

# Loving Hashem: A Model Relationship

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Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS

Proper understanding of the mitzvah of *ahavas Hashem*, love of Hashem, is a cornerstone for our entire observance of mitzvos. It is always incumbent upon us to strive to grow in our *ahavas Hashem*. However, it is particularly appropriate to concentrate on improving our loving relationship with Hashem as we approach the Yom Tov of Shavuos, *zman matan Toraseinu*, the time that celebrates the giving of the Torah as the beginning of that relationship.

The Rambam in Hilchos Teshuva perek 10 gives us a framework as to how to fulfill the mitzvah of *ahavas Hashem*. The love between a man and a woman is the model for our love of Hashem. Such a love is all encompassing. Just as the love between a man and a woman has the ability to completely take over ones thoughts, so too we are commanded to reach this level of constantly focusing on Hashem and His Torah. The Rambam refers to the phrase in Shir HaShirim “חוללת אהבה” – one who is lovesick – as the ultimate description of an *ahavas Hashem* that consumes ones very being. Following the Rambam’s comparison between these two loves, we can learn from analyzing *ahavas Hashem* what a Torah perspective is regarding the proper love between husband and wife.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev has a powerful insight about how we relate to Hashem which is fundamental to any loving relationship. In his book *Kedushas Levi*, he observes that the Torah refers to the celebration of Pesach as *Chag Hamatzos*. Although the Torah does not refer to this festival as Pesach, the Jewish People always call it Pesach. What is the difference between Pesach and *Chag Hamatzos* and why have Hashem and His people chosen different ways to refer to the same holiday?

The name Pesach has its roots in the kindness that Hashem performed for the Jewish people when He passed over the Jewish homes during the plague of the firstborn. *Chag Hamatzos* describes the Jewish people rushing as they left Egypt. The image of an entire people following Hashem into the desert with nothing more than matzos on their shoulders is encapsulated with the words of *Chag Hamatzos*. Hashem and His people chose to commemorate the beginning of their loving relationship by emphasizing what their beloved did for them.

It is this focus ‘on the other’ that is the pillar of true love. All of *chesed* is predicated on one looking to another rather than focusing on oneself. It is therefore not surprising that *chesed* is such a critical character trait to look for in a spouse. There are two models in Tanach that deal with looking for a spouse, and they both highlight the significance of *chesed*. Eliezer the servant of Avraham uses *chesed* as the test to see whether Rivkah would be worthy of Yitzchak. The

*chesed* performed by Ruth towards Naomi and by Boaz towards Ruth are the catalysts that bring this couple together. Thus the entire future of the Jewish People and the royal chain of King David culminating with Melech Hamashiach came about only through *chesed*. So too, every Jewish home rests upon the foundation of *chesed*.

Looking to the relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people as a model for a loving relationship, we can derive an important lesson from the words of commitment “*בְּעֵשָׂה וְנִשְׁמַע*,” that brought this relationship into existence. The Jewish people were not aware of all the details of Torah life before committing to its observance. What was necessary was the trust in Hashem and the total commitment of the Jewish people that as the relationship progressed they would learn more about Hashem and His Torah, and want to observe all of its laws. Shavuos was more of an emphasis on trust and commitment than knowledge of all the details. That knowledge would eventually come at the right time. Similarly, in a growing relationship with a potential spouse it is unrealistic to focus on every possible detail about the other person. More emphasis should be on general personality traits, compatibility, and mutual trust. As events unfold, a relationship built on trust and commitment will be able to sustain life’s challenges.

Even a relationship as close as the one created between Hashem and His people on the first Shavuos can sometimes have setbacks. An important lesson about our interpersonal relationships can be learned from the events that followed Matan Torah. Upon forgiving the Jewish People for the sin of making a golden calf, Hashem taught us the secret of how to attain His forgiveness in the future. Chazal (Rosh Hashana 17b) comment that Hashem appeared to Moshe and taught him the thirteen attributes of mercy. Hashem assured Moshe that whenever the Jewish people would sin they should perform these words and they will be forgiven. Chazal are careful to describe that the assurance for forgiveness is contingent upon performing these words, not merely reciting them. Performing them means acting to others how Hashem deals with us. Just as He is merciful and forgives our misdeeds, so too are we expected to relate to others. True in all interpersonal relationships, this is even more critical in marriage. In our approach to our spouse’s shortcomings, we emulate Hashem’s patience and willingness to overlook our flaws. Nobody is perfect, and those who constantly focus on the others imperfections will never be happy.

As powerful the experience at Har Sinai was, it could not ensure an eternal bond to last between Hashem and His people. The Ramban in his introduction to *פרשת תרומה* sees in the institution of the Mishkan and later the Beis HaMikdash the necessity to keep the experience of Har Sinai fresh in our minds. Every visit to the Mishkan, and later the Beis HaMikdash, had the effect of reconnecting the visitor to the Har Sinai experience, as the central feature of Mishkan and Mikdash was the Aron which housed the luchos. It is only subsequent reconnecting to the events of the past that kept Har Sinai fresh and new in every generation. A similar model is necessary within the marriage relationship. To prevent the relationship from losing its freshness a couple must take many opportunities throughout life to reconnect to the original excitement that was present in the early stages of their life together.

Our relationships with Hashem and with our spouse have many parallels. May we learn from these valuable lessons, thereby strengthening these two fundamental aspects of our lives.