

## Hashem Loves Us

### Part 1 – Sources and How It Is Expressed

It is well known that my *Rebbe* and *Rosh HaYeshiva*, Rav Noach Weinberg, *zt"l*, put a great emphasis on the *Sheish Mitzvot Temidiot* (The Six Constant Mitzvot). Among those mitzvot is *Ahavat Hashem* — to love Hashem. As true as that is, he ultimately spoke much more about the importance of us knowing that *Hashem loved us* than *our obligation* to love Hashem.

In fact, Rav Noach even had a proof that Hashem loved us. He explained that a creation of something *from* nothing is inherently a creation of something *for* nothing. Before we were created, we didn't deserve to exist. Since we didn't exist, then by definition, we couldn't have deserved anything. Therefore, our creation must have been a completely undeserved gift. What could explain that Hashem gave us existence, our most valuable possession, as a pure act of giving? It must be that He loves us. We need to appreciate why it is so essential to realize and remember that Hashem loves us.

The third *perek* of *Pirkei Avot*<sup>1</sup> tells us:

*Chavivin Yisrael, she'nik're'u banim la'Makom. Chibah yeteirah noda'at lahem she'nik're'u banim la'Makom, she'ne'emar, "Banim atem la'Hashem Elokeichem"* (Yisrael is precious, since they are called children of Hashem. A greater [sign of] endearment [is that] it was made known to them that they are called children of Hashem.)

What does it mean that we, the Jewish people, are called *banim la'Makom* (children of Hashem)? Obviously, that Hashem loves us.

It is fascinating that the Mishnah says — even greater than being *banim la'Makom* (children of Hashem), a greater sign of our endearment to Hashem is that we were told we are *banim la'Makom*. What does that tell us? If it is greater to be told something than for that thing to be true, that thing must not be so obvious! The Mishnah is, therefore, telling us something remarkable — it is not so simple to know that Hashem loves us. Apparently, we need to constantly be reminded, which is what Rav Noach understood so well.

We find the love of Hashem all throughout *possukim* (the verses in the Torah)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks discusses this in an essay he wrote on *Parshat Eikev*:

Something implicit in the Torah from the very beginning becomes explicit in the book of *Devarim*. G-d is the G-d of love. More than we love Him, He loves us.

Here, for instance, in the beginning of *Parshat Eikev*:

If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then G-d your L-rd will keep His *covenant of love* [*et ha-brit ve-et ha-chessed*] with you, as He swore to your ancestors. He will *love* you and bless you and increase your numbers.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Pirkei Avot* 3:14

<sup>2</sup> *Devarim* 7:12–13

Again, in *Eikev* we read:

To G-d your L-rd belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. Yet G-d *set His affection* on your ancestors and *loved* them, and He chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today.<sup>3</sup>

And in a verse from *V'etchanan*:

Because He *loved* your ancestors and chose their descendants after them, He brought you out of Egypt by His Presence and His great strength.<sup>4</sup>

[Rabbi Sacks points out that] the book of *Devarim* is saturated with the language of love. The root (אהב) appears twice in *Shemot*, twice in *Vayikra* (both in chapter 19), and not at all in *Bamidbar*. In *Sefer Devarim* it appears 23 times.

[He also emphasizes that] nothing could be more misleading and invidious than the Christian contrast between Christianity as a religion of love and forgiveness and Judaism as a religion of law and retribution... When the New Testament speaks of love, it does so by *direct quotation* from *Vayikra* ("You shall love your neighbor as yourself") and *Devarim* ("You shall love G-d your L-rd with all your heart, all your soul and all of your might").

What is radical about this idea is that the Torah insists, against virtually the whole of the ancient world, that the elements that constitute reality are neither hostile nor indifferent to humankind. We are here because Someone (i.e., Hashem) wanted us to be — One Who cares about us, watches over us and seeks our wellbeing.

### **We also find the love of Hashem all throughout the davening (Prayers)**

Not only do we see this idea of Hashem loving us in many different *possukim*, we also find it all throughout the davening.

In *Birkat Kriat Shema* every morning, we say:

*Ahavah rabah ahavtanu* ([With a] great love You have loved us)... *chemlah gedolah viseirah chamalta aleinu* (with overwhelming compassion have You had compassion on us)... *u'vanu vacharta mikol am v'lashon* (and You chose us from every nation and language), *v'keiravtanu l'shimcha hagadol* (and You brought us close to Your great Name)... *Boruch atah Hashem habocher b'amo Yisrael b'ahavah* (Blessed are You Hashem, Who chooses His nation Yisrael with love)."

