

The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash

Parashat Hashavua
Yeshivat Har Etzion

This parasha series is dedicated
Le-zekher Nishmat HaRabanit Chana bat HaRav Yehuda Zelig zt"l.
PARASHAT VA-ETCHANAN

This shiur is dedicated in memory of
Dr. William Major z"l.

Love of God and Torah Study
Rav Yehuda Rock

This week, instead of analyzing a chapter or unit in its entirety, as we usually do, we shall focus on a Midrash of *Chazal* on some verses from our *parasha*. This Midrash, aside from reflecting what appears to be the *peshat* (plain reading) of the structure of the unit in question, also includes fundamental substance with all-encompassing ramifications for one's personal spiritual world.

"Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God – the Lord is One.

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

And these things, which I command you this day, shall be upon your heart, and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and speak of them when you sit in your home, and when you walk on the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up."

(*Devarim* 6:4-7)

"'And these things, which I command you this day, shall be upon your heart' – Rabbi said: Why was this said? Because it is written, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart' – I do not know how one loves God. Therefore it says, 'And these things, which I command you this day, shall be upon your heart' – meaning, place these things upon your heart, such that you will thereby recognize He Who spoke and the world came into existence, and you will cleave to His ways."

(*Sifri Devarim, piska* 33)

The Rambam's Approach

The Rambam addresses this Midrash, or hints to it, in his *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* (positive *mitzva* no. 3), in two places in his *Mishneh Torah* (Laws of the Foundations of the Torah, 2:1; Laws of Repentance, 10:6), and in his *Guide for the Perplexed* (III, 28). This demonstrates that the Rambam understood that this Midrash is a cornerstone in the Torah's view regarding love of God. In our

analysis of this Midrash, we shall examine the Rambam's comments on it and see how he interprets it; thereafter, we shall humbly propose a different explanation.

The Midrash addresses the relationship between the verses comprising the first section of *Shema*: "Because it is written, 'You shall love...' I do not know how one loves God. Therefore it says, 'And these things... shall be....'" The verse, "These things... shall be upon your heart" – i.e., study and internalization of the commandments or, in other words, Torah study, is meant to supply the answer to the question that arises from the command to love God, which appears in the previous verse.

After noting the structural relationship between the verses, the Midrash goes back and interprets the verse concerning Torah study, and the way in which it provides an answer to the question: "Place these things upon your heart, such that you will thereby recognize He Who spoke and the world came into existence, and you will cleave to His ways." The words of the Midrash, "Place these things upon your heart" are simply a paraphrasing of the verse itself. The continuation, "Such that...," comes to explain how the commandment of Torah study will lead to the desired result. According to the beginning of the Midrash, Torah study is meant to lead to love of God. But by the end of the Midrash, in the description of the results of Torah study, there is no mention of love of God. What happened to that goal? Clearly, the "cleaving to His ways" that is mentioned at the end of the Midrash itself represents love of God.

The question to which Torah study is meant to provide the answer is formulated in the Midrash thus: "I do not know how to love God." There are two ways of understanding this question. It may be a question as to the substance and essence of this love – i.e., what is love of God and how is it expressed? Alternatively, the question may concern the ways and means of attaining this goal – i.e., how does one achieve love of God? The words, "Such that... thereby...," in the answer of the Midrash prove that the question is being asked in the second sense; it concerns ways and means. But the fact that at the end of the Midrash the expression in the Torah, "love of God," is exchanged for a new formulation – "cleaving to His ways" – tells us that in the wake of the commandment of Torah study, we learn not only the ways and means of attaining love of God, but also a new interpretation of the concept of loving God: cleaving to His ways.

Thus, the question that arises in the wake of the commandment to love God is a dual one: what is love of God, and how it is attained? The answer is that the way to love God is through Torah study, and this itself also answers the first question, since love of God manifests itself in cleaving to God's ways. We must also explain the significance of loving God as cleaving to His ways, and how this second expression is meant to shed light on the first. Also, as to the process itself, how is Torah study meant to bring a person to the love that is cleaving?

Rashi understands that the Midrash is discussing not only the means of loving God, but also its essence. He writes, in his commentary on these verses:

"'And these things...' – what is love? 'These things shall be...' – such that you thereby recognize God and cleave to His ways."

