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פרשת וירא

WITH

R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

Finding True Love

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Part I. A Full Heart

The Great Slaughter

The most important event in the history of the world – with the exclusion of *Matan Torah* – took place in a secluded spot, on an isolated mountain-top, with only two people present. Actually, not only was it the second most important event after *Matan Torah* but it was the preface and the reason for *Matan Torah*. Because of what happened on that mountain-top, the Am Yisroel merited to receive the Torah and to be chosen as the *Am Hashem*.

What event are we talking about? It was when Avraham Avinu stretched out his hand with a sharpened knife to cut the neck of his beloved son, Yitzchok. Now the fact that in the last moment Hashem said **אַל תִּשְׁלַח יָדְךָ אֶל הַנֶּעָר** – *Don't send your hand against the young man* (Vayeira 22:12), that doesn't detract from the greatness of his intention. Avraham after all didn't know Chumash; he didn't know that he would be stopped

at the last moment. As far as he was concerned he would be returning home without Yitzchok. He was going to fulfill the command of Hashem and cut through Yitzchok's throat, the *konoh* and the *veshet*, a *koshereh shechitah*, and then he would burn him up as an *olah* offering to Hashem.

Now, what was Avraham demonstrating at that time? The highest level of *ahavas Hashem*; not only that he loved Hashem *but that there was nothing in this world that he loved more than Hashem*.

Now, we understand of course that Avraham loved Yitzchok with an intense love. He waited for him so many years – a hundred years! And finally when he came, he was such a beautiful boy. He had a beautiful mother so of course he was beautiful too. And he was wise and excellent in character; and it was *his* boy, his flesh and blood! And Avraham therefore let loose all the floodgates of love of which a father is capable; he burned with fiery passion of *ahavah* to Yitzchok. אֶת בְּנֵךְ אֶת יְחִידְךָ אֲשֶׁר אָהַבְתָּ – *Your singularly special son whom you love (ibid. 22:2)*.

What Can You Give?

But it's much more than that. The truth is we have no idea how great was the passion of Avraham for his son because Yitzchok was more than a son – he was a nation, a dream.

I'll explain that. You know, Avraham, our first father, had one consuming interest in his life. Wherever he went, וַיִּקְרָא בְשֵׁם ה' – *he proclaimed Hashem (Lech Lecha 12:8)*. He put everything he had into this ideal, to be *mefarsem* in the world the knowledge of the *Borei*.

But he saw that it wasn't sufficient because he's only one person after all. And then his time would come to an end; and that was his great regret. Even when Hakadosh Baruch Hu promised him that שְׂכָרְךָ הַרְבֵּה לִי – *“Your reward is very great,”* Avraham said, לֹא, הַשֵּׁם אֵלֵיָּם מִה תִּתֶּן לִי – *“Hashem, it's nothing. What can You give me?!” (Bereishis 15:2)*.

What can Hashem give him?! He can give him very much. Very very much! Not only in this world. There's no happiness that He can't give Avraham in the Next World. And Avraham says, “What are You giving me?” It seems very ungrateful.

But וְאֵיכָנִי הוֹלֵךְ עֲרִירִי – *“What have you given me if I'm going away childless!” (ibid.)* That's what Avraham was saying: “You have given me nothing if I am going away without any children from this world.”

A child? Why did Avraham need a child? Avraham lived most successfully even without children. He achieved everything! Did he want a little somebody to play with? To walk in the street with him?

A Dream Dashed

No. What Avraham desired was someone who would walk in his footsteps and carry on his great work.

Because Avraham had only one purpose in life – to make Hashem's Name great – and that purpose could be carried out only if he would have children who would follow in his ways. Everything else that he had received up until now meant nothing unless he would have progeny, posterity who would carry on.

That was his all-consuming wish – to have very many descendants who would help him spread his message to the world. Like the Rambam says, the prime ambition of Avraham Avinu was לְהַעֲמִיד אֲמָה עוֹבְדַת הַשֵּׁם – to raise up a nation that would serve Hashem.