And in *Birkat Kriat Shema* every evening:

*Ahavat olam beit Yisrael amcha ahavta* ([With an] eternal love for Your nation, the house of Yisrael, have You loved us)... *v'ahavt'cha al tasir mimenu l'olamim* (and don't ever remove Your love from us). *Boruch atah Hashem oheiv amo Yisrael* (Blessed are You Hashem, Who loves His nation Yisrael).

The language of these *brachot* is based on *possukim* in *Yirmiyahu* (31:2), *Malachi* (3:17) and *Yeshaya* (63:9).

In the beginning of the fourth *bracha* of the *Yom Tov Amidah*, we say:

*Atah v'chartanu mikol ha'amim, ahavta otanu, v'ratzita banu, v'romamtanu mikol ha'leshonot, v'kidashtanu b'mitzvotcha, v'keiravtanu Malkeinu la'avodatecha, v'shimcha hagadol v'hakadosh aleinu karata.*

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<sup>3</sup> *Devarim* 10:14–15

<sup>4</sup> *Devarim* 4:37

“You chose us from every nation, loved us and were pleased with us, [You] elevated us from every language, and sanctified us with Your *mitzvot*, and, our King, [You] brought us close to Your service, and Your great and Holy Name is called upon us.”

The *Maharal m'Prague* in his *Siddur (I'Chol v'Shabbat)* discusses the *bracha* of *Ohev Amo Yisrael* in *birkat Kriat Shema* of *Maariv*:

Although love is [generally] between *shavim v'domim* (equals and those that are similar), love is still possible for Hashem, may He be blessed, since Yisrael are called *banim l'Makom* (children to Hashem). It is known that a father loves his child because his child comes from him, and whatever comes from a person is very connected to him. Yisrael were created from Hashem. And, although everything that was created was [obviously] from Hashem, there was still nothing [else] which came from His essence and from the beginning like Yisrael... Therefore, Yisrael was the creation which came from Hashem, and since Yisrael was “*maaseh Yadav* (the work of His hands),” there is a complete connection...

In terms of people, a parent loves the child, while the love of the child towards the parent is not as great. Since the child came from the parent, flesh from his flesh, this love is possible. But since the parent didn't come from the child, the love [of the child] is not as great towards the parent.<sup>5</sup>

The Ramban explains:

Because we say in [the first *parsha* of] *Kriat Shema* — “And you should love G-d your L-rd” and [in the second *parsha*] “to love G-d your L-rd,” the Rabbis established the *bracha* of *Ahavah Rabah* [and *Ahavat Olam*] before [the *Shema*] in *Shacharit* and *Arvit*. That is to say, just like we [are commanded to] love *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, [we need to remember that] He also loves us. As it says — “‘I love you,’ says Hashem.”<sup>6</sup> And it also says — “Because Hashem loved you.”<sup>7</sup>

It was not because we were greater than the nations that Hashem desired us and chose us, but [simply] from His love for us. And that is [the meaning of] “*HaBocher b'amo Yisrael b'ahavah* — The One Who chooses His nation Yisrael with.”<sup>8</sup>

We find the love of Hashem for Yisrael expressed in many statements of *Chazal* (our Rabbis of blessed memory)

The *Medrash*<sup>9</sup> explains the *possuk* in *Kohelet*<sup>10</sup> — “*Eit le'ehov* — [There is] a time to love,” according to the *possuk*<sup>11</sup> where Hashem says, “I love you.”

Another *Medrash*<sup>12</sup> declares:

Come and see just how much mercy and merit *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* has for Yisrael.

The *Radak*<sup>13</sup> explains the *possuk* of “Hashem loves *tzadikim*” to mean that Hashem loves Yisrael, who are the *tzadikim* among the nations.

