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"LAW AND LOVE"

II. Flower Power?

Having said all this (and it should be understood as a self-evident principle), we must add that love itself is an insufficient basis for life. King Solomon, the wisest of all men, proclaimed that *azah ka-mavet ahavah*, "love is as strong as death." Love is powerful, one of the most powerful forces in the universe; but, unregulated and undirected, it can also be deadly and destructive.

Why is this so?

First, without law we cannot distinguish between licit and illicit love; the limits of love's expression are gone, and one does not know where it will lead.

Second, human love, for all its eminence in life and in doctrine, does not remain the highest value of all. Judaism teaches man that he must submit his entire life and his most cherished commitments to the higher authority of God Himself. There is a love that transcends our love for parents and wife and children—and that is love for God. There is a judgment that surpasses any human judgment no matter how ethical—and that is the divine judgment. This, indeed, is the teaching of the *akedah*: Abraham, despite his passionate and deathless love for his only son, bows his head and submits to the divine decree to offer up his only son as a sacrifice. The law of God takes precedence over the love of man.

Third, without law, love not only "conquers all," but it *destroys* all—including itself! Law is that which allows love to endure within the context of life. The *mitzvot* provide the framework in which true and authentic love can flourish; otherwise it is in danger of spending itself prematurely. Look at our society: rarely before in human history has the word "love" been as popular. Despite some recent assertions that "love is dead," it remains the cheapest commodity on the market today. It fills the scrapbooks of countless teenagers, it is the chief attraction of all pulp magazines, it is sentimentally blared forth on television and peddled in the cinema. At the same time, our society is successively discarding all traditional laws and religious and moral restraints. Yet who is it who will maintain that human relations nowadays are usually characterized by an excess of love? The "hippies" recognize this cynicism and cant and hypocrisy that lie at the heart of modern society. They are sensitive to this corruption and this total lack of genuine

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"Law and Love" (Cont'd)

love. Yet they make the disease worse by giving untrammelled expression to what they consider love while at the same time abandoning all laws and restraints which alone can make it meaningful by channeling it properly. Their life is therefore amoral, uncreative, and astoundingly self-centered. Any sane person—especially one over thirty!—can see that this is a caricature of love and life. Like a living cartoon, it exposes the ludicrous bluff and bluster in society; but it has no solutions to offer, no cures for the ills it protests. It cannot be therefore taken as a serious social movement. The trouble with "Flower Power" is that it has no roots and therefore must wither.

So, Judaism appreciates the importance of love as a basic ingredient in successful human relations. But it knows that love cannot flourish if we do not place it in the context of justice, if it does not have the protection of laws and duties and restraints. Those fortunate enough to experience love must direct it and orient it properly, and must always consider its effects on others—on elders, on contemporaries, and even on the unborn.

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