And because Hakadosh Baruch Hu knew that that's what Avraham's greatest desire was, that's why He promised it to him again and again. Repeatedly He promised to him that he's going to have a tremendous nation, an abundance of descendants, and descendants who would follow in his footsteps. And Yitzchok therefore was not only a beloved son but he was the fulfillment of that great life dream. In Yitzchok, Avraham saw his hope, his future, his everything!

Shechting a Nation

And so when he stretched out his hand to slaughter Yitzchok, he wasn't only giving away his love for Yitzchok; it meant Yaakov and his sons too, the *shivtei Kah*. It meant the *shishim ribo*, the multitude that went out of Mitzrayim and received the Torah at Har Sinai. It meant Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon Hakohen and Miriam. It meant all the *Nevi'im*, all the *Tannaim* and *Amoraim* and *Rishonim* and *Achronim*.

When Avraham was looking at his son as he placed him on the *mizbeach*, he was looking at Rabi Akiva. In Yitzchok's face he saw the Rambam and Rashi. He saw all the *gedolei hadoros* down to the end of all generations.

And because Avraham was the kind of father who loved not only with his emotions but with his *seichel*, so he loved Yitzchok not only as a most special son but also for all of his progeny too. Not like parents today who love their children, they love their grandchildren next, their great-grandchildren less and after that, it's a question how much they love them. Avraham's love was an almost infinite love. And now he was going to give away the love; he was going to sacrifice all of that love on the altar of love of Hashem.

From the Bottom of My Heart

That's called *ahavas Hashem*; that's the *siman* of a genuine *oheiv Hashem*, when your love for Hashem pushes out from your heart and mind the love for anything else. The Rambam says that in his *Hilchos Teshuvah* (10:6). He's talking there about the mitzvah of loving Hashem **בְּכָל לִבְךָ**, *with all your heart*, and he says that there's a certain condition that's necessary: **אֵין אֶהְבֵּת הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא נִקְשָׁרֵת בְּלִבּוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם עַד ... שְׂיֵעֹזֵב כֹּל מֵהַשְּׂעוּלִים חוּץ מִמִּנְהָ** – “It is impossible to love Hashem if you have love of other things in your heart.”

‘All your heart’ means – you do not share the love of Hashem with anything or anyone else. He wants *all* of your heart and therefore a person has to drive out of his mind any kind of interests except *ahavas Hashem*.

It means, don't become involved in love of anything else. Don't become a lover of adventure, a lover of literature, a lover of art, of music, of travel; don't become a lover of anything else in this world except Hashem.

If you love ‘nature’, then forget about loving Hashem. You love to go out in the fields and the forests? You love to go out camping? You're thinking about what type of equipment to buy? Forget about it. You'll never love Hashem.

How to Love Nature

Oh, certainly nature is a very great step up to a love of Hashem. Certainly! If you'll always be looking at it for the purpose of recognizing the Creator, certainly. **הָאָרֶץ הַזֶּהוּמָה רִגְלֵי** – *The world is a footstool to arrive at the greatness of loving Hashem* (Yeshayah 66:1).

Certainly! I carry a seed in my pocket, an apple seed. I take it out of my pocket from time to time to admire it. Certainly, nature is a step up to *emunah* and to *ahavas Hashem*. No question about it! But when people fall in love with nature because they like ‘nature’, then forget about loving Hashem.

If you love ‘music’ then goodbye, forget about loving Hashem. You hear that? Now I know it's going to sound harsh to people who were brought up with American ideas, but there's nothing noble in music. Intrinsicly it's nothing at all. Of course it can be utilized. Oh certainly; music can help you arrive at more *ahavas Hashem*. But if you love ‘music’ for itself, if you're a music enthusiast, then forget about it.

Familial Love

Even to love your own family! Don't become a lover, even of your own family, unless it's in connection with *ahavas Hashem*.