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<sup>5</sup> *Netivot Olam* — *Netiv Ahavat Hashem* 5:1

<sup>6</sup> *Malachi* 1:2

<sup>7</sup> *Devarim* 7:8

<sup>8</sup> *Tefillah l'Moshe* — *Otzar Peirushei HaRishonim al HaTefillot*

<sup>9</sup> *Kohelet Rabba* 3:8

<sup>10</sup> *Kohelet* 3:8

<sup>11</sup> *Malachi* 1:2

<sup>12</sup> *Mechilta d'Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai, Shemot*

<sup>13</sup> *Tehillim Mizmor* 146:8

And finally, we see in the *Medrash*<sup>14</sup> that [Yisrael is] called *Ach v'Rei'ah* (brother and friend), *Ahuv* (beloved), *Ben* (child), and *Eved* (servant).

### How is the love of Hashem expressed?

The *Medrash*<sup>15</sup> writes: *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is concerned for the difficulties of Yisrael.

Just like a father is obligated to redeem his son and teach him Torah, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* also redeemed Yisrael and teaches Yisrael.<sup>16</sup>

The *Medrash*<sup>17</sup> tells us that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is [even] concerned for the money of Yisrael.

And finally, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* called Yisrael “*Kallah*” (a term of affection) in ten places.<sup>18</sup>

### Hashem has a special love for Yisrael

The *Torat Avot (Slonim)*<sup>19</sup> writes:

The love of Hashem toward us is *temima* (complete), with no *p'gam* (blemish) at all. And all of the [other] loves in this world are *k'eyin u'k'effes* (virtually nonexistent) compared to this love... Every single Jew [therefore] needs to feel this love.

Yisrael is more precious to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* than the *Malachei HaShareis* (the Ministering Angels).<sup>20</sup>

Hashem loves *mishpat* (justice) and He also loves Yisrael. However, the love that He has for Yisrael is greater than the love He has for *mishpat*.<sup>21</sup>

The *Tanna D'vei Eliyahu*<sup>22</sup> tells us:

[Hashem says:] There are two things in the world which I love with [all] My heart, a complete love. They are Torah and Yisrael, but [it is difficult to know] which of them comes first. The way of people is to say the Torah is first. But I say that Yisrael is first... If not for Yisrael, the world would not have been created, and it would have [even] been destroyed.

[Hashem] only placed His Name on Yisrael exclusively, *k'vi'achol* (so to speak).<sup>23</sup> *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and *K'nesset Yisrael* are called “*echad*.” This without this is not called “*echad*.”<sup>24</sup>

There were four *kinyanim* (acquisitions) that [Hashem] acquired in His world, and Yisrael was one *kinyan*.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Medrash Zutah, Shir HaShirim, Mehadurat Buber, Parsha Aleph*

<sup>15</sup> *Sifri u'Pesikta Zutrata, Parshat Re'eh 16:13*

<sup>16</sup> *Medrash Bamidbar Rabba 17a, Medrash Tanchuma, Shelach #14*

<sup>17</sup> *Vayikra Rabba 8:4 and see Gemara Yoma 39a*

<sup>18</sup> *Medrash Devarim Rabba 2:37*

<sup>19</sup> P. 233

<sup>20</sup> *Gemara Chulin 91b*

<sup>21</sup> *Likutei Maharam 115*

<sup>22</sup> *Rabba, Perek 14*

<sup>23</sup> *Medrash Bereshit Rabba 18:5*

<sup>24</sup> *Zohar, Chelek Gimmel 93b*

<sup>25</sup> *Gemara Pesachim 87b, Pirkei Avot, end of Perek Vav*

The *Tikunei haZohar*<sup>26</sup> explains the *possuk* in *Shir HaShirim*<sup>27</sup> — “A love as fierce as death”:  
The separation of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and His Divine Presence from Yisrael is as difficult as the separation of the *neshama*, the *ruach*, and the *nefesh* from the body!

*Medrashim* tell us:

Every term of endearment that there is for *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, Yisrael is [also] called by it. Yisrael is called — *Elokim, Chacham, Dodi, Bachurim, Chasid, Kadosh*.<sup>28</sup>

All of the nations are called *nochrin* (foreigners) before *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, and Yisrael are called *kerovim* (relatives).<sup>29</sup>

*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is a relative to us. This is an explicit *possuk* — “*Banim atem la’Hashem Elokeichem*.” So how could *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* judge Yisrael? Necessarily, we have to say that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will need to distance Himself from us... However, Yisrael understands that this *richuk* (distancing) is for the sake of the *kiruv* (closeness). And afterwards, this will cause an even greater *ahavah u’devekut* (love and connection).<sup>30</sup>

