point above Creation.

In Summary and In Conclusion

Let us now summarize and conclude this lesson.

On a simple level, *mesirus nefesh* for others stems from the Creator's *mesirus nefesh* for His creation. That is how we introduced this lesson. Although that was true, we have also learned a deeper understanding of the where this ability is rooted in. Loving others more than you is not simply a spark of the Creator's love for His creations in our *nefesh habehaimis* (animal level of the soul). There is more to it. From the deeper understanding, loving others more than you love yourself is really an ability that comes from the highest point of our soul¹¹⁸, which is attached to the state of before Creation, when the Creator loved His creations even before He created them – and so are we able to love others at a level that goes beyond our own existence.

In order to live at this level of *ahavas Yisrael*, a person needs to live on a level of existence that transcends Creation, to experience life from above it and from outside of it, as if you are viewing life from outside of the world - from above the world.

That is the most complete level of *ahavas Yisrael*. It can only be reached after a person has gone through all of previous steps of *ahavas Yisrael* which were explained in the previous chapters, because one needs to work his way upwards. Although a person can also “skip” to this level of *ahavas Yisrael* simply by having *mesirus nefesh* for another Jew, this can only be done by rare individuals. Here we have explained the general approach which is for most people, of how to reach this level step-by-step, from lowest level to highest level.

We began these lessons by explaining the more practical aspects of *ahavas Yisrael* which are closer within everyone's reach, and in later lessons we progressed to explaining the higher levels of *ahavas Yisrael*, which we certainly feel very far away from. But for a few moments, we can temporarily reach the lofty ability of thinking more about others more and thinking less about ourselves, and then we

118 *The Yechidah level of the soul*

will be learning how to leave behind our ego more and more, and to that extent, our love for others will not be experienced through our ego, but through a place that is beyond our ego.

This is what it means to have a kind of thinking that is aligned with the Torah's thinking, with the Creator's thinking [so to speak], and that is how the world will be filled with the awareness of the Creator, as it is written, "*And the land will become filled with knowledge of Hashem.*"¹¹⁹ That is when Hashem's love for His creations will fill the world in the future, when "*the wolf will dwell with the lamb.*"¹²⁰ It is the inner love of the Creator which fills everything, His love for Creation which existed even before He created everyone - and that is the deeper root behind the level of *mesirus nefesh* in one's *ahavas Yisrael* for another Jew.¹²¹

The remaining three shiurim are currently being translated
From the original Hebrew
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דע את רעך - אהבת ישראל

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¹¹⁹ *Yeshayahu 11:9*

¹²⁰ *ibid 11:6*

¹²¹ *Chapters 1-11 (until now) have been explaining ahavas Yisrael. The next remaining 3 chapters (Chapters 12-14) will be explaining the other side to ahavas Yisrael: Removing sinas chinam (hatred) from amongst ourselves.*