Your wife too! Now, when you are going to meet a girl, a prospective *kallah*, don't tell her that because she will think that you won't have any place in your heart for her. And if she'll ever ask you this *kasha*; let's say she heard this lecture and she says, "So, if you're one of those who come to Rabbi Miller's lectures, so you love Hashem and nobody else?"; so you say, "When I love Hashem with all my heart it means that I love my wife with all my heart too because Hashem said **אוהב את אשתו כגופו**."

And that's the truth; a man loves his wife because Hakadosh Baruch Hu commanded him to. That's the way a man demonstrates his appreciation for the gift that Hashem gave him. **הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתָּה עִמָּדִי** - it is a gift that Hashem gives a man (Bereishis 3:12). And the wife of course goes *b'derech haTorah* and helps him carry out his ambitions to raise a Torah family, so he loves her because he loves Hashem.

When you love people because you love Hashem, that is something else. And therefore to love a son that is going to go *b'derech hayashar* is actually love of Hashem. And a son who is going even more in the ways of Hashem so you love him even more. A good child, a righteous child, deserves much more love - no question about it - because Hashem loves him more.

Limited Love

And *chas v'sholom* if a man has a son that goes off the *derech hayashar* and rebels against Hashem, so he stops loving him as much as he did previously. He doesn't allow the animal feeling, the animal emotion to overcome his *seichel*; he loves only because Hashem said so. His heart has no room for any love except *ahavas Hashem*.

A woman spoke to me about her mother who was not living like a Jewish woman should live - she was living with a gentile - so I said, "She is not your mother." She gasped. She was shocked. But she thought it over and she accepted it. She accepted because she accepted the mitzvah of loving Hashem with all your heart, that we have only one love in this world.

And our model is Avraham. Because his love for Yitzchok was such a great love, a stormy passion like the waves of the sea, endless; much more than this lady loved her mother. And so when he went through all the preparations, he was driving that love out of his heart before the love

of Hashem. וַיִּקַּח אֶת עֵצֵי הָעוֹלָה. He himself chopped the firewood in order to feel that he's going to burn his son in the fire. He had plenty of servants but he did it himself because he wanted to feel how he's doing it himself. Everything for Hashem! Nothing will be held back!

It was a feat of tremendous proportions, the greatest expression of *ahavas Hashem* to ever take place in the history of the world because it meant that Avraham was sacrificing his greatest love, his greatest hope and dream, before the love of Hashem.

Part II. A Heart Full of Fear

Love or Fear?

Now, there's a question here because we know that at that time, Hakadosh Baruch Hu said to Avraham, עֲתָה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי יִרָא אֱלֹהִים אֹתָהּ, – “Now I know that you fear Elokim” (Vayeira 22:12). At this moment, when Avraham achieved the heights of *ahavas Hashem*, Hashem didn't say, “I see now that you love Elokim.” He said, “Now I know that you *fear* Me.”

The question is, why is that so? On the contrary, to us it seems like fear and love are polar opposites. We think that where there's *yirah* there's no *ahavah*.

Now, if we're going to understand the answer to this enigma, we should listen first to the words of a great authority, the Chovos Halevavos, at the beginning of his *Shaar Ahavas Hashem*. That's ‘The Gate of Loving Hashem’. I'll read it inside: הִזָּה בְּסִפְרֵי הַזֶּה – *Whatever I've mentioned previously in this sefer about the the duties of the mind and the qualities of character, all these things are ma'alos and madreigos, they're steps and ladders to go up, אֶל הָעֵינֵן הָעֲלִיּוֹן הַזֶּה – to this most important of all subjects, which is ahavas Hashem. He's telling us that everything that was discussed in this great sefer until now was a preparation to that great quality of ahavas haBorei yisborach.*

It means that in order to approach the subject of *ahavas Hashem*, a very great preparation is necessary. It's not like people think, a matter of deciding that you're going to love Hashem. People think that it's just a matter of wanting to do it, when they're good and ready they'll do it. No, it takes work. It needs a lot of *hakdamos*, many chapters in the Chovos Halevavos before you get to *Shaar Ahavas Hashem*.

Fear Before Love

And what is the most important, the most essential *hakdamah*? *Yiras Hashem*. That's what the Chovos Halevavos says, that without *yiras Hashem* you can never gain *ahavah*.