The difference between the creation of Yisrael and the creation of the nations is... that everything was created for the sake of Yisrael, while Yisrael was created for its own sake... Ultimately, everything returns to the *possuk* — “*Banim atem la’Hashem Elokeichem*.”<sup>31</sup>

The *Ikar hakavod* (essential honor) for Yisrael is that they are called *banim* (children). And it is [specifically] through the Torah that Yisrael are called *banim*.<sup>32</sup>

Yisrael is called *banim la’Makom*, and [furthermore, due to] the love which He loved them, He called them — “*B’ni Bechori Yisrael* (My son, My firstborn, Yisrael).”<sup>33</sup>

Since [Yisrael] is the first of all the creations, and only they [truly] know Hashem, that is why they are called “*Bechori* (My firstborn).”<sup>34</sup> Hashem knew Yisrael first, and then all the other nations. That is why they are the “firstborn.”<sup>35</sup>

The *Gur Aryeh*<sup>36</sup> explains the *possuk* — “Hashem says, ‘*B’ni Bechori Yisrael* — My firstborn son is Yisrael’.”<sup>37</sup>

Yisrael precedes the other nations just like the first-born precedes the other brothers.

The *Maharal* doesn’t mean that Yisrael actually *came to the world* before the other nations. On the contrary, Yisrael was actually the final nation to come to the world. Rather, the intention here is to the *machshava rishona* (initial thought).

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<sup>26</sup> *Tikun Aleph* 18a

<sup>27</sup> 8:6

<sup>28</sup> *Medrash Tanchuma, Parshat Kedoshim* 5

<sup>29</sup> *Medrash Esther Rabba* 7:13

<sup>30</sup> *Sheim m’Shmuel, Moadim, Rosh Hashanah*

<sup>31</sup> *Gur Aryeh, Devarim* 14:1–2, Note #167

<sup>32</sup> *Imrei Emet, Bamidbar, Shavuot*

<sup>33</sup> *Gemara Shabbat* 31a, *Shemot* 4:22

<sup>34</sup> *Shemot* 4:22

<sup>35</sup> *Gur Aryeh, Shemot* 4:16

<sup>36</sup> *Devarim* 14:1-2, note #165

<sup>37</sup> *Shemot* 4:22

It is written in *Netzach Yisrael*:<sup>38</sup>

No other nation is called “*ben* — child” to Hashem more than Yisrael. But even so, the name “*ben*” is not such an enhancement for them, since a person could have two children. Therefore, Yisrael is called “*b’ni bechori* — My first-born son” since it is impossible for one to have two different first-born children. And from this we can understand that it would be impossible for there to be another nation that would be called “*banim* — children.” Hashem is intrinsically one, and since a child is from His true essence, His son must necessarily also be one.

The *Netzach Yisrael*<sup>39</sup> asks:

What does it mean that Yisrael are called “*Banim la’Hashem*”? There is no doubt that all of existence is nourished from Hashem, but not everything is comparable. Some [elements of creation] are drawn from His true essence and are close to Him, while others are not, due to their distance. Since this nation of Yisrael is drawn from His true essence, in this way, there is more of a joining and connection to Hashem. They are, therefore, called “*banim* (children).” We can understand from this that it would be impossible for any other nation to [also] be called “*banim*”... This is just like there can only be one nation which is “*reishit* (first),” and created first from Hashem.

## Hashem also loves non-Jews

The *Rinat Dodim*<sup>40</sup> explains –

*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* loves Yisrael more than all the nations of the world, even though they are [also] *chavivim* (precious) to Him. As the Rabbis tell us, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* rebuked the Angels [when the Egyptians were drowning in the *Yam Suf*] — “The work of My hands is drowning in the sea and you want to sing *Shirah* (a song of celebration)?” In any case, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* loves Yisrael [more] than all the nations. And there is no difficulty in those words that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* loves the nations... We never said that He loves them in general, except that there are some among them who fulfill the seven [Noachide] *mitzvot*, which is all that they are commanded, and a few who fear Hashem.

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<sup>38</sup> Ch. 11, p. 65a

<sup>39</sup> Ch. 11, *Samech Hei, Be’er HaGolah, Be’er HaShlishi* 42b

<sup>40</sup> Rav Eliyahu Luntz, a *mekubal* who lived in Germany (1564–1636), *Shir HaShirim* 3:9