YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***Bein Adam Le-chavero:* Ethics of Interpersonal Conduct**

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**Shiur #25: The Dual Love of *Kiruv***

**What is Closeness?**

In last week's lesson, we dealt with the spiritual components of the *mitzvot* of *te’ina* and *perika*, loading and unloading: namely, helping someone who is spiritually hampered by the overwhelming weight of sin. This understanding of the obligation to assist another in need presumes that there is an interpersonal mandate to help another Jew regain spiritual balance and direction no less than there is a requirement to help one who is in physical distress.

The attempt to help others in the spiritual realm is often referred to as *kiruv rechokim*, literally, bringing those who are distant closer to a life of spirituality. In truth, there are those who take issue with the term *kiruv*, as it presupposes that we may determine, based upon outward signs of mitzva observance, who indeed is close and who is far from God. However, it is the default term.

The ideal of being *karov* (close) to God is clearly a noble one. Indeed, everyone may benefit from trying to get closer to God. The verse (*Devarim* 30:2) states: “This matter is very *karov* to you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.” “This matter” is identified either as the study of Torah (Rashi) or the practice of repentance (Ramban). Any attempt to enable others to feel this closeness and benefit from a greater perception of God is an act of *kiruv*. One who is able to sincerely call out to God in earnest prayer merits this closeness: “God is *karov* to all who call Him, to those who call him sincerely" (*Tehillim* 145:18).

Thus*, kiruv* is a fundament obligation. Judaism is not a missionizing religion; in fact, it is avidly against actively going out to convert others to its faith. Nevertheless, it stands for calling out in the name of God, welcoming those who seek Him. This encompasses reaching out to those who are within the faith and those who are unable to understand God, inspiring them to become better acquainted with it.

Helping others improve their religious observance is the fulfillment of a ritual obligation to God; however, beyond this dutiful responsibility lies the most basic of interpersonal obligations. There are individual commandments which are pertinent to the discussion, but they are rooted in the concept of *ahava*, love. True love of God, coupled with the earnest affection for fellow Jews, requires helping others to gain or sometimes regain a connection to the Holy One. In order to understand *kiruv*, first we must understand this *ahava*.

**Love of God and Love of a Fellow Jew**

The first verse we teach to a child is *Devarim* 6:4:

Hear (*Shema*) O Israel, Lord is our God, Lord is one.

*Shema* is supposed to be recited a minimum of twice a day, morning and evening, expressing the Jew's acceptance of the kingship of God. It also identifies Him as "our God", concerned with us. However, though this is one of the most intimate declarations of the Jew, it is formulated not as a personal affirmation but as an announcement. It opens with "Hear O Israel," and the message is the following: let the truth of God's oneness and kingship be broadcast to the world; let all Jews hear that God is One and true. (See the first chapter of Rav Aryeh Kaplan's *Reaching Out*.)

Why can't we keep our ideals to ourselves? Why must we burden innocent bystanders with our convictions? Though one might view this as pushiness and unnecessary religious coercion, it is actually a great display of love. Sharing the most wonderful truth with others is the most sublime act of dual love, love of man and love of God.

Indeed, the following verse sets down the mitzva of loving God. Its placement next to the cardinal declaration of our faith makes it paramount, and the following verses underscore this: our love for God knows no bounds. It is something we must keep in mind constantly, in our mouths, upon our arms, beside our doors.

You shall love Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your means.

God not only wants us to fulfill His commandments but to recognize His greatness and love of us and to love Him in return. This mitzva of loving God is directed to each individual, but as the Talmud explains, its proper fulfillment requires influencing others to love Him as well. The Talmud (*Yoma* 86a) teaches:

“You shall love Lord your God” — this means that the name of Heaven should become beloved through you.