Why is that so? Because let's be frank; let's stop being disingenuous. How are you going to love Hashem? Love what? Can you love a vacuum? Can you love air? Can you love empty space? You have to *have* a Hashem in order to love Him.

And so even if you're just going to begin loving Him now – let's say you never really considered it much but now you're hearing this and you're thinking, "Maybe I should do it. After all, I'm saying it every day, a few times, וְאֶהְבֶּתְ אֵת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ, but what am I doing about it? *L'maaseh*, nothing at all!"

Isn't it a shame? Someday you'll come to the Next World and there'll be a judgment. You want to come into Gan Eden and the *shoimer* will ask, "Did you ever love Hashem?" You scratch your head. You're trying to remember.

Start With Emunah

That would be a tragedy. So imagine you want to start tonight; you want to try at least. But you can't love thin air. You need Something to love. Which means, you have to have *emunah*.

But not *emunah* like a man told me recently, "I have *emunah peshutah*. I believe." Now, I'm sure this man will run into a fire for *kiddush Hashem* because that's the kind of *emunah* he has. But that doesn't mean he has *emunah*. *Emunah* means that you believe in Hashem with at least the same belief that you have in your cousin in the Bronx. Imagine you have a nice cousin in the Bronx. You see him at the family *simchahs*; he sends you a check on your birthday every year. So you believe in him. That's *emunah*!

So your *emunah* in Hashem should be at least as much as that. But if your *emunah* in Hakadosh Baruch Hu is *emunah sichlis*, it's only intelligence – and even then, it's hazy; it's phrases, words, there's no actuality about it, you don't feel it – so that's not *emunah*.

Seeing Is Believing

And therefore the first step towards love of Hashem is *yiras Hashem*, fearing Him. Because 'to fear', in its most *poshut* explanation, means 'to be aware, to have *emunah*.' And I'll explain that *al pi dikduk*. Because *reish-alef* means to see. We write it as ראה but the *hei* falls off. And *yud-*

reish-alef, איר, means to be afraid. Those words are relatives and they're not distant cousins; they're close relatives. In איר the *yud* falls off many times and in איר the *hei* falls off many times, so איר is the *shoresh*. The root of the words 'to see' and 'to fear' is the same.

Now that's not *drush*; it's *dikduk*, it's the simple explanation of the words. And if you think about it, you'll find that it's justified. Because fear means awareness. 'To be afraid' means 'to see something', 'to recognize something' that arouses emotions in you, either apprehension or something else. If you don't see that a peril is soon to come upon you, there's no fear because you're unaware. So *yirah*, fear, is a result of *re'iyah*, seeing, awareness. Fear means *mamashus* because you only fear something that's real, that you're aware of.

Fear Means He's Real

But it's not merely the fear. Of course, that's a benefit, to be afraid of doing a sin; but there's something in addition to that, even more valuable, and that is that it gives you *emunah chushis*. Because if your whole belief is invested only in *l'osid lavo*, that after you leave this life in *Olam Haba* there'll be judgment and retribution and reward, whatever it is, so it's not so simple that it will be a motivation for you. It's not so easy to be motivated by far off things. But when a man is thinking he needs Hashem right now, *the next minute he needs Him* because he wants to be safe and healthy and successful, so that brings Hashem close to him. And Hashem becomes so real that now when he wants to practice *ahavas Hashem*, he has Something on which to practice it. He's right here!

And that's why *yirah* is so important as a preface and as an adjunct to *ahava*. Because to love something that's very far off is extremely difficult. But to love an object which you already picture in your mind and is constantly before your mind's eye, that comes much easier.

That's why you're doing a great benefit when little children are taught from the beginning that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is ready to take action against wrong deeds; because it makes them aware that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is right here. That's a wonderful beginning because they're gaining *emunah* now – Hashem is real! He demands! He's right here and He reacts! He's a *Chai V'kayam*, a true reality – and that's the *emunah* they'll use to come to *ahavas Hashem*.

