

A MAN MUST ATTAIN TO THREE LOVES

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THE FOUNDER OF HASIDISM IN THE LATE 18TH CENTURY IN EASTERN EUROPE, WAS A RELIGIOUS GENIUS BY THE NAME OF BALL SHEM TOV OR RABBI ISRAEL BEN ELIEZER. RABBI ISRAEL TAUGHT, "A MAN MUST ATTAIN TO THREE LOVES. HE MUST COME TO LOVE GOD, THE TORAH, AND THE COMMUNITY." FOR THIS RABBI, ALL OF LIFE WAS A STRIVING TO ATTAIN TO THESE THREE GOALS. FOR HIM, A MAN COULD ACHIEVE MANY KINDS OF SUCCESS, BUT IF HE WAS NOT CAPABLE OF THESE LOVES, HE WAS NOT A FULFILLED ~~MAN~~ HUMAN BEING. THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH MEN LIVE, SAID RABBI ISRAEL, IS TO LEARN HOW TO LOVE IN THESE DIMENSIONS.

IN THE 20TH CENTURY WHEN ONE SPEAKS OF LOVING GOD, HE IS GREETED WITH A VACANT STARE. HOW CAN ONE LOVE GOD, WHEN ONE IS UNSURE OF WHAT GOD IS? RABBI ISRAEL WAS NOT UNAWARE OF THIS PROBLEM ~~IN~~ EVEN IN HIS DAY. HE WOULD REFER HIS STUDENTS TO THE ANCIENT PRAYER, "THOU SHALT LOVE THE LORD THY GOD WITH ALL THY HEART, AND ALL THY SOUL AND ALL THY MIGHT." AND HE WOULD POINT OUT THAT THE PRAYER SPECIFICALLY STATES THAT YOU DEMONSTRATE YOUR LOVE FOR GOD BY OBSERVING THE LAWS, THE MITZVOS, THAT ARE ASSOCIATED WITH HIM. IN THIS PRAYER, THE CONCEPT OF THE LOVE OF GOD LOSES ITS ABSTRACT AND VAGUE IMPLICATIONS, AND BECOMES SOMETHING PRACTICAL AND MUNDANE. TO LOVE GOD IS TO FOLLOW HIS COMMANDMENTS. THE COMMANDMENTS, AS WE KNOW, DEAL WITH THE WAY IN WHICH ONE HUMAN BEING IS TO TREAT ANOTHER. IT FOLLOWS THAT TO LOVE GOD IS TO LOVE ONE'S FELLOW MAN, WHO WE ARE TOLD, IS CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD.

THE TALMUD TELLS THE STORY OF A KING WHOSE SUBJECTS CAME BEFORE HIM AND SAID, "O, OUR KING, WE WOULD DEMONSTRATE OUR LOVE FOR THEE, WHAT SHALL WE SAY UNTO THEE? WHAT GIFTS MAY WE GIVE THEE? THE KING ANSWERED, "MY SUBJECTS,

I AM GRATEFUL FOR YOUR GOODNESS IN COMING BEFORE ME TO SHOW YOUR LOVE. BUT WHAT WORDS SHALL YOU UTTER? I KNOW THE SENTIMENTS IN YOUR HEARTS. WHAT GIFTS MAY YOU GIVE TO ME? AM I NOT THE KING, THE RULER OF THE ENTIRE REALM? ON THE OTHER HAND, THE CITIZENS OF MY KINGDOM ARE MY CHILDREN, AND I CHERISH THEM. IF YOU WOULD SHOW YOUR LOVE FOR ME, THEN GO FORTH AND SERVE MY CHILDREN." THE JEWISH INTERPRETATION OF THE LOVE OF GOD PICTURES GOD AS SAYING, "IF YOU WOULD SHOW YOUR LOVE FOR ME, GO FORTH AND SERVE MY CHILDREN."