[This means that] one should read [Scripture], study [Mishna] and serve Torah scholars, and his dealings with people should be conducted in a pleasant manner. What should people say about him? "Fortunate is his father who taught him Torah; fortunate is his teacher who taught him Torah. Woe unto people who do not learn Torah. This person who learned Torah — see how pleasant are his ways, how refined are his deeds!" Regarding him Scripture says: “[God] said to me, ‘You are My servant, Israel, through whom I am glorified’ (*Yeshayahu* 49:3).”

The Talmud describes that by acting appropriately, the Torah scholar causes a *kiddush ha-shem*, sanctifying the name of God before all who witness the scholar's exemplary behavior.

The Talmud continues that the opposite is true for those individuals who study Torah but act in a way that turns others off from a life of Torah: they not only distance themselves from God, they simultaneously profane God's name in the eyes of others.

Loving God is more than an obligation: it means recognizing His goodness. If one would not want a friend to be misrepresented and disliked, certainly one should feel so regarding God. In *Mesillat Yesharim* (Ch. 19), Rav Moshe Chayim Luzzatto explains:

When you like someone very much, you cannot simply stand by and allow others to beat him and insult him. When necessary, you do whatever you can to help. The same is true for one who really loves God. You cannot stand by and allow others to desecrate His name and violate His commandments.

The love which lies at the basis of the desire to inspire others regarding the truth of God is not only rooted in our divine love. The "great principle of the Torah," according to Rabbi Akiva, is the mitzva of loving our fellow Jews as we would ourselves (*Torat Kohanim, Kedoshim* 4:12). A basic act of love is helping others maximize their lives. Sharing with others the joy of a connection to God, bringing them closer to what is inherently close to them, is one of the best ways to accomplish this.

Similarly, the Maharal notes (*Netivot Olam* II, 50, *Ahavat Reia*) the connection between loving God and loving one's fellow man:

For this matter of love for people is also the love for God. One who loves another loves all which the other does. Thus, when one loves God, it is impossible not to love His creations. And if a person hates mankind, it is impossible to feel love for God who created it.

The Baal Ha-Tanya (*Likkutei Torah, Taamei Ha-mitzvot, Vayikra* 19:18, quoted in Rav Aryeh Kaplan's *Reaching Out*) indicates that the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself also generates communal responsibility, unifying all Jews in one greater whole. He relates this to the confession which is found in our liturgy.

Every single Jew is like an individual limb of a body. This is the reason for the responsibility that every Jew bears for every other Jew who sins. It is for this reasons that my master, the Ari, would recite confession for every type of sin, even those which he had never committed. He said, "Even though a person may have never committed a sin, he must seek forgiveness and recite his confession." It is for this reason that the wording of the confession is in the plural, "We have sinned," not "I have sinned."

The reason for this is that all Jews collectively form a single body. Therefore, even if an individual has never committed a particular sin, he should confess it anyway, for if another Jew has committed this sin, it is as if he himself has done so. It is also for this reason that the confession is written in the plural.

**The Codified Commandments**

In his *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*, the Rambam codifies this connection, making clear that this is not an aggadic statement, but a halakhic one. He mentions this in the context of the positive commandments to love God and to sanctify his name. Regarding the former (3), he writes:

Our Sages also said that this mitzva includes calling out to all mankind to serve G‑d, exalted be He, and to believe in Him. This is because when you love a person, for example, you praise him and call out to others to draw close to him. So too, if you truly love G‑d — through your understanding and realization of His true existence — you will certainly spread this true knowledge that you know to the ignorant and the foolish.

Thus, the Sifrei says: “‘You shall love Lord,’ i.e. make Him beloved among the creatures as your father Avraham did, as it is written, ‘The souls that he made in Charan’ (*Bereishit* 12:5).”

The Sifrei means to tell us that Avraham, as a result of his deep understanding of G‑d, acquired love for G‑d, as the verse testifies, "Avraham, who loved Me" (*Yeshayahu* 41:8). This powerful love therefore caused him to call out to all mankind to believe in G‑d. So too, you shall love Him to the extent that you draw others to Him.

