

GREAT FOR SHARING  
AT THE SHABBOS TABLE!

# בשבת



PARSHAS  
VA'ESCHANAN

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## RELATIONSHIPS TAKE WORK

**P**arshas Va'eschanan features what is perhaps the most famous paragraph in all of the Torah — the *Shema*.<sup>1</sup> In this passage, we find many *mitzvos* — the requirement to wear *tefillin*, the obligation to put up a *mezuzah*, and even the fundamental duty to teach Torah to the next generation. But perhaps the most basic *mitzvah* listed is the *mitzvah* to love Hashem.

The Sefer HaChinuch<sup>2</sup> explains that a person will not perform any of the other *mitzvos* properly if they don't have the feelings that come from love for Hashem. However, perhaps because the need to love Hashem is so simple and obvious, this *mitzvah* has been the subject of considerable debate in how to approach its performance.

The Mesillas Yesharim<sup>3</sup> records a line of reasoning that was proposed in his time. As opposed to the *mitzvos* that require an action — shaking a *lulav*, eating *matzah*, etc. — the *mitzvah* to love Hashem needs little to no analysis. After all, what more is there? Just love Hashem!

However, writes the Mesillas Yesharim, this thought process is not only erroneous, it is dangerous. Every area of the Torah needs understanding, investigation and scrutiny to truly understand the parameters, applications and pitfalls of that particular *halachah*, and 'love for Hashem' is no different. In fact, if one only has a superficial understanding of this *mitzvah*, they are apt to perform *all* of their *mitzvos* by rote, with substandard feeling.

This sentiment is found in the Rambam<sup>4</sup> as well, where he explains that *mitzvos* should be done out of love for Hashem. He then points out, though, that the depth of this feeling is not something that shows up instinctively, rather, it is something that takes work to achieve.

However, it is clear from the Rambam, Sefer HaChinuch and Mesillas Yesharim that the work is well worth the payoff — an amazing and deep relationship with the Creator of the universe.

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### Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

While it is clear that love for Hashem is a foundational requirement of *avodas Hashem*, how does one engender that love?

There are a couple of ways to do so, all of them involve appreciating that which Hashem has created.

Rabbeinu Bachya<sup>1</sup> writes that one should develop an appreciation for the amazing depth, breadth and wisdom of the Torah and *mitzvos*. Through those feelings, one will come to love Hashem.

The Rambam<sup>2</sup> and Sefer HaChinuch<sup>3</sup> add that one could look at Hashem's works, the incredible world, all of its intricate complications and systems, and come to appreciate and love Hashem through that focus.

We can only relate to Hashem through His actions, and all too often we don't focus on what we take as 'normal.'

However, the best, and perhaps only, way to truly have an appreciation of Hashem is by taking the time to focus on the amazing things He has done.

1 *Devarim* 6:5 s.v. ואהבת

2 Positive *Mitzvos*, 3

3 *Mitzvah* 418

1 *Devarim* 6:4-9

2 *Mitzvah* 418

3 *Mesillas Yesharim*, Introduction

4 *Hilchos Teshuvah*, 10:6

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**The Yetzer Horah sometimes dresses up as the Yetzer Tov to convince a person that learning mussar is bittul Torah. - R' Hillel Lichtenstein, Avkas Rochel 1:10**

# HOLDING HIS HAND

"Come in!" Rabbi Barish's\* voice rang out. The door opened, and Yosef peeked his head in to the doorway. "Um... have a minute?" Rabbi Barish could hear the strain in Yosef's voice; something was clearly amiss.

"Sure, please let me finish up, and come back in five minutes?"

Five minutes later, to the dot, Yosef again knocked on the door. The scene repeated itself, but this time Yosef was invited to sit down.

"Yosef, always nice to see you. What's going on?" Yosef was a very close *talmid* of Rabbi Barish's — though he had a difficult childhood growing up, he had made amazing strides, and was quite mature for his age. Now Yosef was married for a couple of years, and had two little ones at home. As far as Rabbi Barish knew, Yosef was generally doing fine. Yosef took a deep breath, and his voice cracked a little when he spoke.

"I, well, I feel like Hashem is picking on me." There was a pause while Yosef collected his thoughts. "It's just that, look, there are some days when I know I'm not doing the right thing. And then, inevitably, that night my kids will be up all night, or will get an ear infection, or something like that. I know I'm not perfect, but why is my punishment so swift and exacting? Am I so much worse than the next guy?"

Rabbi Barish took in the scene before him. Yosef was a sincere young man, but his background sometimes had him feeling down, and he placed a lot of blame on himself.

"It sounds like you feel that Hashem is out to get you." Yosef nodded, silent. "I imagine it's not easy to feel otherwise when you see the quick response to what you call your misdeeds. But perhaps..."

"Yosef, when you take stock of your life, what do you see? Can I tell you what I see? I've known you for some time now. I see a young man who, despite everything life had thrown at him, rose to the occasion. I see a young man who found his wife and was blessed with amazing young children. And this is in contrast to some other family members who are still struggling.

"You are still in *yeshiva*, and your wife supports you. You spend your days doing something you love, and, if I recall correctly, you're financially stable.

"Yosef, I see someone who Hashem loves to pieces. If anything, Hashem has held your hand during your entire journey. That's what I see."

Yosef was still silent, this time with tears in his eyes. "Well, when you put it that way... You are right. I was feeling overwhelmed, I think I just needed a bit of perspective. Thank you." As the door closed, Rabbi Barish whispered a *tefillah*, once again asking Hashem to watch over his *talmid*.

*\*Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

## DID YOU KNOW?

- Part of 'love for Hashem,' is bringing others close to Hashem.<sup>1</sup>
- Love for Hashem and fear of Hashem are closely linked. One who truly loves Hashem is afraid to do anything that would upset that relationship.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Kad HaKemach, Ahavah 1:1*

<sup>2</sup> *HaKsav V'HaKabbalah, Bereishis 22:12*

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