And even if you're not such a little child anymore – let's say you're a man of fifty or sixty – you also have to learn to be afraid. If you do something wrong, there's going to be a clobber over the head. You have

to believe it *k'pashtus*. *Yiras ha'oinesh!* We must spend time on being afraid of punishment.

Fear on the Street

Like the Gemara says, **יָצָא לְשׁוּק** – Anytime you walk out on the street, **יְהִי דוֹמָה בְּעֵינֶיךָ בְּאֵלֵי נְמֹסֵר סַרְדִּיּוֹט** – you should practice up fear by feeling like you've just been arrested by a Roman sergeant. You know a Roman sergeant, if he arrests a man, that man is an unfortunate fellow. In the ancient days a policeman meant business. Even not so long ago, when I was a boy, I walked through certain neighborhoods at night. There was no question about it because everybody was afraid of the policeman. And there was only one policeman! And he didn't have any patrol cars; he didn't have any walkie-talkies either. All he had was a billy club. But he knew that if he used it there wouldn't be any civilian review board and therefore one policeman on foot was enough to intimidate a big neighborhood.

And you can be sure that the Roman sergeant was even worse. And so when the *Chachomim* tell us that as soon as you walk out in the street you should imagine that you're already being followed by a Roman policeman it means that you should be afraid of what might happen to you on the street.

Now we don't have to suspect the *Chachomim* of trying to give us nerves, to make us sick. They only want us to live successfully and they're telling us that every time you go out in the street we should grab that opportunity to practice up our *yirah* by realizing that anything could happen to you now and you need the help of Hashem.

Now why in the street? And in your house you shouldn't be aware of Hashem? In your kitchen you don't need His protection? The answer is that of course we want to utilize any opportunity we can for *yirah* but we want to be genuine about it too. In your house, you're protected. You know who's in your house. The street is already a *hefker* place. In the street, all types of *meshugoyim* go around.

Street Violence

Who knows what could happen? A man might run amok with a knife or a gun! Who knows? Maybe the cornice of the house will fall down on top of you. It happens sometimes, again and again. Or a car drives up on the sidewalk. Here's a nice man – I know him well – and he's standing on the street corner waiting for the light to change. He has no bad intentions.

Suddenly a car drives up on the sidewalk and now he's been in the hospital for the last two years. Operation after operation.

So it's true, even in your house you can practice up fear of Hashem but the street is a dangerous place and so the Gemara is telling us to utilize the street as an opportunity for *yiras Hashem*. Every corner you stop and say, "Hashem, please protect from this corner till the next one. Please don't let anything bad happen to me."

Now, that doesn't mean that life should be full of apprehensions but you'll give yourself a little reminder here and there, it'll redound to your benefit. Even when you hear that somewhere far away people are being killed – that Arab terrorists went into a school and slaughtered children – so you give yourself a shiver. That's a very good shiver because a person who practices on *yiras ha'oinessh*, he is a man who is most likely to climb up to the high *madreigah* of *ahavas Hashem*. Because once you're aware of Hashem, so now you can begin loving Him. And the more and more you become aware of Him – even if you're an old *tzaddik* of 120 years you can still grow in awareness – the more and more you can love Him.

Fear, Awareness and Love

And so we come back now to our question. At the great moment, the moment when Avraham Avinu reached the pinnacle of love of Hashem – sacrificing all of his love for Yitzchok on the altar of love of Hashem – Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, "כִּי יִרָא אֱלֹקִים אֶתְּךָ – Now I know, עֵתָּה יִרְעָתִי – you fear Elokim." What fear?! It was all love!

No! It was all fear, all awareness, because that's what Avraham spent his life busy with – he saw Hashem more and more every day and so he had more and more to love every day. And therefore when that great moment came, that great test of sacrificing everything before the love of Hashem, Avraham passed the test with flying colors because he had a heartfelt of *yirah*, of awareness. And Hashem said, "Now I know that you're so aware of Me, I'm so real to you, that you were able to completely fall in love with Me and put your love for Me before anything else."