The Rambam identifies love of God with spiritual inspiration of one's fellow Jew. Loving God requires recognizing the truth of God's existence, and the beauty of one whose life is rooted in eternity. True love of God recognizes God's care for His creations, Jew and non-Jew alike; thus, one must spread the truth of God so all His creations may benefit from it.

The Rambam adds that to live a life of Torah sincerely, one must be driven by a commitment of love to God, acting in a way that will cause others to love God as well. Doing so sanctifies God's name. In fact, Avraham, the quintessential lover of God, is described repeatedly (*Bereishit* 12:8, 13:4, 21:33) as calling out in God's name. Thus, all those who act with similar love and devotion are sanctifying God's name.

The mitzva of sanctifying the name of God (9), which at times requires martyrdom, also contains a similar element:

This mitzva requires us to publicize the true religion to the masses. This must be done without fear of retribution, to the extent that even if a powerful tyrant tries to force us to deny G‑d, exalted be He, we may not obey him. We must rather unquestioningly submit to death, not even allowing him to think that we have denied G‑d, exalted be He, even if we still maintain belief in Him in our hearts.

This obligation to sanctify the name of God at some points requires submission to death, but the ideal is accomplished through living a life dedicated to Torah, acting as ambassadors for the God we love. Doing so allows others to see, through one's example, the greatness of a Torah-based life. Similarly, the Sefer Ha-charedim (1:9) explains how the mitzva of loving God involves a call to *kiruv*:

The commandment "You shall love Lord your God" also includes a responsibility to talk to others about the Torah and speak convincingly, until one brings the love of God into their hearts.

**The Spiritual Need**

This mandate is mentioned elsewhere, including in the Talmud and the writings of the Rishonim.

*Chovot Ha-levavot* (*Shaar Ahavat Hashem* 6) states:

You should know, my brother, that a believer may attain the utmost limit in the improvement of his own soul in his devotion to God, even approaching the level of the prophets as far as their personal virtues, their praiseworthy conduct, their effort in serving God, and their pure love for Him are concerned. Nevertheless, such a person's merits would not equal those of one who guides others to the right path and directs the wicked back to the service of the Creator. Such a person's merits are multiplied according to theirs, every minute of every day….

If a person rectifies his own soul, his merits are much less. One who rectifies both his own soul and the souls of others, on the other hand, multiplies his merits according to the merits of everyone whom he rectifies before God.

Elsewhere, *Chovot Ha-levavot (Shaar Ha-bitachon* 4) counts inspiring others as a necessary endeavor in order to merit the World to Come:

A person’s good deeds alone do not make him suitable for the reward of the World to Come. G-d considers him suitable only because of two other factors in addition to his good deeds. The first is that he teaches others about the service of G-d and guides them in doing good… The second is God’s kindness and beneficence…

The famed Rav Shlomo Wolbe, in a powerful speech from November 2000 (available at: <http://www.kiruv.com/articles/338/rav-wolbe-ztls-vision/>), cites this passage as an awesome declaration of the importance of reaching out to others. He actively calls upon those who dedicate their lives to Torah study to devote time to this important endeavor, stating that no one can be excused from the obligation.

Similarly, in another powerful speech (recorded in the final chapter of Rav Aryeh Kaplan's *Reaching Out*), Rav Moshe Feinstein discusses the need for each individual's involvement in reaching out to others, elaborating upon the necessity of balance between focusing on one's own personal growth and tending to the needs of others. He uses the example of the tithe customarily given to charitable causes from one’s income; similarly, he argues, one should tithe his or her spiritual time in order to avoid becoming self-centered. (See Year 1, Lesson 30.)

Now that we understand the nature of love and its connection to *kiruv*, we must turn to the trailblazers from our past. What can we learn from them today? In next week's lesson, we will examine Avraham’s love for both God and man as well as Aharon’s educational path in this regard.