

## The Letter Alef (א אות א)

אהבה להקדוש ברוך הוא

*Love of the Holy One Blessed Be He*

**T**here is no greater virtue than the love of G-d, for from this love emanates all service of the Holy One Blessed Be He and Judaism (in general). One who serves G-d out of love is incomparable to someone who serves Him merely out of fear. The author of “Sefer HaBrit” has already profoundly clarified in depth, breadth, and length the roots of love and fear with sound reasoning and logic. The words of the sage possess such grace! Fortunate is the man who diligently studies his words! The purpose of this work that lay before me is to write a few observations to myself and others like me in accord with what I have learned from the aforementioned book and other works that my eyes have seen, that they should be for a “remembrance between my eyes”. The Lord Almighty should help me for the sake of the honor of His Name.

Behold, the love of G-d is one of the 613 commandments, and it is a constant mitzvah which a person can fulfill every moment just through remembering. It is performed with thinking and reflection alone, such that when an individual arouses his heart properly, to have a passionate love for G-d, he has performed a great mitzvah.

This group of commandments, which are accomplished with just thinking, are easy to fulfill. This is because a person cannot be for even a moment without some thought. If he ponders strange whims and bad notions instead of thinking about the love of G-d, His fear, and related matters, this is not but a sign of the waywardness of his heart that he has abandoned the “source of living waters” and has chosen to “broken wells”. Instead of doing a mitzvah for which one receives reward, “... the fools have transgressed and are punished.”

Therefore, it is fitting for a man to strengthen himself with great fervor and zeal to banish all strange whims and bad notions and to have holy thoughts, even intermittently. The moment he realizes that he is “doing bad” by having improper thoughts, he should regret them and “flee for his life” by embracing his Creator to the extent that he is capable.

There are two kinds of love. One is the love that relates directly to the self. A person understands that it is the way of a man to love an individual from whom he receives benefit, even a small amount – all the more so, should he receive a large portion. This is even more true if he provides him with all of his financial well-being and bestows other kindnesses upon him. The individual will surely say, “How can I repay this person who has done for me such kindness and granted me such undeserved gifts? Even if I live for one thousand years, I will not be able to repay him! If he should send me in the middle of the night half way around the world, I must listen to his voice! I cannot disregard any of his requests, for I owe him so much!” If his friend saves him from some disease, great pain, awful blemish, or loss of limb, his love will be even greater. And if he saves him from death, his love will

be increased more and more- such that there are multiple levels of love each one greater than the other.

As such, it is most fitting that one should have an extra-double, manifold love for his Creator. For all kindnesses, whether those that come from Heaven or those that come from the hands of men, are truly from Him. It is G-d who puts in the hearts of his creatures to bestow goodness one upon the other. He has many agents of good! If a person has experienced many evils and tribulations and has been saved from them, he is obliged to love the Almighty, who redeems and rescues and answers, and has compassion at all times of suffering and distress. All the more so if the Holy One Blessed Be He has bestowed upon him goodness that his eye has seen no evil, and he has been spared any evil that might have come upon him or visited the world. Such a person has truly been blessed with G-d's kindnesses. It is in this regard that our Sages said, "Every soul shall bless G-d' – for each and every breath one is obligated to give praise." And, so, now shall Israel say, 'With what shall we approach G-d, shall we bow before the Almighty on high – for He has granted us infinite kindness! Even as we angered Him, He did not requite us according to our wrongdoing nor recompense us according to our sins!' The language of the prayer we recite every Shabbat, 'The soul of all life', should never leave our thoughts, "... even if our mouths were filled with song as the sea..., during famine He has provided for us, during times of plenty He has sustained us, from the sword he has saved us..." A person should contemplate in detail the myriad of kindnesses that G-d has conferred upon him from the time of his conception in his mother's womb, and from how many misfortunes he has been delivered &- both those that are revealed

to him and those that are hidden from him (as the Gemara in Nidda, 31 says, “The person who experiences the miracle does not recognize it.”), whether they came upon him and he was rescued from them, whether they were intended, but never materialized. For all of these things a person is required to take notice and to love his Creator with a passionate love.

