

We can do this! The secret to engaging in this spiritual practice that is surprisingly doable, practical and a must.

A teaching from the book *Tanya*, Rav Schneur Zalman of Liadi, Chapter 32, 1796

ספר תניא - פרק לב

והנה על ידי קיום הדברים הנ"ל, להיות גופו נבזה ונמאס בעיניו, רק שמחתו תהיה שמחת הנפש לבדה, הרי זו דרך ישרה וקלה לבא לידי קיום מצות ואהבת לרעך כמוך, לכל נפש מישראל למגדול ועד קטן.

TANYA – CHAPTER 32*

Acting on the advice mentioned above — to view one's body with scorn and contempt, and to find joy in the joy of the soul alone — is a direct and easy path toward fulfilling the mitzvah, (1) "You shall love your fellow as yourself," with regard to every Jew both great and small — in spiritual stature.

כי מאחר שגופו נמאס ומתועב אצלו, והנפש והרוח, מי יודע גדולתן ומעלתן בשרשן ומקורן באלקים חיים?

Since his body is despised and loathsome he will not love himself on account of his body more than he loves his fellow; and as for the soul and spirit, the differences between his own soul and that of his fellow surely will not diminish the love between them, for who can know their (the soul and spirit's) greatness and excellence in their source and root — the living God?

בשגם שכולן מתאימות, ואב אחד לכולנה. ולכן נקראו כל ישראל אחים ממש מצד שורש נפשם בה' אחד, רק שהגופים מחולקים,

How, then, can one claim that his soul is superior to his fellow's?

Furthermore, they are actually all equal; and not only equal yet separate, but, furthermore, they all have one father — one source, and within their source they all comprise one entity. It is on account of this common root in the One God that all of Israel are called "brothers" — in the full sense of the word, and not only figuratively, in the sense of "relatives" or "similar in appearance" and the like; (2) only the bodies are distinct from each other.

This explains how it is at all possible to demand that one love his fellow as he loves himself. Self-love is innate, natural to man; love for one's fellow is not. How can a generated love match a natural one? According to the principle stated here, this is readily understood. One Jew need not create a love for another. The love is an inborn characteristic of his soul, on account of its root in Godliness, which is common to all souls; it is as natural as the love between brothers.

ולכן העושים גופם עיקר ונפשם טפלה אי אפשר להיות אהבה ואחוה אמיתית ביניהם אלא
התלויה בדבר לבדה.

Therefore, there can be no true love and fraternity between those who regard their bodies as primary and their souls secondary, but only a love based on an external factor. Since the body separates us from each other, whereas the soul is that which binds us together, the greater value one places on his body at the expense of his soul, the more conscious he is of the differences between himself and his fellow. These differences require that he create a love for his fellow, and as said above, a created love can never equal a natural, innate love. Therefore, love between people who consider their bodies as primarily important, must be only a love based on some external factor, in which case the love is (a) limited to the importance of the motivating factor, and (b) destined to endure only as long as that factor is valid.

Up to now the Alter Rebbe has discussed the *mitzvah* of loving one's fellow, on its

own merits. He now proceeds to discuss the value of this *mitzvah* as the basis for all the commandments, thereby elucidating yet further the importance of "rejoicing with the joy of the soul alone."

The *Talmud* relates that it was Hillel the Elder who authored the well-known statement that *ahavat Yisrael* (the love of one's fellow Jew) is the basis of the entire Torah. For Hillel had been approached by a gentile who declared that he wished to convert to Judaism, but only if Hillel would teach him the entire Torah while he stood on one foot. Hillel replied, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah; the rest is but commentary..."

An obvious difficulty presents itself. All *mitzvot* fall into either of two categories: (a) *bein adam lachaveiro* — "between person and person," and (b) *bein adam laMakom* — "between a person and God."

It is readily understood how all the *mitzvot* of the former category may be motivated by one's love of his fellow. But how can this love motivate one to fulfill any of the *mitzvot* belonging to the latter category — to observe the Sabbath, for example.

The Alter Rebbe's answer follows from his previously stated principle that the essence of *ahavat Yisrael* lies in giving priority to one's soul rather than to his body. This indeed is the basis of the entire Torah — as the Alter Rebbe continues:

זזהו שאמר הלל הזקן על קיום מצוה זו: זהו כל התורה כולה, ואיך פירושא הוא וכו', כי יסוד ושורש כל התורה הוא: להגביה ולהעלות הנפש על הגוף מעלה מעלה עד עיקרא ושרשא דכל עלמין, וגם להמשיך אור אין סוף ברוך הוא בכנסת ישראל, כמו שכתוב לקמן, דהיינו, במקור נשמות כל ישראל, למהוי אחד באחד דוקא.

This explains Hillel the Elder's statement concerning the fulfillment of this mitzvah: (3) "This is the entire Torah, the rest is but commentary."

For the basis and root purpose of the entire Torah is to elevate and exalt the soul high above the body, to [God], the root and source of all worlds, and also to draw

down the infinite light of Ein Sof into the Community of Israel — as will be explained further, (4), meaning into the fountainhead of the souls of all Israel, so that "the One [God] will reside within [Israel — but only insofar as they are] one," i.e., united.

ולא כשיש פירוד חס ושלום בנשמות, דקודשא בריך הוא לא שריא באתר פגים, וכמו שכתוב:
ברכנו אבינו כולנו כאחד באור פניך.

But this indwelling of the light of Ein Sof in the Community of Israel is impossible if there is disunity between the souls, God forbid, for "God does not dwell in an imperfect, fragmented, place." (5)

So do we say in our prayers: (6) "Bless us, our Father, all as one with the light of Your Countenance," indicating that "the light of God's Countenance" can be revealed only when we are united "all as one."

1. Leviticus 19:18.
2. From a note by the Lubavitcher Rebbe. (The two alternative meanings of "brothers" appear in the commentary of Rashi on Genesis 13:8)
3. Shabbat 31a
4. *Tanya*, Chapter 41
5. Zohar I, 216b
6. Liturgy, final blessing in the Amidah

* Regarding the text in English: The words in italics are the original translation of the Hebrew text, Rabbi Nissan Mindel, 1962. The words in regular non-italics are the commentary in "*Lessons in Tanya*", Rabbi Yosef Wineberg and Rabbi Levy Wineberg, 1987.

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