

## Nourishment for the Neshama

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### Wednesday, January 12, 2011

#### Understanding unconditional love – Ein Od Milva

Most of us have not grown up with unconditional love. To me, unconditional love would have meant that my mistakes and immaturities and areas in need of improvement would have been addressed with a wise, loving parent, guiding and explaining while never letting me doubt that I am lovable. Having to sit with my foot incapacitated for over a month now, I have fallen into being dependent again on people. But instead of being small, I have a lifetime of experience behind me, being near 60. I have raised children while trying to give unconditional love (and can't claim to have succeeded totally but I do think my children know I love them unconditionally even if I didn't handle every situation with unconditional love. At least I hope so.) And as a Baale Teshuva, over my lifespan so far, I have grown enormously in Ahavas Hashem, in loving Hashem, because I have come to understand the total unconditional love that He sends to us in a two world perspective, although sometimes His love does not seem sweet to us who live in this physical reality.

Let's consider being dependent as if we were growing up with certain insights that I have had from depending on the kindness of friends. Firstly, it feels so good when someone does what we need with a smile, calmly, as if this is the highlight of their day, to help us. We feel important to them and as though they truly care about us. Naturally, just like anything that feels good, we want more! But as an adult, we realize the sacrifice the person is making and even though it is from the heart, we understand the boundary – ask only for what you need, not more. With that understanding (available from an adult perspective), it becomes much easier to understand little children who demand more and more! They want the love more than they want what they are asking for! One insight that I have is to help a child who is asking for more time, more enjoyable activities when there is no more time or energy in a day is to make sure that the child is completely in touch with how much you appreciate their seeing your love for them! If a parent is hearing demands, it is natural to conclude that the child is hungry for the love of the parent and is using her imagination to apply that love that seems like a great natural resource to more of her goals for her life! Very natural, and it shows what the child's interests are and that the child is planning and thinking, all good! All of a sudden the wisdom of "How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen so Kids Will Talk" sets in. In that book, the authors suggest that we give the child in fantasy what they want even though we can't actually deliver it. Why? Why does this make sense? I now understand it as a way of helping the child make a boundary for themselves on what they ask for, while feeling loved and cherished. This is the key. The answer is not always yes but yes I always love you.

And isn't that Hashem's message to us as well?

Let's look at this from another perspective, the perspective of pain. The wound on my foot is healing slowly but gets very irritated by the removable cast when I wear it. Last night, the wound started bleeding a little, just as a sore top layer of skin got irritated a little too much. Some first aid cream and peroxide took care of the wound but, being in a dependent frame of mind, I actually complained to a few friends who have been sharing my ordeal. One called me up to sympathize. Another emailed me good advice about taking care of it and letting the doctor know. Again, why did I feel the need to reach out? It is not something that I would ever have done before this. The reason was that I felt safe enough to share it, that my friends would care. And if they care, then I feel a little better because I am not so alone with it, not so anxious.

And isn't that why we pray to Hashem as well? When we know how much Hashem does for us, that He is in reality doing everything for us, we feel safe sharing our innermost struggles knowing how much He cares. He is head over heels in love with us! And He wants to give us what is good for us! And He CAN give us what is good for us! We are kids in the palace of the King!

Sometimes we have to make ourselves into the type of person who merits such good. With Hashem, the main way that we do this is by recognizing that He is the King. There is no other power, no king, no ruler, who has the ability to respond to our every whim as does Hashem. No contest. But He is not going to give to us this way unless we recognize it, which means that we stop believing the illusion of autonomous existence inherent to our having free will. Hashem gave us free will so that we can pierce the illusion and then submit our free will to this higher understanding, to use it to feel compelled and absolutely honored to serve the King. And when we do, we become part of Him and are maintained in good form. Key here is that we have to be sincere, have a sincere relationship where He trusts that we truly understand His Kingship.

What does that mean, that we understand His Kingship? Let's first say what that does not mean. It does not mean that we are something less because we serve Hashem. It does not mean that we are obscured or unable to actualize our potential or contribution to this world. What understanding His Kingship means is that every day, we make our choices with the intention of declaring that our relationship with Hashem is paramount in our minds affecting our actions and our thoughts. Every person is here on a mission to bring their talents and special gifts to the world. And every person is here to fix something inside of us, to repair a negative concept. Each day Hashem sends us back our soul, our holy energy, for us to use in ways that bring Him nachas ruach. If our energy diverts to something that is not pleasing to Hashem, we have to try to shepherd it back, remembering that He is King.

So, why don't we do this? Introspection and intention can be a challenge. A person needs to reflect and correct herself. And, if we did not grow up with unconditional love, we may have damage that prevents us from admitting our faults. We may not be strong enough to do this. Yet, we know that we are to do cheshbon hanefesh, try to correct ourselves where we can. This must be done in a loving way and not a harsh way – small steps, a gentle but committed loving internal accounting.

And what if we don't do it? Chances are that if we cannot look inside, our insides will simply rule. Because the Yetzer Hara has strength only in this world and because Hashem has given the Yetzer Hara the power to test us and to challenge us through our free will, if we are not aware of the yetzer hara, using cheshbon hanefesh to examine our deepest intentions, and return our will to serving Hashem, inevitably we will see our way clear only to serving ourselves and the El Zar within us. Before I began learning, I had no idea that there was something called a Yetzer Hara who runs the world. I had no concept of free will as something to use to bring out more of the aspect of Hashem's image within me. Rather, I thought of free will as freedom, to seek happiness, to choose my destiny in this world. This results in our knowingly or unknowingly bringing pain to others and damage to the spiritual realms, albeit we may find that we have "taken for ourselves" something that appears pleasant and satisfying. But Hashem, being a Shepherd, led me through and opened my mind so that I could find in my inner being what was truly pleasant and satisfying, fulfillment through ahavas and yiras Hashem which brings true simchas hachaim.

When we depend on Hashem for our needs and see others as His Creations for whom He is also providing, what comes into focus is an ineffable dimension affecting ourselves and affecting our world, a dimension of existence that is crucial for our eternity. What we think is too hard is really what we are here to do. Approach it. Hashem will help. He loves us! But we have to ask and we have to be sincere in seeing Him as Absolute King, ein od milvado.