All of these kindnesses are as nothing compared to the goodness of the soul, for it is indeed an immense goodness that has no equal. For this, Israel should rejoice in its Maker, who has chosen us from all of the nations, given us His Torah of truth, planted within us eternal life, sanctified us with His commandments, chosen us to serve Him, and offer blessings using His name. Through these means we will merit, live, and inherit the goodness and blessing of the World to Come, which is a magnificent goodness. To the extent that our Sages said (Avot 4:17), "Better is one moment of spiritual bliss in the World to Come than the entire life of this world." One should think about this if he serves G-d for the sake of receiving a reward. However, when he reaches the level of servants who attend their master not for the sake of a reward, then let him rejoice more and more for the privilege of being a servant to an exalted and lofty, revered and awesome king whose greatness knows no bounds. He has chosen us from all the nations and heavenly hosts. He has desired and loved us. The Holy One Blessed Be He wanted to bestow merit upon the Jewish people; therefore He has increased for them Torah and mitzvot. This He has desired in His love in spite of our vain humanness. This is a great goodness to which nothing can compare, to one who thinks deeply about the exaltedness of the Creator compared to the lowliness of man. From this one can recognize and know that it is an act of profound

kindness that He has chosen us and brought us close to His service. So much so that in truth the Sages said (Avot 4:17), "Better is one hour of Torah and good deeds in this world than all of the World to Come." A person should imagine what honor and greatness has been bestowed upon a man, even the lowliest of men, whose honor the king has desired and who has been chosen to stand before Him and serve Him even though he is mere flesh and blood, a putrid drop – even more so for all of the outstanding qualities that the Omnipresent has given us. It is beyond our ability to comprehend the magnificence of the kindnesses that our Creator, Fashioner, and Maker has granted us.

In truth, the reason for us to rejoice in all of the good of this world and the deliverance from evil is that through life and its good we will be able to achieve the greatest goodness, which is to serve our Creator. This is the horror of death and evil – that it prevents us from serving our Maker. For without service of our Master, life and death would be the same. Our lives are but a fleeting shadow, and the good and evil of this world are vain – "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity". However, our only desire in life and its goodness is that it seems to advance our service of G-d. This is the intent of our statement, "...until now your mercies have helped us," in the prayer, Nishmat Kol Chai, after "... and even if our mouths were filled with song like the sea". The message is that our true joy, beyond all of Your kindnesses and rescuing us from evil, is that your compassion has allowed us to serve You.

As such, each individual, according to that which the Holy One Blessed Be He has granted him, is obligated to love his Creator for all of the good. One cannot compare the general good which has been conferred upon Israel – He gave us the Torah of truth, statutes,

and mitzvot – to the good that He imparted of strength, health, aptitude, stability, serenity, and peacefulness to an individual for the sake of the service of G-d, may His name be blessed. Someone who has set his place in the beit midrash has received a greater good than others; and someone whom G-d has granted wisdom and knowledge to conduct himself with good and upright attributes and to recognize the disgrace of prohibitions and bad character and to distance himself from them in such a manner that he will find favor and good understanding in the eyes of G-d and men when he does that which is good and upright – this is an immeasurably precious and vast goodness. Such a person is obliged to love his Creator with a passionate love, complementary to the abundance of good that has been imparted to him. He should be very humble and say, "I am unworthy of all of the kindnesses and truth that you have done for Your servant. How can I approach G-d and pay my gratitude to Him?" Like this and other similar things, a living person should notice and deepen and broaden his thinking in pure thoughts until his heart bursts into flames with the fire of the love of G-d. We will write more about this with the help of G-d in the entry of Simcha, look over there, because love and happiness are one.

There is another kind of love that comes from the intellect, which is called the love of the sublime. Someone who has proper intellect and recognizes the virtue of the man of perfection, whose heart desires perfection, avidly loves such an individual for his perfection. All the more so one should love the Creator, may He be blessed, for He possesses the ultimate genuine perfection of all forms of perfection. However, this kind of love is not possible except between two similar beings – in those who desire good and

go in the ways of godliness. Therefore, to the degree that a person increases his involvement in Torah and fulfillment of His mitzvot, just as G-d fulfills them, for "the commandments of G-d are straight" and one goes in His pathways, so shall his love of G-d be amplified due to his further perfection. In the opposite direction, to the extent that a person diminishes his study of Torah and performance of mitzvot, so shall he retreat from his love of G-d. This is either because of dissimilarity to his Creator or that his wrongdoings have become a barrier between himself and his Father in Heaven. The sins are prosecutors that confound his mind with a multitude of thoughts, so that he can no longer remember or be capable of continuous reflection regarding the love of his Creator.