At the end of the Midrash, there is a duality in the formulation of the result of Torah study: (1) "You recognize He Who spoke and the world came into existence"; (2) "And you cleave to His ways." As noted, the beginning of the Midrash states explicitly that the desired result is love of God, and it is clear from both expressions at the end that it is specifically the second (the "cleaving to His ways"), as an experiential, existential expression rather than a purely intellectual one, that is meant to fulfill the role of loving God. This being the case, we must ask: what is the function of the first expression? Why is the intellectual aspect of knowing God introduced here at all?

To summarize the initial structural analysis of the Midrash: Torah study leads to recognition of God and love of God, and this teaches us the meaning of love of God and cleaving to His ways. It remains for us to understand how Torah study leads to love of God, what the role of knowledge and recognition of God is in this context, and how to understand love of God which is cleaving to His ways.

Let us begin by looking at what the Rambam has to say, and noting the difficulties arising from his approach. Thereafter we shall propose a different understanding.

In order to understand the Rambam's approach, let us first examine and compare what he says in the *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* and in the *Mishneh Torah* (Laws of the Foundations of the Torah):

The command to love:

1. contemplation
2. knowledge of God
3. love of God

Source in *Chazal*:

"Because it is written, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart' – I do not know how one loves God. Therefore it says, 'And these things, which I command you this day, shall be upon your heart' – meaning, place these things upon your heart, such that you will thereby recognize He Who spoke and the world came into existence..."

Sefer Ha-mizvot, positive *mitzva* no. 3:

"And the third command is that we are commanded to love God. This means that we must contemplate and consider His *mitzvot* and His actions
In order that we may understand Him,
And take supreme pleasure in understanding Him; this is the essence of the love that is commanded."

Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Foundations of the Torah, 2:1-2

"This honored and awesome God commands that we love Him.... What is the way to love Him?

When a person contemplates His wondrous, great actions and creations, and perceives in them His immeasurable and infinite wisdom,

Then he immediately loves and praises and exalts and experiences a great desire to know the great God, as David said: 'My soul thirsts for the living God...'

As our Sages taught, concerning love: 'For thus you recognize Him Who spoke and the world came into existence.'"

In his Laws of Repentance, the Rambam writes (10:6):

"It is known and clear that the love of God is not bound up in a person's heart until he meditates on it properly at all times and will abandon everything in the world except for it, as He commanded and said – 'With all your heart and with all your soul' – but with knowledge he shall know Him. And according to the knowledge, so the love: if there is little (knowledge), there will be little (love); if there is much (knowledge) then there will be much (love). Therefore a person must direct himself to understand and plumb the spheres of wisdom and insight that tell him about his Maker, in accordance with the power that a person has to understand and to conceive of it, as we explained in the Laws of the Foundations of the Torah."

[This represents the formulation recorded in almost all of the manuscripts (see *Yad Peshuta*, and *Yalkut Shinuyei Nuscha'ot*, Frenkel edition). The words, "... Until he meditates... and with all your soul" are not the end of the sentence, such that it would mean that the love of God is not bound up in a person's heart unless he meditates on it; rather, these words are an elaboration on the matter of this love that is under discussion (in keeping with the Rambam's words in law 3). The sentence is then completed later on: "Except by knowledge; that he should know Him." In other words, it is only through the knowledge that a person comes to have of God, that the love of God is bound up in his heart, such that he meditates on it always....]

What is common to the Rambam's comments in *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* and in the *Mishneh Torah* is that in both places he introduces knowledge of God as a link connecting meditation and study, on one hand, and the love of God, on the other. Hence, according to the Rambam, the words of the *Sifri*, "You come to recognize Him Who spoke and the world came into existence," are describing knowledge of God, which represents the link between Torah study and love of God. Torah study is a means of coming to love God – not directly, but rather via knowledge of God. Torah study leads to knowledge of God, and knowledge of God leads to love of Him.

