

Elul 2022

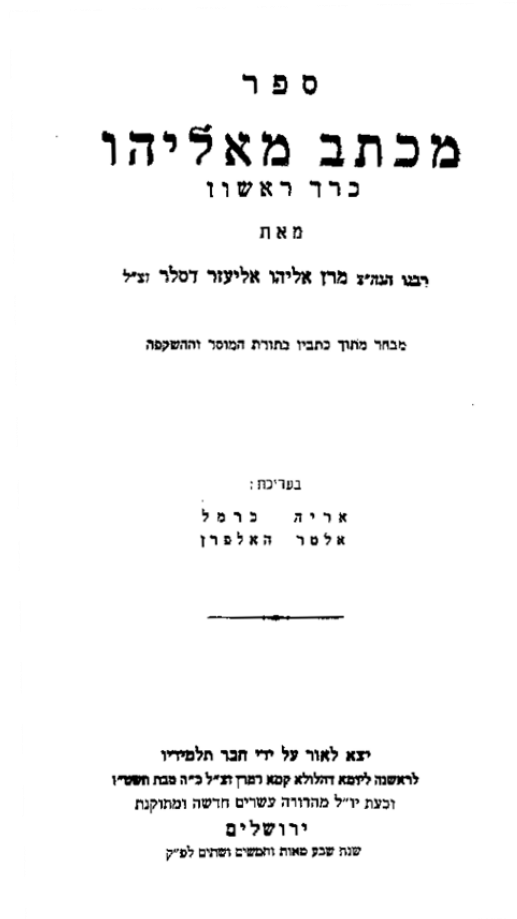
Week 4, Ahavah / Love

Supplemental Study Texts

I. Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, *Michtav M'Eliyahu*

When we love someone, we need no reason to give, no outside motivation is necessary. The question that Rav Dessler deals with here is whether the flow of influence could go in the other direction. He questioned what impact the very act of giving has on our hearts. The essential question he prompts us to consider is this: do you give to the ones you love, or do you love the ones to whom you give? English translation follows the Hebrew text.

Rav Dessler's *Kuntrus HaChessed*
Michtav M'Eliyahu, volume 1
"The Source of Love"



פרק ד' בשורש האהבה

אין אדם בעולם שאין בו ניצוץ כח הנתינה. זה ייראה בשמחתו, שאיננה שלמה בהיותו יחידי, וכן בגעגועין אל החברה אשר מעמקי הנפש יבואו (וזה לך האות, כי הנה עונש בית־האסורים — ההפרדה מהחברה — לעונש חמור יחשב). ומה המה הגעגועין הללו? — נ י צ ו ן כ ח ה נ ת י נ ה.

כל אדם יתאוה לבנים. ויש בזה שתי בחינות :

(א) כי ירגיש את בניו שיהיו כהמשך לעצמותו, לאחר שיפרד מעולמו.

(ב) כי ירגיש צורך והכרח שיהיה לו את אשר יאהבנו ויטיב לו.

וכן הננו רואים בהולכים ערירים, אשר יכניסו יתומים לביתם והיו להם לבנים ; וגם יש כאלה, אשר כלב או שאר בעלי חיים יקרבו אליהם, ויטיבו להם כאשר יעשו לבנים. הלא גם זה לאות, אשר שורש כח הנתינה טמון הוא בעומק נפש האדם.

כאן שאלה יפה עומדת לפנינו : הן האהבה והנתינה באות כאחת, האם הנתינה היא תולדת האהבה, או להיפך, האהבה באה מן הנתינה ?