Part III. A Heart Full of Love

Who Needs Tests?

Now, we're not done yet because there's another question here and if we'll understand the answer it will give us a practical path forward in *ahavas Hashem*. And so we go back to what Hashem said to Avraham

Avinu after the *akeidah*: כִּי עָתָה יֵדַעְתִּי – Now I know that you've built that skyscraper of *ahavas Hashem* ... וְלֹא חָשַׁבְתָּ אֶת בְּנֶךְ אֶת יְחִידְךָ מִמֶּנִּי – because I see that You didn't hold back even your one beloved son from Me” (Vayeira 22:12).

“Now I know”?! Didn't Hakadosh Baruch Hu know even without that test? Hashem is not a schoolteacher that He has to give tests in order to see what you've accomplished. He knows very well what's inside you. So what does it mean, “Now I know”?

Subterranean Love

And so we'll explain it as follows. You must know that everybody is born with a great store of love of Hashem, potential love of Hashem, in their heart. How much is there? A tremendous fire of love of Hashem is burning there.

You know, inside the earth a tremendous fire, a subterranean fire is burning. Sometimes you can see it when there's an eruption of a volcano. We're amazed at that – so much heat, so much flame, so much energy is hidden in the bowels of the earth! Same thing in every Jew; there's a volcano of *ahavas Hashem* under the surface waiting to erupt. מִיָּם עֲמֻקִּים עֵצָה כְּלֵב אִישׁ – Like deep waters of a spring is wisdom and counsel in the mind of a man (Mishlei 20:5). It's inside of us only that most people let it remain dormant. It sleeps inside of them all their lives and only in the Next World they see what could have been, what they could have brought forth. It's a tragedy, a *rachmanus*, a wasted opportunity.

And therefore our job is to avert that tragedy and bring it forth while we're still in this world. And it's possible. וְאִישׁ תְּבוּנָה יִדְלֹנָהּ – A man who uses understanding can draw it up like you draw up water with buckets from a well (ibid.). He can draw up this *ahavas Hashem* that's concealed in the depths of his personality.

Thinking It Through

Now, there are a lot of ways in which *ahavas Hashem* can be brought to the surface. Number one is by means of thought. An *ish tevunos*, someone who is willing to use his mind, *yidlenah*, will draw it forth. Its potential is buried, hidden, within you, but when you think thoughts of *ahavas Hashem*, so you're developing that *middah* in your *neschama*. When you think about it, you mull it over, you consider it, it comes to the front part of your mind instead of being hidden somewhere in the background.

So a man, let's say, is walking on the street and he sees his married daughter coming his way, so instead of wasting the opportunity he

thinks, “Oh, Hashem! I love You so much for marrying off this daughter. Day and night it was on my head, finding her a shidduch, and You did that for me. I love You for that.” So just by thinking those words, you cause it to become *min hakoach el hapoal*; you’re bringing it into the open more. And the more you think those thoughts – not only that example; you can think about loving Hashem for anything that Hashem has given you – so little by little you’re becoming stronger in that attitude.

Speaking It Out

Now that’s thoughts. Thinking, that’s very good, but imagine now that you’ll talk about it; oh, that’s much better already. **כִּי חַיִּים הֵם לְמוֹצְאֵיהֶם** – Torah is life to those who discover the words of Torah (Mishlei 4:22). **אֶל תִּקְרִי לְמוֹצְאֵיהֶם אֶלָּא לְמוֹצְאֵיהֶם בְּפִה** – Instead of *motzeihem*, ‘discover’, read it as ‘*motzee’eihem*’, uttering. Torah is more life to you when you utter the words (Eirubin 44a). When a person says words of *ahavas Hashem*, so he’s taking his thoughts, which are already precious, and by expressing them with words, that’s *motzee min hakoach el hapoel*, he’s making them more real.

So if you can whisper the words quickly before your daughter reaches you, even better. If you can sit in your home when you’re alone, when nobody will hear you, and you’ll say, “I love You Hashem for giving me a roof over my head, for giving me the money to pay the rent,” so you’re doing something very big now – you’re loving Hashem not only with *machshava* but with *dibbur* too. And the more you talk about it, the more you feel it because you’re drawing forth that fountain of love in your heart to Hashem and making it more effective by means of speech.