With regard to the way in which Torah study leads to knowledge of God, the Rambam offers a similar explanation in both sources: the Torah appears here as one of the expressions of God's will in the world; hence, as with any study of His creations and His actions, study of Torah also gives a person some understanding of His characteristics. Since the Rambam understood that Torah study appears here as only one example of the expression of God's will in the world, he does

not give special emphasis to it specifically, but rather speaks mainly about His actions and His ways in Creation, in a general way: "That we should consider and look at His *mitzvot* and His commands and His actions." In the *Mishneh Torah* the Rambam makes no specific mention of Torah study at all: "That a person should consider His wondrous, great actions and creations... to understand and to plumb the spheres of wisdom and insight that tell him about his Maker...." Apparently, to the Rambam's view, the centrality of Creation as the object of meditation and study, along with Torah, is the reason why *Chazal*, in their description of knowledge of God, refer to God specifically as "He Who spoke and the world came into existence."

As to the type of knowledge that is required, and the manner in which this knowledge of God leads to love of Him, the Rambam's explanation in his *Mishneh Torah* differs from that offered in *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*. In *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*, the connection between knowledge and love is the pleasure that accompanies the intellectual activity of recognizing and internalizing the depth of the phenomenon that is the object of meditation. Love is defined here as this very pleasure: "And the pleasure one experiences in meditating upon Him is the epitome of pleasure, and this is the essence of the love that is commanded." This love is not a special category of its own; rather, it exists in the recognition of and meditation upon an object which a person considers and studies. What transforms this pleasure into love of God is simply the fact that the object of meditation here is God, via His ways and His actions.

In the *Mishneh Torah*, in contrast, the Rambam speaks of specific knowledge of the wonder and power of Creation and of God's actions, reflecting God's wisdom and His greatness. This knowledge leads to love that is praise and glory, on one hand, and a desire to know God better, on the other. There is a dual definition here of the love of God: as a sense of praise and wonder at God, on one hand, and as a thirst and longing for Him – i.e., for knowledge of Him – on the other. It would appear that these two stages in the love of God have a causal connection between them: one's wonder at God's wisdom is what gives rise to the desire to know more. The foundation of love for God is the sense of awe in the face of God's wisdom and greatness, and its apex is the thirst for deeper knowledge and greater awareness of Him.

Concerning the connection between knowledge of Creation and love of God, which is the way of coming to view God's wisdom in Creation, Rambam elaborates further on in his Laws of the Foundation of the Torah (4:12): "When a person considers these things and recognizes all of the creations... and perceives God's wisdom in all creatures and all creations, he loves God even more and his soul will thirst and his flesh long to love the blessed God." Rambam maintains this position in *Moreh Nevukhim* (Guide for the Perplexed), where he writes (III, 28): "But the other correct views of all of this reality, which are all of the many types of theoretical sciences... even though the Torah does not refer to them explicitly... nevertheless it refers to them in a general way, as it is written, 'To love the Lord...' And we have already explained, in the *Mishneh Torah*, that this love comes about only through recognition of the reality as it is, and through considering God's wisdom in it, and we also mentioned there the comment of our Sages, of blessed memory, concerning this matter."

Rambam also repeats in *Moreh Nevukhim* the identification of the love of God with a thirst for knowledge of Him: (I, 39): "But it is written, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart...' – what this means is that you should make the understanding of Him the point of all your actions."

Since the love flows not from the process of knowledge but rather from its content, the power of the love is proportional to the scope of the knowledge, as the Rambam explains in his Laws of Repentance: "If there is little (knowledge), there will be little (love); if there is much (knowledge) then there will be much (love)." To the extent that a person's recognition of God's power and wisdom broadens, so his awe for God and his desire to know more about Him will increase. This view is different from the one offered in *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*, where the Rambam speaks of the pleasure inherent in the actual process of knowledge; here, the scope of knowledge has no influence on the pleasure that is gained.

It is possible that the difference between the *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* and the *Mishneh Torah*, when it comes to the formulation of the substance of study and meditation that lead to knowledge of God, arises from a difference in the knowledge that is being sought. In *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*, the knowledge that is sought is recognition and understanding of God via expressions of His will. To the extent that the expression of His will is more direct, so the knowledge of Him will approach more closely to His essence. The Torah, representing not only an expression of God's will but God's direct word to us, is a more direct expression of His will than all of His deeds and creations. For this reason, while Rambam includes all of God's actions within the objects of meditation that lead to knowledge of Him, he emphasizes especially the study of Torah: "That we consider and look at His *mitzvot* and commands and actions."