STILL THERE IS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE LOVE OF GOD AND THE LOVE OF MAN. FOR THE JEWS, THE LOVE OF GOD REQUIRED ALSO A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF AWE AND RESPECT. FOR EXAMPLE, AN ARTIST MAY PAINT PARTIALLY FOR THE ~~XXXXXX~~ SAKE OF BEING PAID FOR HIS WORK, BUT IF HE IS TRULY AN ARTIST, HE PAINTS BECAUSE OF AN INNER COMPULSION, out OF SOME KIND OF LIFE IMPERATIVE. THE RELIGIOUS PERSON HAS THIS KIND OF FEELING ABOUT GOD AND MAN. HIS LOVE OF GOD IS LINKED TO HIS APPRECIATION OF THE WONDER AND MAGNIFICENCE OF THE UNIVERSE AND ITS CREATURES. AN ART CONNOISSEUR MAY HANDLE A PIECE OF SCULPTURE AS A MOTHER MIGHT HANDLE HER BABY. EACH SO APPRECIATES THE WONDER IN HIS HANDS THAT HE IS APPREHENSIVE LEST THE LEAST THING GO WRONG WITH IT. THE RELIGIOUS PERSON HAS THIS FEELING ABOUT THE SPIRIT BEHIND THE UNIVERSE AND HIS CREATED THINGS. THE LOVE OF GOD IS LINKED TO THE DESIRE TO SANCTIFY ALL OF LIFE, BECAUSE THE SPIRIT OF GOD PERVADES THE LIFE OBJECT.

THE HASIDIM TOLD THE STORY OF A CERTAIN UNEDUCATED MAN WHO HAS A HERDSMAN. HE DID NOT KNOW HOW TO READ THE FORMAL PRAYERS. IT WAS HIS CUSTOM TO SAY EVERY MORNING, "LORD OF THE WORLD. IF YOU HAD THE CATTLE AND GAVE THEM TO ME TO CARE FOR, THOUGH I TAKE WAGES FROM ALL OTHERS, FROM YOU I WOULD TAKE NOTHING, BECAUSE I LOVE YOU." WHILE THE LOVE OF GOD IS LINKED TO THE LOVE OF MAN, THERE

IS A DIFFERENCE IN QUALITY. TO LOVE GOD MEANS THAT YOU WILL DO CERTAIN TASKS FOR NOTHING, WITHOUT RECOMPENSE. ONE MIGHT DO JUSTICE TOWARD ONE'S FELLOW MEN BECAUSE HE LOVES HIM, BUT CHARITY AND COMPASSION ARE THE EXTRA QUALITIES WHICH ONE BESTOWS BECAUSE ONE APPRECIATES THE WONDER AT THE HEART OF LIFE, AND BECAUSE ONE IDENTIFIES THIS UTMOST CONCERN WITH GOD HIMSELF. YES, THE LOVE OF GOD, HAS TO DO WITH THE FOLLOWING OF THE LAWS ASSOCIATED WITH HIM, BUT IT INVOLVES SOMETHING BEYOND THAT. A THOUSAND YEARS AGO A JEW NAMED BACHYAH WROTE A GREAT WORK CALLED, "THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, HOV-VOT LAVAVAT", THE LOVE OF GOD ELICITS AN AWARENESS OF THE OBLIGATIONS OF THE HEART. IT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PERSON WHO DOES AS HE IS TOLD, AND A PERSON WHO DOES DOUBLE DUTY, WHO GOES BEYOND THE ACTUAL REQUIREMENTS.

WHEN RABBI AKIBA WAS BURNED AT THE STAKE BY THE ROMANS, HE RECITED THE SH'MA AND "THOU SHALT LOVE THE LORD." WHEN ASKED BY ONE OF HIS TEARFUL DISCIPLES WHY HE SPOKE AT THIS MOMENT OF HIS LOVE FOR GOD WHEN GOD SEEMED TO FAIL HIM, AKIDA ANSWERED, " I HAVE ONLY NOW LEARNED THE MEANING OF THE LOVE OF GOD." TRUE LOVE IS GIVEN FREELY WITHOUT THOUGHT OF REWARD.