הורגלנו לחשוב את הנתינה לתולדת האהבה, כי לאשר יאהב האדם, ייטיב לו. אבל הסברה השניה היא, כי יאהב האדם את פרי מעשיו, בהרגישו אשר חלק מן עצמיותו בהם הוא — אם בן יהיה, אשר ילד או אימן, או חיה אשר גידל, ואם צמח אשר נטע, או אם גם מן הדומם, כמו בית אשר בנה, — תנהו דבוק למעשי ידיו באהבה, כי את עצמו ימצא בהם. וכן הראוני מקור בדברי רבותינו זכרונם לברכה כסברה זאת השניה, כי כך שנינו במס' דרך ארץ זוטא (פ"ב) „אם חפץ אתה להידבק באהבת חברך, הוי נושא ונותן בטובתו“.

ועמוקה היא האהבה הזאת מאד. הלא נראה מה שכתוב בספר תורת ה' (שהוא המקור היחידי לדעת את עמקי כחות הנפש עד תומם, כי רק הבורא לבדו הוא אשר ידע את מסתרי נפש האדם אשר יצר) :

„מי האיש אשר בנה בית ולא חנכו כו“

מי האיש אשר נטע כרם ולא חללו כו“

מי האיש אשר ארש אשה ולא לקחה כו“

כולם יחזרו מעורכי המלחמה, בלי הפרש, והוקשו זל"ו, יען אשר תדמה אהבתנו את פרי עבודתנו כאהבת ארוסקי.

האהבה הזאת, היא אשר תבא מן הנתינה בלי ספק.

ראיתי מעשה, והנה הורים צעירים ראו את כל חמדת חייהם בבנם הקטן. בשעת חרום, ומלחמה פרצה במקום ההוא, ויברחו כולם משדה המלחמה. ויקר המקרה, אשר האויבים הפרידו בין הדבקים, והאב עם בנו נשארו לצד האחד, והאם לצד השני. וכה נפרדו, ביגונם וגעגועיהם, כמה שנים, עד אשר שקטה המלחמה, והשלום שב אל מקומו. ויתוועדו יחדיו בני המשפחה כולה וישמחו איש ברעהו מאד.

והנה פלא. לא יכלו לתקן את אשר חסר להם בזמנו; אהבת האב ובנו היתה יותר עמוקה ודבוקה, מאהבת האם והבן. היא הניחה אותו קטן, ותמצאהו גדול, ויהי בעיניה כאלו הוא אחר, — עדיין היתה מתגעגעת אחר בנה הקטן שהניחה. אבל, הן זה רק דמיון; ואיה הוא שורש הדבר? הוא, אשר האב אימן וגידל את הילד תחתיה. זהו אשר חסר לה, ושב אל האב במקומה. האהבה הבאה מן הנתינה והיא, עברה כולה אל האב.

ואמרו רבותינו ז"ל (בבא מציעא ל"ב ע"ב): „אוהב לפרוק ושונא לטעון מצוה בשונא כדי לכוף את יצרו” — ואע"פ שבפריקה מונע גם צער בעלי חיים, שהוא מדאורייתא, מ"מ „כדי לכוף את יצרו עדיף”. ויש ענין בזה גם כי בהטיבו לשונאו, גם הוא עצמו תסתלק השנאה מלבו ותכנס תחתיה אהבת הנותן אל המקבל ממנו. ומי שענינו פקוחות יראה מעשים כאלה הרבה.

כללו של דבר, זה אשר יתן האדם לזולתו, לא יאבד ממנו, אלא זו היא התפשטות עצמותו, כי ירגיש אשר גם חלק לו בחבירו זה אשר נתן לו. זו היא הדבקות שבין אדם לזולתו, אשר נקרא לה בשם „אהבה”.

פרק ה' ואהבת לרעך כמוך

התבאר בפרק הקודם, כי לכל אדם יש ניצוץ כח הנתינה. וזה, כי לא ניתנה רשות לכח הנטילה לבטל גם את הניצוץ הזה; שאלמלא כן היה העולם חרב: לא היו נושאים נשים ולא היו מגדלים בנים. על כן גזר השם יתברך, כי ניצוץ זה לא יפרד מבני האדם לעולמים. אולם יען כי מעט מאד הוא ענין הנתינה אשר בהם, על כן יבחרו באשר ימצאו חן בעיניהם; להם יתנו ויטיבו, ואותם יאהבו, את אלה יחשבו כאלו שלהם המה; משפחתם, קרוביהם, רעיהם וחבריהם; אך את שאר בני האדם, לנכרים וזרים יחשבו; יתנחגו עמהם במדת הנטילה, יתחרו בהם ויחטפו מהם ככל אשר יוכל.

