



The Mussar Institute – Annual Kallah 2023 Sunday, January 29, 2023

Setting the Stage: Something New about *Ahavah*/Love

Leviticus 19:18

וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה:

Love your fellow as yourself: I am *Adonai*

Proverbs 10:12

שִׂנְאָה תַעֲרֶר מִדִּנִּים וְעַל כָּל־פְּשָׁעִים תִּכְסֶּה אֲהָבָה:

Hatred stirs up strife,
But love covers up all faults.

Pirkei Avot 1:12

הִלֵּל אוֹמֵר, הִנֵּי מִתְלַמְּדִיו שֶׁל אֶהֱרֹן, אוֹהֵב שְׁלוֹם וְרוֹדֵף שְׁלוֹם, אוֹהֵב אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת וּמִקְרָבָן לַתּוֹרָה

Hillel used to say: be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace,
loving humankind and drawing them close to the Torah.

Pirkei Avot 5:16

כָּל אֲהָבָה שֶׁהִיא תְלוּיָה בְּדָבָר, בִּטּוֹל דָּבָר, בִּטּוֹלָה אֲהָבָה. וְשֶׁאִינָה תְלוּיָה בְּדָבָר, אִינָה בִטּוֹלָה לְעוֹלָם

All love that depends on a something, [when the] thing ceases, [the] love ceases;
and [all love] that does not depend on anything, will never cease.

Avot d'Rebbe Natan 31

Three things make a person beloved by others: an open hand, a set table and a happy frame of mind.

Solomon Ibn Gavriol, *Tikun Middot HaNefesh*

Love blinds the eyes and obstructs the ears.

A person will not reach what they love until suffering through what they hate.



Orchot Tzadikim – Sha'ar HaAhava (The Gate of Love)

When a person channels their love towards evil, there is no *middah* worse than love, and when a person channels their love towards good, it is the most exalted of all *middot*.

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, *Michtav M'Eliyahu* - The discourse on loving-kindness

A person is bound in love to the work of his hands, for in it he finds himself...One who gives, loves.

Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, *Alei Shur* vol. 1, p. 35

Each pleasure and each [experience] of newness in spiritual matters increases love.

Alan Morinis

Bahya ibn Paquda wrote his classic work of Mussar, *Chovot HaLevavot/Duties of the Heart* in 1080. The subject of the book is right there in the title. He undertook to explore “the ‘duties of the heart’ which belong to the hidden, private realm of the heart; it is the wisdom of the inner life.” And he was very surprised when he examined previous Jewish writings and “did not find among them a book devoted to the knowledge of the inward life.” That led him to frame the hypothesis that maybe Judaism does not guide us in this area, but he quickly rejected that notion. And the first of the sources he cites as a basis for confirming that Judaism does, indeed, enjoin upon us to cultivate certain inner qualities (“duties of the heart”) is the verse:

וְאַהֲבָתְךָ אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ

You shall love ADONAI your God... (Deuteronomy 6:5)

We are commanded to love God. The Torah is telling us that we have this obligation to cultivate this quality in our hearts, and we learn from this that it is possible to foster love.

Indeed, there are many sources that say that undertaking to love God is the basis for loving other people, because if you focus on the superficial aspects of other people, you are likely to find yourself experiencing more judgment than love. But when you focus on the *neshama* within the other person, that image of the divine in every person, then you can love them. You learn to love others by learning to love God, because God is the source and the *neshama* within every person is a spark from that source. So loving God becomes a very focal aspect of the inner life.



Merging Into One: Loving Self, Others and The Divine



FOR FOCUS:

- How do our sources expand your understanding of *ahavah*/love beyond the common usage of the world in our lives and today's world?
- How is *ahavah*/love a spiritual task? In what ways does the spiritual dimension lift your understanding of this *middah* beyond desire?
- In what ways might practicing *ahavah*/love in the context of your *Mussar* practice expand and lift your heart, soul, and ultimately your relationships with others, and the Holy One?