In contrast, in the *Mishneh Torah*, the knowledge that is being sought is recognition of the wisdom and greatness of the Creator. This knowledge is not a function of the directness of connection between the expression of His will and His essence, but rather of the power of His wisdom and greatness that are reflected in His creations. On this level, it is possible that the Rambam maintained that it is specifically God's actions and creations that reflect more of His wisdom and greatness than the Torah does. For this reason, in the Laws of the Foundations of the Torah he makes no explicit mention of Torah study at all, even though this is the example upon which the Midrash in the *Sifri* is built.

From *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* it appears that the Rambam did not regard the expression from the *Sifri*, "And cleave to His ways," as a source for a special interpretation of love of God: firstly, it seems unlikely that the pleasure associated with intellectual understanding can be described as "cleaving," and secondly, the pleasure arises from the actual process of understanding and recognition; it does not relate directly to the ways of God. This, apparently, is the reason why the Rambam rejects his first interpretation of the *Sifri*, as recorded in *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*, in favor of the interpretation that he offers in the *Mishneh Torah*.

In the *Mishneh Torah*, the pinnacle of the love of God – whose foundation is in praise and awe at God's wisdom and greatness as reflected in Creation – is the thirst and longing for greater

knowledge. This thirst is described in the Laws of Repentance (1:3,6) as an obsession. This, apparently, is how the Rambam understands the "cleaving" referred to in the *Sifri*. This thirst is for further knowledge of God's wisdom in His actions and in His creations, and this seems to be how Rambam interprets the formulation of the *Sifri*, according to which the cleaving is to God's ways. "His ways," then, refers here to His attributes as expressed in His actions and creations.

Uniqueness of Torah Study

The Rambam's approach raises difficulties. Even if we accept the idea of contemplating Creation, both as a means of recognizing the wisdom and greatness of the Master of the world as reflected in them, and to be filled with awe, and as an expression of the longing and thirst to observe the hand of He Who spoke and the world came into existence, this does not seem to be what the Midrash means – for several reasons.

It cannot be that the significance of Torah study is simply an example of contemplation of different expressions of God's will. Unquestionably, in the Torah, in the teachings of *Chazal* and in Jewish tradition as a whole, the uniqueness of Torah is such that its importance goes far beyond the importance of contemplating Creation. There can be no doubt that the Rambam knew this, and therefore he does not write what he has to say about this Midrash in his Laws of Torah Study. The Rambam does not base the importance of Torah upon those principles arising from his teachings in the Laws of the Foundations of the Torah and in the Laws of Repentance, but rather regards those principles as another layer, but not the essence, of the significance of Torah study; that layer is the main content of knowledge and love of God, not of Torah study. It is not logical that such a relatively insignificant meaning could be expressed in verses that represent the main source for the commandment of Torah study. Apparently, the Rambam believed that the Midrash is not trying to interpret the plain meaning of the verses, but rather is teaching a homiletic lesson on the juxtaposition in the Torah of the command to love God and the command to study Torah. However, it appears to me that the tone of the Midrash conveys the sense that it is speaking about a central foundation for the commandment of Torah study. Likewise, the Midrash does not adopt the usual formula, "Why is... juxtaposed to...", but rather, "Why is it written... because it is written... I do not know... Therefore it is written...." If this were merely a lesson based on the juxtaposition, the Midrash should have used the appropriate model. Therefore it would seem that the Midrash is not teaching a lesson based on the juxtaposition, but rather commenting on the flow or sequence of the verses in the Torah, as a heading that describes the desired objective followed by a description of the means for attaining that objective. Since this verse represents the main source for the commandment to study Torah, it turns out that the Midrash is expressing a fundamental principle concerning the significance of the commandment of Torah study.