אך יתבונן נא האדם, כי לא שר יתן, יאהב, וגם יהיה לו חלק בו, וידבק אליו, כאמור, ואז יבחין ויבין, כי זה אשר זר נחשב לו, הוא רק מאשר טרם נתן לו, ועוד לא הטיב עמו. אם יתחיל נא להטיב את כל אשר ימצא, כי אז ירגיש אשר כולם המה קרוביו, כולם אהוביו, כי בכלם יש לו חלק, ובכולם התפשטה עצמותו.

לאדם אשר יזכה להגיע אל המדריגה המעולה הזאת, מובנת היא כפשוטה מצות התורה: „ואהבת לרעך כמוך” — „כמוך בלי שום הפרש... כמוך

מכתב מאליהו

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ממש" (מסילת ישרים פ' י"א); כי בנפשך תמצא, אשר אתה והוא — אחד
הנכם, ותרגיש הרגשה ברורה, כי הוא לך כ מ ו ד.



There is nobody in the whole world who does not possess at least a spark of the faculty of giving. This may be seen for instance at times of family rejoicing, when people of the most grasping natures still feel the urge to involve their friends in their celebration. No one's joy is complete unless he can share it with others. Similarly, everyone has a deep-seated need for social life of some sort. (This is why solitary confinement—separation from the company of one's fellow-men—is considered such a severe punishment.) What is the nature of these yearnings?—sparks of the faculty of giving.

We all want to have children. Two motives may be distinguished here. We want children to give us a sense of continuity; we feel that death is not quite so final if we have left children behind us. But perhaps an even stronger motive is the need to have someone on whom to lavish our love and affection. This is why childless couples will often adopt orphan children and bring them up as their own. Some will even lavish their affection on a dog or other pet animal, and treat it almost like a child. This too is an indication of the hidden depths of the power of giving in the human soul.

Here we come to an interesting question. We see that love and giving always come together. Is the giving a consequence of the love, or is perhaps the reverse true: is the love a result of the giving?

We usually think it is love which causes giving because we observe that a person showers gifts and favors on the one he loves. But there is another side to the argu-

ment. Giving may bring about love for the same reason that a person loves what he himself has created or nurtured: he recognizes in it part of himself. Whether it is a child he has brought into the world, an animal he has reared, a plant he has tended, or even a thing he has made or a house he has built—a person is bound in love to the work of his hands, for in it he finds himself. I have been shown a source in the sayings of our Rabbis which may indicate that they held the opinion we have just put forward: that love flows in the direction of giving. They say in the tractate *Derech Eretz Zuta*:¹¹ “If you want to keep close to the love of your friend make it your concern to seek his welfare.”

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Love of this kind can go very deep indeed. Let us observe what is written in God’s Torah. (This is the only source from which we can learn the true depths of the human heart, for only the Creator knows the secrets of the human soul that He has created.) We find there that among the categories of men permitted to return home before a battle are the following:

Whoever has built a new house and not consecrated it...and whoever has planted a vineyard and not redeemed it...and whoever has wedded a woman and not taken her to his home....¹²

All are treated in exactly the same way: the builder of the house and the planter of the vineyard equally with the new husband who is involved in the most intimate of human relationships. The Torah thus reveals to us that the love we bear to the fruit of our labors is directly com-

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parable with the love of a man for his betrothed. There can be no doubt that this is an example of the love produced by the power of giving.