Secret Advice

That’s why I tell you – it’s good you came here tonight; you’ll get some good advice – that you should say these words as much as possible, “I love You Hashem.” You don’t love Him? Say it anyhow.

Nobody should hear you. If somebody hears you say it, they’ll think you’re off your head a little bit. They’re off their heads but they don’t know. So you do it in secret. Walk in a telephone booth and pick up the telephone. Don’t drop any money in. Make a long distance call, say, “I love You, Hashem. *Ich hob dir lib*, Ribono shel Olam.”

Don’t think it’s a small thing. Life is passing by! Say, “I love you Hashem.” Keep on saying it and over the course of time, a little bit of that comes into your heart and you begin saying it sincerely.

Little Children Love Too

You know I must tell you what the Gra said. The Gra says that you can even start with little children. “Is that really possible?” he asked. “How do you start it with little children?”

So he says like this: When a little child is sitting on his highchair and you're giving him something to eat or a candy so you say, “This candy is from Hashem. Don't you love Hashem for it? My *kind*, say ‘I love You Hashem.’”

That's *seichildig*. It's very logical. And it's *seichildig* for us too. After all, we're little children too – each one of us is his own most important child – and that's how we should talk to ourselves too. So when you sit down to breakfast, you should also think to yourself, “Shouldn't I love Hashem that He's feeding me? After all, I enjoy eating. It gives me energy and it tastes good too. And He's the One giving it to me.”

“Oh,” you say, “I should love Hashem because of breakfast? A bowl of cereal is not befitting for such a great subject.”

Loving In Life

You're making a big mistake because loving Hashem is not a detached emotion; it's connected with your normal everyday life. When you put on your shoes, love Hashem for that. Suppose you had no shoes, *chalilah* and a man came along and said, “Here. Here's a pair of shoes.” You'd love him! No question you'd love him! *Baruch Hashem*, every day He lends you a pair of shoes. You make a *bracha*, *שְׁתַּשֶּׁה לִּי כֹל צַרְכֵי*, so you see you have to be grateful. You have to love Hashem for your shoes.

Now other people who never think about these things might ridicule this. They'll laugh at it. Who cares? Let them laugh. They're laughing at the Chovos Halevavos because he's the one who says that we should be using that great motivation of *hakaras hatov*, gratitude to Hashem, to become *ohavei Hashem*.

Hands and Air

He starts from the benefits, having hands. *הַיָּדִים לְקַחַת וְלָתֵת*. It's fun to have a hand. Oh yes, it's a lot of fun! There's a man on the street, I see him frequently. He has an empty sleeve. *Baruch Hashem* your sleeves are full! And out of your sleeve comes a derrick with more derricks attached to it. You can bend it anyway you want. And the joints of your fingers too! No creaking as the bones rub against each other! Everything is lubricated beautifully. Ah! A pleasure! A *taanug*! A privilege! As you're walking down

the street, swinging your arm, you're thinking these thoughts and you're loving Hashem in your mind.

And when you breathe a breath of air, think how much you should love Hashem for that. Air is the most precious commodity there is – you must have it immediately and constantly – and He's giving it to you always. And it's a special elixir that He made especially for you – it's a mixture precisely suited to your needs; oxygen and a certain amount of nitrogen and a small amount of carbon dioxide. And each one of them is important in the right proportions so that when we breathe we are oxygenating our blood; we are making ourselves strong, making ourselves energetic and happy.

So why shouldn't you love Hashem for that? Imagine a man is walking and is loving Hashem because he can breathe. He breathes in the Brooklyn air and he's loving Hashem. If he's thinking about it, very good. And if he'll say words too, even better.

Acting It Out

Now suppose as a result of your thoughts and your words, you go on and do acts – even better. Words are greater than thoughts and actions are greater than words. If you'll act on your love you're bringing it out even more.