THE SECOND LOVE TO WHICH A MAN MUST ATTAIN, TAUGHT RABBI ISRAEL, IS THE LOVE OF TORAH, DEFINED AS OUR RELIGIOUS TEACHING. FOR THE JEW TORAH MEANS MUCH MORE THAN LAW, ALTHO IT CONTAINS MANY LAWS. OUR TORAH, our RELIGIOUS TEACHING, ALSO CONTAINS THE HISTORY OUR OUR PEOPLE, THE TEAR-STAINED AND BLOOD-STAINED SAGA OF THEIR ATTEMPT TO CREATE A LIFE OF MEANING. WE MIGHT SAY THAT THE CONCEPT OF TORAH IS A CONCEPT OF "ETHICAL HISTORICITY". IT IS NOT MERELY THE LAW. IT IS A COLLECTION OF THE EVENTS OUT OF WHICH THE LAW GREW. AS SUCH IT IS NOT JUST A LEGAL CODE. IT IS A LIVING

DOCUMENT. IT IS TOUCHED BY THE DIVINE, BUT IT GLOWS WITH THE HEROIC EXPERIENCE OF A DEDICATED GROUP OF PEOPLE. THE DEEPEST MEANING OF THE TORAH IS THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN EFFORT. YOU CANNOT GIVE UP, IT TELLS US, FOR IF YOU DO, ALL OF THE PAST, WAS IN VAIN. YOU MAY BE WILLING TO YIELD TO SELFISHNESS AND TO TYRANNY IN YOUR GENERATION, THE TORAH CALLS OUT, BUT IF YOU DO, YOU MAKE MOSES AND JEREMIAH INTO FOOLS, AND YOU BELITTLE ALL THE VALIENT MEN AND WOMEN WHO FACED STERNER FOES THAN YOU. HE WHO ATTAINS TO THE LOVE OF TORAH, ATTAINS TO A RESPECT FOR LAW, HE TOUCHES THE FINGER OF GOD, BUT THE DISTINCTIVE QUALITY OF THE LOVE OF TORAH IS THE LOVE FOR THE DIFFICULT STRIVING OF IMPERFECT MEN. HE WHO LOVES THE TORAH UNDERSTANDS WHAT IT MEANS WHEN IT SAYS THAT ALL JEWS STOOD AT MT. SINAI TO RECEIVE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS, EVEN THOSE JEWS YET UNBORN.

THE LOVER OF TORAH SHARES THE ANGER OF MOSES WHEN HE SAW THAT THE PEOPLE HAD BETRAYED HIM AND TURNED TO OTHER GODS AND OTHER WAYS. YET HE IS AT ONE WITH MOSES WHEN HE PRAYED WITH GOD TO FORGIVE THIS IGNORANT AND STUBBORN PEOPLE. THE LOVER OF TORAH UNDERSTANDS JEREMIAH'S REFUSAL TO PRAY FOR THE VICTORY OF THE ARMIES OF AN EVIL JUDEAN KING. HE APPLAUDS THE ATTACK OF THE PROPHETS ON THE PRIESTS WHO ACCENTED RITUAL AND FORGOT ETHICS, AND HE TREMBLES WITH THE JEWS IN EXILE AS THEY BRAVELY CLUNG TO THEIR FAITH AMIDST ANIMOSITY AND SUSPICION.

THE MAN WHO LOVES TORAH IS A RESPECTER OF THE PAST WHO UNDERSTANDS THAT CHANGING SITUATIONS REQUIRE CHANGING ANSWERS, BECAUSE HE HAS NOTED THAT HIS PEOPLE DID THE SAME THING AND IT IS SO RECORDED IN OUR RELIGIOUS TRADITION. SUCH A MAN IS ONE WHO HAS UNDENIABLE FAITH IN THE FUTURE FOR HE HAS FOLLOWED THE FAITH DEVELOPMENT OF HIS PEOPLE OVER HUNDREDS OF YEARS, AND HE HAS SEEN THAT HIS PEOPLE WERE SUSTAINED BY THIS KIND OF WORKING FAITH.

THUS THE MAN WHO LOVES TORAH STANDS WITH ONE FOOT IN THE PAST AND ONE IN THE FUTURE, SO THAT HE MIGHT BE MORE CREATIVE IN THE PRESENT. THIS IS THE MAN WHO KNOWS THAT THERE IS A MEANING TO LIFE DELICATELY EMBROIDERED ON THE LEAVES OF THE TREES, ETCHED INTO THE RIVER BANKS, AND ENGRAVED ON ROCK FORMATIONS. FOR HIM, NO PASSING EVENT, HOWEVER OPPRESSIVE, SHALL ALTER HIS CONVICTION THAT ALL WHICH HE BEHOLDS IS POTENTIALLY A BLESSING.