Here is a case which I personally observed. I knew a young married couple whose little son was the delight of their lives. War overtook the town where they lived and they were forced to flee. It so happened that the young mother was away from home on that day; the father fled with his little boy in one direction while the mother was forced to take the opposite route, and so the family was separated by the warring armies. And so they remained, separated in sorrow and yearning, all the years of the war. At last the battlefronts grew quiet, peace returned, and they were re-united—and what a happy family reunion that was!

But a remarkable thing came to light. They could no longer make good that which the years had taken away. The love between the father and his son was deeper and closer than that of the mother for the son. Was it because she had parted from him as a small boy and found him grown up? Was she still yearning for the little son she had left behind? But this is only imagination. The cruel fact was that the potential “giving” of all those years was lost beyond recall. It was the father who had trained and reared the child and had lavished on him the thousand-and-one acts of tender care which normally fall to the lot of the mother. The love which springs from all that giving had passed completely to the father.

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We can find another example of “the love which comes from giving” in the *halacha* dealing with help to a fellow-

Jew in distress. Two cases are discussed in the Gemara.¹³ One is the case of a pack-animal whose load has fallen, and the mitzva is to help the owner re-load it. The other is the case of the overloaded animal, where the mitzva is twofold: to prevent further suffering to the animal, and to help the owner to load it more effectively. If one is confronted by both cases at the same time, the second one takes precedence, since an additional mitzva is involved—helping the animal. If one is confronted by two precisely similar cases, but in the one instance the owner is a friend and in the other the owner is an enemy, helping the enemy takes precedence, since there is a specific mitzva to help one's enemy,¹⁴ “so as to conquer one's *yetzer*.”

But what if the choice is between *unloading* the pack-animal of a friend and *re-loading* the pack-animal of an enemy? Here too, says the Gemara, the mitzva of helping the enemy comes first. Even though the mitzva of preventing suffering to an animal is a Torah command, “conquering one's *yetzer* takes precedence.” There is an additional point here. By resisting one's inclination and helping one's enemy one automatically removes some of the hatred from one's own heart and replaces it by the love which comes from giving. A perceptive person will observe many cases of this sort.

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To sum up: that which a person gives to another is never lost. It is an extension of his own being. He can see a part of himself in the fellow-man to whom he has given. This is the attachment between one man and his fellow to which we give the name “love.”

“you shall love your neighbor as yourself”

It was explained in the previous chapter that every human being possesses some spark of the faculty of giving. In other words, the faculty of taking has not been given the power to extinguish this last spark. It is essential that this should be so, for the world depends on it for its very existence; without that vestigial spark of giving, no one would marry or have children.

But since most people’s power of giving remains at this vestigial level, they tend to restrict their giving and their love to a narrow circle of relatives and friends. They look on everyone else as strangers and deal with them in ways dominated by the power of taking; envy, exploitation, grasping and greed rule the day.

If one were only to reflect that *a person comes to love the one to whom he gives*, he would realize that the only reason the other person seems a stranger to him is because he has not yet *given* to him; he has not taken the trouble to show him friendly concern. If I give to someone, I feel close to him; I have a share in his being. It follows that if I were to start bestowing good upon *everyone* I come into contact with, I would soon feel that they are *all* my relatives, *all* my loved ones. I now have a share in them all; my being has extended into all of them.

Someone who has been granted the merit to reach this sublime level can understand the command, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”¹⁵ in its literal sense: “As yourself: without distinction; as yourself: in actual fact.”¹⁶ By giving to him of yourself you will find in your soul that you and he are indeed one; you will feel in

the clearest possible manner that he really is to you “as yourself.”

II. **Ramban commentary to Leviticus 19:18¹**

The Torah verse, “Love thy neighbor as thyself” is a well-known directive, which is most challenging to uphold. How can we be expected to love others as we love ourselves? What is really being asked of us?

