

## Connecting With Hashem Through Ahava

I was driving with my children towards the ocean yesterday. We didn't go to the beach and were careful with social distancing, but we wanted to get some fresh air and have a change of scenery. It was a beautiful drive with the sunroof open, windows down, and we were blasting Uncle Moishy who my son loves to sing along to.

On the way towards Malibu my five-year-old daughter asks me, "Why did Hashem bring the Coronavirus?" That's a question all of us are asking, but it caught me off guard coming from my daughter at that moment. I thought for a minute, then this is the answer I gave her.

I explained an idea I heard attributed to Rav Yitzchok Hutner (1906 – 1980), the long-time dean of Yeshiva Rabbi Chaim Berlin in Brooklyn, New York before establishing Yeshiva Pachad Yitzchok in Jerusalem.

I said to my daughter that Hashem wants a relationship with us. Sometimes He does things to make us think about our lives and what we're doing. With Coronavirus, Hashem is shaking up the entire world and posing that question to everyone. Our response needs to be to speak to Hashem more, daven, do good deeds, and act with kindness.

My daughter took that in, then asked me, "Daddy, when is Mashiach coming?" I smiled at that, looked at her in the rearview mirror and answered that we'd like him to come right away and as soon as possible, but that I would be happy to bring her to some of our wonderful local Rabbis who can better answer that question. With that, we all went back to singing along with Uncle Moishy.

Later in the evening, Rabbi Baruch Gradon shared the following ideas about *Ahavas Hashem* (loving Hashem) in his Thursday night class. I had to listen to the emailed recording ([here](#)) several times to start to scratch the surface of grasping these deep ideas, but I will do my best to accurately relay what I can. If something doesn't make sense here, it's an error on my part.

In parshas Chukas, we are introduced to the Parah Adumah (red heifer). It is the ultimate *chok* (commandment we do not understand). Parah Adumah was so deep that even Shlomo Hamelech, the wisest man, couldn't grasp it.

Shlomo Hamelech said that he would study it and understand it, but it defied his interpretation. From there he understood that every mitzvah he thought he understood, he really did not understand. Although he realized that he did not understand the mitzvahs, he felt privileged to perform them.

Rabbi Gradon asked, why do we feel that we need to understand the mitzvahs?

The focal point of the world is Hashem. We have been given the opportunity to be a part of a world ruled, created, and dominated by Hashem who means only our benefit.

Rabbi Gradon then asked what does it mean, in simple terms that make sense, to *love Hashem*?

The Rambam explains the third mitzvah of *Ahavas Hashem*, that Hashem asked us to love Him. That would be accomplished by thinking and to understand to the best of our ability His

mitzvahs and the way He interacts with our world until we can actually understand something of His mitzvahs, His essence, each one of us according to our own level. When we discover that connection and part of the profile that we can relate to, then the person gets an exotic feeling of spiritual pleasure that is unparalleled.

Why does he get that feeling? It is an awareness of the absolute truth. The *neshamah* inside the person goes on fire and he gets so excited.

When someone hears a good *vort* and it's resoundingly true and you feel the truth, it catches the person in the depths of his essence and he's full of simcha and joy. He has the awareness of something that is Hashem's revelation to the world, the wisdom of Hashem. As he is experiencing that phenomenal pleasure – the Rambam says, *that* is the *ahava* we are talking about.

That the person is connected to Hashem and feels that his pursuit of this understanding, this action has raised him to a new point and it resonates inside him and it connects to the essence of a person, *that* is the expression of *Ahavas Hashem*.

That doesn't mean we have to understand the entire mitzvah. We have to understand the part of the mitzvahs Hashem lets us understand.

Eternal love is based on the appreciation of the quality of the person you are connected to. It is based not on an emotional response, but rather an experiential and intellectual *tefisah* (perception) on what the other person is that fires me up and connects me.

Our job is to love Hashem. One of the ways of connecting to Hashem is by surrendering to Him. So I don't understand the mitzvahs, like *Parah Adumah*, so I don't understand...but after seeing the magnificence of Hashem, the dominion of Hashem, the beauty of Hashem, the compassion of Hashem, and the sensitivity of Hashem – I am happy to surrender.

Rabbi Gradon explains that the success of a good *tefillah* (prayer) is the inspiration that a person gets from davening properly. And it is the experience of *tefillah* that raises the person, that improves the person.

The idea of davening to Hashem is about the privilege of davening.

Just as we said *Na'aseh ve'Nishma* (we will do and we will hear), I don't need to understand the mitzvah. I need to know what the mitzvah is, so I can do it. I'll do it because I am privileged to connect to You. The connection itself awakens in me a passion and that passion is *Ahavas Hashem*.

The awareness of the beauty and the power and the sensitivity of the Force I am connecting to – that is *ahava*. It's an overwhelming sentiment, an overwhelming emotion that a person cannot control.

Rabbi Gradon concludes that our job in life is to connect to Hashem. The mitzvahs are about our ability to become *B'nai Torah*. A *ben Torah* is someone who is connected with Hashem, not someone who just has facts and information in their head.

זאת חוקת התורה (Zot Chukas HaTorah – This is the decree of the Torah) – this is the saving grace of the Torah. That fact that we know we don't understand, we don't take proprietorship of the mitzvahs, we perform the mitzvahs because they are a point through which we can connect to Hashem. That's the *chok* of our life.

When we feel the privilege and the splendor of realizing the beauty of what it is connects us to Hashem, of *Ahavas Hashem*, we will be able to overcome the *nisyonos* (tests) facing us.

*Ahavas Hashem* is the way we will connect with Hashem. It is what we need to do to have the feelings that will allow us to be connected to Hashem with what the Torah calls *ahava*.

Rabbi David Ashear in his Living Emunah email ([#1267](#)) quotes the Sefer Emunah Shleimah which is based on the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov (1698 – 1760) and his students.

The Sefer Emunah Shleimah wrote an imaginary letter that Hashem, *ka'veyachol*, would write to each one of us and it would go something like this:

My dearest beloved child,

I want to remind you that I am your Father and I love you beyond imagination. I am always with you in every situation, in every place. I know what's best for you and I always act with your best interest in mind.

I am bringing you closer to fulfilling your purpose here. You are only able to see a very small part of a much larger picture. Don't think you can understand from your vantage point.

Trust Me. You are always put in the best circumstance for your purpose. I never give anyone a challenge that they can't handle.

Rely on Me. Pray to Me. Speak to Me. I am right next to you, always.

I am the One who brings couples together in marriage. I am the One who heals the sick. I am the One who supports everyone financially. I am the One who brings new life into the world.

Always remember I am controlling everything that happens. And all tests and challenges are only given out of My great love to you.

I never make mistakes. You never have to second guess or blame other people for the situation that you are in.

I do everything and the people are just My messengers. I yearn to be a part of your life.

Please keep Me close.

With great love,

Your Father

If we can take this knowledge and bring it more into our hearts, we will always be happy.

I am fortunate to be able to talk about Hashem with my family outside of shul and religious events. He is a part of our everyday lives. If I can do it, so can you.

Please let me know about a time when you feel especially connected to Hashem. I want to hear about it.

What can we do to bring Hashem into our lives more often?