THE THIRD LOVE TO WHICH A MAN MUST ATTAIN SAID RABBI ISRAEL, IS THE LOVE OF THE COMMUNITY. NOWHERE DID RABBI ISRAEL SAY THAT WE MUST ATTAIN TO THE LOVE OF MAN, YET THIS IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF EACH OF HIS THREE CATEGORIES OF LOVE. CERTAINLY MEN CANNOT LIVE AFFECTIONATELY TOGETHER A REVERENCE FOR THE PURPOSEFUL COMMUNITY. IN MODERN HISTORY MANY NATIONS HAVE TRIED TO CRUSH THEIR CITIZENS BY MISUSING THE MACHINERY OF THE COMMUNITY. IN THE BACKLASH AGAINST THE EXCESSES OF GOVERNMENT, MEN HAVE PROJECTED THEMSELVES INTO THE SPACELESSNESS AND TIMELESSNESS OF UNCONTROLLED INDIVIDUALITY. THE BEATNIKS AND THE MATERIALISTS, THE SUPREME CONFORMISTS, ARE AT ONE IN THEIR DISDAIN FOR THE COMMUNITY. "EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF" IS INCREASINGLY THE THEME OF OUR DAY. WE MIGHT CALL THIS THE L.S.D. GENERATION, L.S.D., THESE BEING THE INITIALS FOR LET SOCIETY DROWN. THIS KIND OF "GO FOR YOURSELF" PHILOSOPHY WOULD BE UNTHINKABLE TO RABBI ISRAEL. FOR HIM, AS FOR THINKING JEWS IN EVERY GENERATION, THE INDIVIDUAL CAN BE SANCTIFIED ONLY IN THE SANCTIFIED COMMUNITY. THE INDIVIDUAL CAN EXPERIENCE THE DEEPEST MEANING OF LIFE ONLY IN THE COMMUNITY WHICH SEARCHES MOST CONSCIENTIOUSLY FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE. THE JEW COULD NOT CONCEIVE OF THE GOALS OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE COMMUNITY AS BEING SEPARATE. THEY ARE AS ONE. THE COMMUNITY IS THE GUARANTEE OF THE AUTHORITY OF THE LAW. THE LAW GUARANTEES THE RIGHTS OF THE INDIVIDUAL. HENCE, THE INTELLIGENT INDIVIDUAL WILL PURSUE THE WELFARE

OF THE COMMUNITY. HE WILL MINISTER TO ITS HEALTH AND NOURISH ITS STRENGTH.

IT CERTAINLY IS NO SECRET THAT FOR JEWS OF PAST GENERATIONS, THE IDEA OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE HAD A MYSTIC QUALITY. HOWEVER BAD THINGS WERE IN A GIVEN COUNTRY, HOWEVER MISERABLE WERE THE JEWS IN A CERTAIN GEOGRAPHICAL AREA, THEY ALWAYS GAINED STRENGTH FROM THE THOUGHT THAT, AS JEWS, THEIR FATE AND FORTUNE WAS LINKED TO AN ETERNAL COMMUNITY. THAT IS, TO A PEOPLE WITH AN ON-GOING ROLE TO PLAY. JEWS OF SPAIN MAY HAVE DIED IN THE INQUISITION OF 1492, BUT THEIR MEANING SURVIVED IN THE JEWS WHO FLED TO HOLLAND AND ITALY. SIX MILLION JEWS WERE SWALLOWED UP BY HITLER, BUT THEY HAVE NOT BEEN TOTALLY LOST SO LONG AS THERE IS THE STATE OF ISRAEL, AND SO LONG AS AMERICAN JEWS RETAIN A SENSE OF THE MISSION OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE. AGAIN "LOVE" OF COMMUNITY IS NOT AN ABSTRACTION. IT MEANS A SENSE OF THE WORTH OF, IT MEANS A RESPECT FOR, IT MEANS A MYSTIC UNION WITH, IT MEANS A COMMITMENT TO LABOR ALONGSIDE OF.

RABBI ISRAEL TAUGHT - A MAN MUST ATTAIN TO THREE LOVES, "THE LOVE OF GOD, THE LOVE OF TORAH, AND THE LOVE OF COMMUNITY!". LEARNING HOW TO LOVE MATURELY IS THE WORK OF THE RELIGIOUS MAN.