So you want to carry it out in acts too? You can do that too. You know when you do a mitzvah the *poskim* tell us there are conditions for a mitzvah; and among the conditions are *dechilu u'rechimu*. You have to have *yirah* and *ahavah* when you do a mitzvah. We're too busy and we're also so accustomed to the mitzvah, so we don't think about it, but that's what the *poskim* say. That's a condition. You have to be aware that you're standing in front of a King and also you have to love Him.

So suppose sometimes you make an exception and say, "This mitzvah I'm going to do now because I love you, Hashem." One time a day you'll choose a mitzvah. Now you're taking all of those thoughts, all of your words, and you're making it *l'maaseh*. You're loving Hashem with your acts. Imagine a person is walking to shul and he thinks, "I'm walking to shul now to *daven* because I love You and want to speak with You," so every step he takes is an act of *ahavas Hashem*.

Growing in Love

And so we come back now to Avraham Avinu. "Now I know" means not that Hashem needed this proof to demonstrate that Avraham loved him. No. It means that's how he *became* a greater lover of Hashem. If

Avraham took the knife ready to slaughter his beloved son whom he loved with such an overweening love, a love that encompassed all the generations of *tzaddikim* that would come from him and Avraham was willing to sacrifice everything, that act brought forth the *ahavah min hakoach el hapoel* into a most prominent and powerful force. And that's what it says, עתה ירעתי – now. Now you have become a man who loves Hashem. Because it doesn't happen on its own; it's by means of a person's thoughts and words and actions that he becomes an *oheiv Hashem*.

And so we're learning now that everyone can become an *oheiv Hashem* if they would make use of these three functions. You can do it *b'machshavah*, by thoughts. Then you do it *b'dibbur* too – you say words of *ahavas Hashem*. And then you do it *b'maaseh* too. That's how you develop. Little by little, you keep on this way and you become something eventually. Of course, each one must do according to his abilities. It doesn't mean that you're going to be like Avraham but whatever *ahavas Hashem* is developed properly, it becomes the very greatest of a man's achievements, the crown of a man's perfection.

Have A Wonderful Shabbos

LET'S GET PRACTICAL

Three Ways To Love

Avraham Avinu reached the pinnacle of *ahavas Hashem* through a lifetime of climbing the ladder of *Yiras Hashem*, and by using the system of thought, speech and acts in order to bring that love from the potential into the actual.

This week I will *bli neder* walk in the footsteps of our first father and try to make use of these four ideals every day. One, to remind myself that He is real, He is here. Number two, to think a thought of *ahavas Hashem*. Number three, to say words of *ahavas Hashem*. And number four, to keep my eyes open for an opportunity to act out this love for Him.

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שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך

Q:

How could Hakodosh Boruch Hu ask Avrohom Avinu to sacrifice his son, Yitzchok? Isn't that too extreme of a demand?

A:

I don't understand the question. Why not? What is a son? A son is a gift from Hashem. So how do you show your appreciation for such a wonderful gift? You had him for so many years, so now you take him and you bring him as an offering to Hashem. What's wrong? I don't see the kasha. I don't understand the question.

You don't like the idea? Even Yitzchok himself was satisfied. He had lived many years. How do you show appreciation to Hashem? You're willing to give your son back to Him, if He asks. Let's say I lend you my car, and you're riding around in my car, enjoying yourself for a couple of days, and then I say, "My friend, can you please give me back my car tomorrow?" So you'll say, "What do you mean, 'Give back the car?! I'm enjoying it to no end. I don't want to give it back.'"

Now, Hashem gave us life. Of course, we know that Hashem doesn't want any of us to be sacrificed, but in logic it certainly has a place. Of course it does. Only that Hashem's logic is higher than our logic. But if we were Hashem, we would demand that people give their lives to us. Certainly we would. Don't think that you're so good. Don't think you wouldn't demand it. We're lucky that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is in charge, not we. And therefore, Hakodosh Boruch Hu said, אל תשלח ירך - "Don't stretch out your hand." Don't sacrifice your son.

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