וטעם ואהבת לרעך כמוך הפלגה כי לא יקבל לב האדם שיאהוב את חבירו כאהבתו את נפשו ועוד שכבר בא רבי עקיבא ולמד חייר קודמין לחיי חבירך (ב"מ סב) אלא מצות התורה שיאהב חבירו בכל ענין כאשר יאהב את נפשו בכל הטוב ויתכן בעבור שלא אמר "ואהבת את רעך כמוך" והשוה אותם במלת "לרעך" וכן ואהבת לו כמוך (ויקרא י"ט:ל"ד) דגר שיהיה פירושו להשוות אהבת שניהם בדעתו כי פעמים שיאהב אדם את רעהו בדברים ידועים להטיבו בעושר ולא בחכמה וכיוצא בזה ואם יהיה אוהבו בכל יחפוץ שיזכה רעהו האהוב לו בעושר ובנכסים וכבוד ובדעת ובחכמה ולא שישוה אליו אבל יהיה חפץ בלבו לעולם שיהיה הוא יותר ממנו בכל טובה ויצוה הכתוב שלא תהיה פחיתות הקנאה הזאת בלבו אבל יאהב ברבות הטובה לחבירו כאשר אדם עושה לנפשו ולא יתן שיעורין באהבה ועל כן אמר ביהונתן (שמואל א כ יז) כי אהבת נפשו אהבו בעבור שהסיר מדת הקנאה מלבו ואמר (שם כג יז) ואתה תמלוך על ישראל וגו'

AND THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF. This is an expression by way of overstatement, for a human heart is not able to accept a directive to love one's neighbor as oneself. Moreover, Rabbi Akiba has already come and taught, (*Baba Metzia 62a*) "Your life takes precedence over the life of your fellow-being."² Rather, the commandment of the Torah means that one is to love one's fellow-being in all matters of good, as one loves oneself.³ It is possible that since it does not say

¹ Translation based on Sefaria.org. All male references should be read as gender neutral.

² This teaching applies to a case where "two people are together on a journey and one has a pitcher of water; if they both drink from it they will die, because there is not enough for both, but if only one will drink he will survive. Ben Petura taught that it is better that both should drink and die, rather than that one should see the death of the other. [This was held to be the law] until Rabbi Akiba came and taught: that thy brother may live with thee (further, 25:36), your life takes precedence over the life of thy brother."

³ Thus: "he is to speak in praise of his neighbor, and be as careful of his neighbor's property as he is careful of his own property, and be as solicitous of his neighbor's honor as he is of his own" (Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilchoth Mada*, 6:3).

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Tzelem Elokim – The Likeness of God

“and thou shalt love *‘eth rei’acha’* [In that case the command would have been to love the person as much as one loves one’s own self. But instead the verse says *l’rei’acha*, which means “to [or ‘for’] your neighbor,” thus teaching that that which is good “for” your neighbor you should love as if it were good for yourself.] as thyself,” but instead it likened them in the word *‘l’rei’acha’* [which literally means “to” thy neighbor], and similarly it states with reference to a proselyte, *and thou shalt love ‘lo’ (him)* [but literally: “to” him] *as thyself*, Further, Verse 34. [Here too the thought conveyed is: “that which is good for the proselyte you should love, as if it were good for your own self.”] that the meaning thereof is to equate the love of both [himself and his neighbor, or himself and the proselyte] in one’s mind. For sometimes a person will love his neighbor in certain matters, such as doing good to him in material wealth but not with wisdom and similar matters. But if he loves him completely, he will want his beloved friend to gain riches, properties, honor, knowledge and wisdom. However [because of human nature] he will still not want him to be his equal, for there will always be a desire in his heart that he should have more of these good things than his neighbor. Therefore, Scripture commanded that this degrading jealousy should not exist in his heart, but instead a person should love to do abundance of good for his fellow-being as he does for himself, and he should place no limitations upon his love for him. It is for this reason that it is said of Jonathan’s [love for David], *for he loved him as he loved his own soul, I Samuel 20:17*. because Jonathan had removed [altogether] the attribute of jealousy from his heart, and he said [to David], *and thou shalt be king over Israel, Ibid., 23:17*. etc.