It seems, furthermore, that the expression, "cleave to His ways," is not a stylistic innovation by Rabbi, in this Midrash, but rather is borrowed from another verse further on in Moshe's speech: "For if you will properly observe all of this command which I command you to do, to love the Lord your God, **to walk in all of His ways and to cleave to Him...**" (*Devarim* 11:22). In this verse, love of God is described explicitly as cleaving to Him and walking in His ways. Our Midrash simply condenses the two expressions into a single one – "Cleaving to His ways." Thus, the "ways"

referred to here are not, as Rambam maintains, His actions and deeds in Creation, but rather the modes of behavior that are appropriate to follow before God. This conclusion does not conform at all with the Rambam's interpretation.

It seems that we need to interpret the Midrash in the *Sifri* in a different way. The knowledge of God that is mentioned in the Midrash ("You recognize Him Who spoke and the world came into existence") is not a link between Torah study and love of God, but rather the result of Torah study – an additional result, over and above love of God. Torah study leads to two independent results: knowledge of God and love of Him.

The opening verse of the unit, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God – the Lord is One," calls for recognition of the uniqueness of God as Creator of everything ("the Lord is One"), and His kingship and mastery over everything ("the Lord our God"). The Midrash hints to this in the words, "You recognize He Who spoke and the world came into being," in other words, he recognizes the uniqueness of the Creator of all the world.

Recognition of God, which is mentioned in the first verse, does not raise the same questions as the second verse. However, in the wake of the question concerning the love of God in the second verse, the Midrash concludes that the function of Torah study is to lead to love of God, and that the relationship between the third verse and the second is the relationship between means and goal. What this conclusion suggests is that the second verse is the heading of the unit, establishing a general goal for the rest of the unit. The means to attain that goal are set forth in the following verses. Hence, the first verse is also part of the general heading, and it too establishes a general goal for the rest of the unit. The Midrash explains that the means that are set forth in the following verses are the means not only to attaining the love of God that is mentioned in the second verse, but also to the recognition of God that is mentioned in the first verse. Thus, the unit commands Torah study as a means, which leads to two separate goals: recognition of God and love of God. For this reason the Midrash concludes with the words, "Place these things upon your heart, such that through this you will recognize Him Who spoke and the world came into being, and you will cleave to His ways."

How does Torah study lead to recognition of "He Who spoke and the world came into being?" The answer is that the act of studying Torah is an educational act, with the educational message being the centrality of God's will. For the purposes of recognition of God, this means the centrality of God's will on the theoretical, speculative level, within the framework of a person's beliefs and views. When a person devotes his time to examining and clarifying the will of God, in such a way as to make God's word his criterion for practical decisions, he is gradually educated towards a recognition of the One Who commands as the Master of everything, Whose commandments are worthy of observance and Whose will is worthy of being studied and known.

The essence of the educational message is on the level of theoretical content, but its ramifications extend to the existential level. The obsessive, seemingly absurd involvement in God's command, to the extent that man devotes every available moment – whether he is sitting alone at home, or while he is walking or journeying, with no need for any other occupation – to

exploration of God's demand of him, to a clarification of its exact content, and to engraving this upon his heart, even setting aside regular times for this occupation, at night when he lies down to sleep and in the day when he arises, is devoid of significance or purpose by any natural, mortal yardstick. Such an obsession can arise only from an almost pathological love. The filling of every available hour to a clarification of the principles and sub-sections of God's word educates man as to the centrality of God's will – not only on the speculative level, but on the existential level, too. Thus the Torah scholar is educated towards love of God.

The value of Torah study is not limited to a purely educational means. At the beginning of our analysis of the Midrash we noted that the replacement of the expression "love of God" with "cleaving to His ways" teaches us that by contemplating the connection between Torah study and love of God, we learn about the nature and qualities of love of God. Indeed, this is so. Torah study educates one to love God – not in the manner of an external pedagogic device, but rather as an expression of the love of God itself. The way to draw hearts to the value of love of God is through a practical action that expresses that love. This point requires further explanation.

Let us consider the following parable: let us assume that I am holding two pages that my wife has created. The one is a drawing, a work of art, giving expression to emotions that arise from the very depths of her soul. The other is a shopping list. I may examine the drawing and thereby meditate on her personality and learn about it, and be awed by her ability and her wisdom. I may also contemplate the shopping list and learn its details out of a desire to ensure that she will indeed receive those items, to the extent that this is possible. Which of these two actions – meditating on the drawing, or meditating on the shopping list – is a greater expression of my love for my wife?

