

SECRET LOVE, SWEETEST, FOR A PRICE

Parshas Saitzai

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

a) Hashem's love of Israel is mentioned many times in NACH (Prophets and Scriptures) (Malachi 1:2; Jeremiah 31:3; Hoshaiah 11:1; etc. etc.) but only once in Chumash. Even there it is not mentioned straightforward, but indirectly, in the context of Bilaam Horosho who wanted to curse "But Hashem your G-d refused to listen to Bilaam, and... reversed the curse to a blessing for you, because Hashem loved (loves) you" (Parshas Saitzai 23:6). [Another passage speaks of Hashem's love of Israel, Devorim 7:13, but it is in the context of numerous blessing (love you, bless you, multiply you, etc., etc.)].

This reversal from Bilaam's intention into a blessing seems to be basic in the very priestly blessing, recited before the Mitzva of Birchas Kohanim. The Bracha of the Kohanim is "Boruch... and commanded us to bless His people Israel with love BEHAVO". Now where in the Torah is it commanded to recite the blessing "with love"? Love is not mentioned in the commandment to bless Israel, in Parshas NOSO (Bamidbar 6:22-27). The answer is found in the above statement, Hashem reversing Bilaam's intentions into blessing, KI AHAIVCHO, because Hashem loves you. In the very blessing of the Kohanim, Rashi indicates a "transformation" into a gracious countenance. Also in the prayers of the listeners (to the priestly blessing) there is a reference to a "transformation" into blessing.

The reason for this INDIRECT form of Hashem's love of Israel is that in this indirect form the love is a higher level of love, the secret love. In marriage it is not the loud music accompanying the bride and groom after the chupa. That is only an introduction to the validity of chupa, in the YICHUD privacy room.

The priestly blessings with love (in the context of transformation instead of a direct statement) is a reference to that higher level of love, Hashem's secret, private, love of Israel.

The less ostentation, the less display, the more privacy, the deeper the relationship. The more secretive Hashem's love of Israel, the deeper and more enduring, the more confirmed and validated the priestly blessing with love.

Now, is this love showered upon the Jew freely, no obligation whatever on the part of the receiver of that love? Or perhaps there IS a price, a requirement on our part? The answer is, yes there is! The love coming gratuitously does not carry the weight and can sometimes be uprooted. Only love earned, love resulting from meaningful deeds, can attain deep roots, to gain permanence. What is that price? It is love of fellow Jews, אהבת ישראל.

One of the reasons Benjamin is called 'ידיד ה', Hashem's beloved (Devorim 33:12) is that he is the prototype of the loving brother. He had no part in the sale of Joseph (and would not tattle against his brothers though he knew about it). It is for this reason, according to Sifri (ibid), that the Bais Hamikdosh was built in his share in Jerusalem.

b) Although the Mitzva of the priestly blessing is meant chiefly for the Kohanim, nevertheless, it is also observed by non Kohanim. So states the Jerayim. By accepting the Kohanim's blessing (listening attentively), the whole congregation in attendance observe and fulfill the mitzvah.

Accordingly, the condition of love, as stipulated by the Kohanim "to bless Israel with love", applies equally to all listeners in the congregation. A warm feeling of love for all Jews must permeate every listener in order to share in the observance of the Mitzvah.

This may be the clue to understand an (otherwise) difficult law in our Sidra: "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the congregation of Hashem ... because of the fact that they did not greet you with bread and water on the road when you were leaving Egypt, and because he hired against you Bilaam to curse you."

It should be inquired why the need for two reasons, unless they are intertwined. Especially according the Ramban that the first reason applies only to Amon, and the second reason only to Moab, these are two separate rules, why are they given in a combined form?

As the above, however, that Hashem's love of Israel is not given gratis, but well-earned as the reward for love and compassion for fellow Jews, the combined form is most felicitous. For Amon's ruthless character (refusing to sell bread and water to needy people, which is the basis for disallowing him into the Jewish fold in marriage) stands in direct contrast to the character of the Jewish people of love and compassion for fellow Jew, the basis for Hashem's love mentioned in the second reason.

c) Commentators found sources of inspiration for the month of Elul. One is the first letters of **אני לדודי ודודי לי**, “I am my Beloved’s and my Beloved is mine” from **שיר השירים** (6:3), eloquently expressing the mutuality of love between Hashem and Israel. The second is **איש לרעהו ומתנות לאביונים**, “sending delicacies to one another and gifts to the poor” (from Scroll of Esther 9:22). These two sources combine to manifest the dependence of Hashem’s love of Israel upon Israel’s care for one another.

d) Getting closer to Rosh Hashana it is most timely, in connection with the above principle, to consider the following: Rosh Hashana is the chosen day when we inaugurate (in renewed spirit) the Almighty as our King. The very mitzvah to blow the shofar on Rosh Hashana is based on this proclamation of Hashem’s kingdom. Says Reb Akiva in the Mishna (Rosh Hashana 32a), without the blowing of shofar how could one pronounce Malchios (Kingdom)? The wordless sound of the shofar is the ultimate human “expression” promulgating Heavenly Kingdom on earth. It is mind-boggling, **לעילא ולעילא**, higher, higher, exceedingly beyond human utterance.

[The Jewish people must elevate themselves to this spiritual level becoming proclaimers of Hashem’s Kingdom. Thus, the shofar is blown following Zichronos, Hashem’s covenant with Israel, and again following Shofros, the Sinai experience, receiving the Torah.]

e) Hashem’s Kingdom is everlasting. **מלכותך מלכות כל עולמים...**, “spanning eternities” (Tehilim 45:13), and proclaimed with renewed enthusiasm on Rosh Hashana. Where is the source that this proclamation takes place on Rosh Hashana? Expounds the Talmud (Rosh Hashana 32a) it is the phrase **אני ה' אלקיכם** (I am Hashem your G-d). Since as Creator, He is Creator of all the universe and all humanity, not only Israel, the phrase is said to refer to “Kingdom”, the capacity of which He may be called “King of Israel”. **“מלך ישראל וגואלו”** (King of Israel and its Redeemer) (Isaiah 44:6). Redeemer of Israel whom He loves (**וגואלו**). **“זמביא גואל - באהבה מלך עוזר...”**

Now this phrase **אני ה' אלקיכם** is mentioned in the portion of **פאה**, (Vayikra 23:22) the mitzvah to leave the gleanings of the harvest for the poor. The next passage, in proximity, speaks of Rosh Hashana (ibid 23:23,24). From this proximity we learn that **אני ה' אלקיכם**, Kingdom, is proclaimed on Rosh Hashana. We see here that Malchios, Hashem’s Kingdom of Israel out of love, stems from Israel’s character of love and care for the poor.