Behold, we are orphans of orphans, and we have become very low and increased impurity and guilt. Our sins withhold good from us, and we are not able to direct our thinking to the love and fear of the revered and awesome G-d. As such, it is good that a person should establish time on a daily basis, or at least semi-frequently, to read those books that discuss fear and love of G-d and similar things – such as the holy book, Reishit Chochma, the works of the holy Shlah, the Chovot HaLevavot, and the book, HaBrit, etc. In these, our words, perhaps there is hope to partially fulfill the mitzvot of to fear and to love G-d. Fear emanates from love – for in accord with the abundance of one's love, either due to the good that one has received from Him or due to His exaltedness and perfection, a person is fearful of violating His will, angering Him, or causing Him any pain. The mitzva of fear is realized with thinking alone, as we will write later in the entry,

"Yirah". As a result of the thought of love, the thought of fear will be derived.

A person is able to awaken love and fear of G-d from every material thing. For example, if a person eats or drinks something which is satisfying to his palate, or he delights in taking walks or trips, or listening to a pleasant voice, or marital intimacy, or making money, which is greater than all of the others, he should take to heart that if he so loves these things which are temporal, vain, and empty, that are here today and gone tomorrow, how much more so should he love his Creator, who is the source of all loves and pleasures and from Whom are the outcomes of all life and all pleasures. He should make his mind flee from the love of physical things and unite with the love of his Maker. The faithful servant should say, "I have loved my Master! How beautiful and pleasant is the love of [spiritual] pleasures." Likewise, when a person is anxious and fearful from any cause of accident, he should say to himself, "What is there to be afraid of in this thing which is of no consequence! It would be better for me to fear the Lord!" He should immediately exchange the "bad" for the "good" since, by doing so, he will receive a good reward and find his redemption.

Just as we said that the achievement of love and fear of G-d is based on the abundance of one's action and his study of Torah and the works of mussar (ethical improvement), likewise according to

the abundance of love and fear of G-d, will the *love of Torah and mitzvot* increase. Love is discernible in the performance of one's beloved's will with all of a person's heart, soul, and wealth. "Many waters will not be able to extinguish the love" (Shir HaShirim 8:7). According to the magnitude of one's love will he be prepared to

exert himself greatly and shoulder a heavy yoke for many days. They will be as but a few days in his eyes due to his love for his Creator, just as in the pursuit of his love for money and other forms of material love. It is sufficient that a person should love Torah and mitzvot as he loves money, his wife, and children. Would that the “holy woman be treated like the inn keeper”! It will be known if a person has reached the level of one who loves his Creator when he rejoices in His word as one who finds a vast treasure and when he is even more particular about the loss of even a moment without involvement in the study of Torah and mitzvot when he is able, than he is about the loss of a great fortune. "Torah is more precious than pearls, and all desires cannot equal it (Mishlei 3:15)!" In truth, our Sages said (Avot 6:2), "Woe unto humanity from the insult of Torah!" There is no greater insult than one who could earn a "great profit" and provide satisfaction to his Maker, and yet, just does not care. If at that same time he engages in levity and idle speech, regarding him the prophet (Yirmiyahu 2:13) says, "They have abandoned Me, the source of living water, to dig cracked wells." Fortunate is the man who listens and values the reward of a mitzva and, by doing so, gives pleasure to his Maker, for "Better is one moment of Torah and good deeds in this world than all of the World to Come." One needs especially to strengthen oneself in a situation where there might be monetary loss, so that he should not come to love money more than his Creator. Whoever abandons the service of his Creator, the study of Torah or any mitzva opportunity, for some inconsequential reason, has demonstrated that he loves that thing more than G-d – great is his shame and the wrath upon him! In everything in which a person is involved in matters of this world, he should

think that it is for the purpose of facilitating his service of G-d, may His name be blessed. All of his actions should be for the sake of heaven, in accord with the verse (Mishlei 3:6), "In all of your ways, know Him, and He will straighten your paths." This is a great principle in Torah, for one who abides by it shall not deviate from the correct path and will weigh all of his deeds on the balanced scale. As a result, his entire life will be considered as one who engaged in the Torah!

There are many kinds of love that are incumbent on a person, all of which emanate from the love of the Creator. What we discussed until now was first, and is followed by,



## אהבת עצמו

### *Love of Self*

**I**t is part of human nature as designed by the Creator that a person should love himself. An individual identifies with himself and loves himself more than the entire world or any thing in the world. He will give everything that he has to save his own life. However, there is an evil sickness, the exploit of the evil inclination, which seizes the eyes of the person and makes a man as one who is sick or intoxicated, who cannot distinguish between his right and left hand. This causes damage unto himself; it destroys his body and soul, even more than his own worst enemy could do! This is tremendous folly! In truth, our Sages said (Sota 3a), "A person does not sin unless a spirit of foolishness enters him." A fool's folly will sometimes cause him to commit suicide, Heaven