The concept of love, in the Torah's view, is not identified with a set of subjective feelings of pleasure and closeness – even though such feeling may and should feature prominently within a loving relationship. The essence of love, according to the Torah's view, is placing the loved one at the center of the lover's set of desires and aspirations. The emphasis is on the loved one himself, rather than the feelings towards him. The true lover concentrates all of his desires and aspirations around the welfare of the beloved. In the case of a human beloved, then at the center of the existential world of the lover there will be concern for the needs of the beloved and fulfillment of his desires. Where the beloved is the Master of the universe, we cannot speak of needs; we can only commit ourselves to fulfilling His will.

For this reason, contemplating the shopping list – an act expressing the desire to internalize the knowledge necessary to cater to my wife's welfare and to fulfill her will – is a greater expression of love towards her than being impressed by her work of art. Likewise, contemplating God's command is a greater expression of love towards Him than meditating on His creation is. It is possible that a person who meditates on Creation will have a clearer perception of God's hand in the world. It is possible that he will have a better understanding of God's ways in the world, and will feel greater awe at God's wisdom and His greatness than that experienced by the Torah scholar. But the Torah scholar, who devotes his time to a clarification of the content of God's commandments, out of a seemingly absurd concern for the guardianship of God's will, is a greater

lover of God. Thus, Torah study is not only a means to inculcate knowledge and love of God in a person's heart, but also is itself the supreme expression of love of God. The Midrash refers to love of God as "cleaving to His ways" because love of God is expressed in a powerful desire to know God's word and to fulfill it, with existential cleaving to the ways that God desires. The existential nature of Torah study is accepting the yoke of God's Kingship willingly, with enthusiasm and love. The filling of a person's life with expressions of love of God is the way to inculcate love of God in one's heart.

Clearly, this is something of a paradox: in order to achieve love of God, a person must perform acts of Torah study, which express love of God. But the function of the command to study Torah is to initiate and maintain this cycle. It is possible that a person will start studying Torah out of coercion, because of the command, and will gradually come to be educated to recognize and love God; his learning, too, will gradually become a full expression of his love of God. This represents positive feedback in an ongoing process in which man inculcates within himself the love of God, by focusing and concentrating, through cleaving and love, on expressing that very love. The practical expression – of the educational effort as well as of the existential connection itself – is Torah study. Thus, Torah study does not appear here as a means to an external end, but rather it itself is both the means and the end.

As noted, Torah study here is of a dual nature: on one hand, it is itself a fixed, daily expression of the love of God; on the other hand, its focus is the educational objective of inculcating this love in a person's heart. This status of Torah study as an educational act is the reason why the text begins with the command to teach Torah to one's children and students, and only afterwards goes on to speak about the practical involvement in Torah by the person himself ("And you shall speak of them..."). The involvement in Torah represents a broadening of the basic model of teaching Torah. Halakha regards both the command that a person engage in Torah himself and the command that he teach Torah as focusing on the educational objective, to the extent that only a person who represents the object of Torah teaching that has been commanded, is commanded to engage in Torah and teach it (*Kiddushin* 29b).

It seems, then, that from the halakhic perspective, the direct content of the command to study Torah is the educational act, aimed at inculcating Torah and love in the heart of the person who is being educated – whether he be the child, the student, or a person teaching himself - as arising from the structure of the unit as interpreted by the *Sifri* and from the emphasis on teaching one's children. For this reason, the formal halakhic obligation depends on the educational act, in accordance with the halakha in *Massekhet Kiddushin*. But the command also gives rise to another level: the educational command to study Torah establishes, as the supreme objective, the love of God, on one hand, while on the other hand assuming that this love is expressed in the act of Torah study as an expression of cleaving to God's commandments. Hence, the direct command also gives rise to a general value-orientated statement: Torah study, as the fulfillment of love of God, is itself the objective, and it is the purpose of the entire educational endeavor.

Translated by Kaeren Fish

