YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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student summaries of Sichot of the Roshei Yeshiva

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Dedicated in memory of Rabbi Jack Sable z”l and

Ambassador Yehuda Avner z”l

By Debbi and David Sable

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**Parashat LEKH-LEKHA**

**Sicha of HarAV MOSHEH LICHTENSTEIN**

**Avraham, My Friend**

Summarized by Yair Oster

Translated by David Strauss

If each of us were asked to name the most exemplary figures in all of Jewish history, it is very likely that Avraham Avinu and Moshe Rabbeinu would top our lists. What distinguishes them specifically as towering figures on a historical scale is the fact that they represent two tracks in the service of God: Avraham represents love, and Moshe represents fear.

**Avraham and Moshe – Love and Fear**

How do we see that Avraham represents love? In many places in the Torah, Avraham is referred to by the designation *ohev Hashem*, "God's friend," "He who loves God":

But you, Israel, My servant, Yaakov whom I have chosen, the seed of Avraham My friend [*ohavi*]. (*Yeshayahu* 41:8)

Did You not, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and give it to the seed of Avraham Your friend [*ohavkha*]forever? (II *Divrei Ha-Yamim* 20:7)

In the *midrash*, Avraham merits a similar designation:

"Those that love Me [*le-ohavai*]and keep My commandments" (*Shemot* 20:5). "Those that love Me" – this is Avraham Avinu, and the like. (*Mekhilta De-Rabbi Yishmael*, *Yitro*, *Massekhta De-Bachodesh* 6)

Moshe, on the other hand, is referred to by terms that clearly describe him as serving God by way of fear:

My servant Moshe is not so; he is trusted in all My house. (*Bemidbar* 12:7)

So Moshe the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moav, according to the word of the Lord. (*Devarim* 34:5)

Moshe is the "servant of God" in the full sense of the term.

This distinction is noted also in *Avot De-Rabbi Natan*:

These eighteen [people] were called servants: Avraham was called servant, as it is stated: "And I will multiply your seed for My servant Avraham's sake" (*Bereishit* 26:24)… Moshe is called servant, as it is stated: "My servant Moshe is not so" (*Bemidbar* 12:7).

These twelve [people] were called chosen [*bachur*]: Avraham was called chosen. From where do we know this? "Who did choose Avram" (*Nechemya* 9:7). Moshe was called chosen, as it is stated: "Had not Moshe His chosen" (*Tehillim* 106:23); "the minister of Moshe, from his youth up [*mi-bechurav*]." (*Bemidbar* 11:28).

These six were called beloved [*yedidim*]: The Holy One, blessed is He, was called beloved, as it is stated: "What has My beloved to do in My house" (*Yirmeyahu* 11:15).

These five were called friends [*ahuvim*]: Avraham was called a friend, as it is stated: "The seed of Avraham my friend" (*Yirmeyahu* 41:8). (*Avot De-Rabbi Natan*, version 2, chapter 43)

While Moshe is included in the list of servants and chosen ones, he is not included among the beloved and the friends.[[1]](#footnote-1)

It is important to emphasize that these values ​​do not necessarily contradict each other, but can rather coexist. The verses of the Torah themselves already emphasize the value of combining the two elements. A mere eight verses after the verse, "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (*Devarim* 6:5), there appears, "You shall fear the Lord; and Him shall you serve, and by His name shall you swear" (*Devarim* 6:13). So too in the opposite direction, three verses after, "You shall fear the Lord your God, Him shall you serve, and to Him shall you cleave, and by His name shall you swear" (*Devarim* 10:20), we find, "Therefore you shall love the Lord your God, and keep His charge, and His statutes, and His ordinances, and His commandments, always" (*Devarim* 11:1). That is to say, the Torah itself recognizes not only the independent importance of the two different tracks of serving God, but also the added value of their union.

The relationship between God and one who serves Him out of love is different from the relationship between God and one who serves Him out of fear, as is expressed in the Torah. When God wanted to dispense punishment, he could not keep it from Avraham: "And the Lord said: Shall I hide from Avraham that which I am doing" (*Bereishit* 18:17). Since Avraham is God's friend, he is treated as His confidante, as one from whom God does not wish to withhold information.

God's attitude toward Moshe is different. It is true that God tells Moshe about the punishment that He wishes to impose upon Israel, but he does so in a totally different manner:

And the Lord spoke to Moshe: “Go, get you down; for your people, that you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have dealt corruptly.” (*Shemot* 32:7)

God informs Moshe that He has a role for him to play. God does not feel obligated to tell Moshe of His plans out of a sense of great closeness, as was the case with Avraham, but only because Moshe would be the ablest executor of the mission that had to be carried out.

It might be possible to liken the relationship between God and Avraham to the relationship between a father and his son, and the relationship between God and Moshe to the relationship between a manager and a senior employee. The army Chief of Staff tells his son about his plans because he feels close to him and he trusts him. He shares those plans with his general commanders also because he trusts them, but in a professional sense, and not because of personal fondness.

The *gemara* in *Sota* discusses the relationship between these two tracks:

It has been taught: R. Meir says: It is stated about Iyov, "one that fears God" (*Iyov* 1:1), and it is stated about Avraham, "you fear God" (*Bereishit* 22:12). Just as the fear of God stated about Avraham was out of love, so too the fear of God stated about Iyov was out of love. From where do we know this about Avraham himself? As it is written: "The seed of Avraham who loved Me" (*Yeshayahu* 41:8). What is the difference between one who acts out of love and one who acts out of fear? The difference is that indicated in what was taught: R. Shimon ben Elazar said: Greater is he who acts from love than he who acts from fear, because with the latter [the merit] remains effective for a thousand generations, but with the former it remains effective for two thousand generations…

Two disciples were once sitting in the presence of Rava. One said to him: In my dream they read to me: "O how great is Your goodness which You have laid up for those that fear You" (*Tehillim* 31:20). The other said to him: In my dream they read to me: "But let all those that put their trust in You rejoice, let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them; let them also that love Your name be joyful in You" (*Tehillim* 5:12). He replied to them: Both of you are completely righteous Rabbis, but one is actuated by love and the other by fear. (*Sota* 31a)

At the end of the passage, the *gemara* brings a story in which two of Rava's disciples ask him about dreams that they had; to one it was alluded that he was a God-fearing man, whereas to the other it was alluded that he was a God-loving man. Rava calls both of them absolutely righteous men, only that each is found on a different track: one serves God out of love, while the other serves Him out of fear.

Seemingly, according to this, the two tracks are different, but equally good for serving God, for both disciples are designated absolutely righteous men. Why, then, is it stated earlier in the passage that "greater is he who acts from love than he who acts from fear"?

**Fearing God – Out of Love**

It seems that this is connected to the fact that in the *gemara*, Avraham is not designated simply as "God's friend" or "one who loves God," but rather "one who fears God – out of love." The fear of God is the more basic attribute, to which everyone must aspire. A higher level is that of Avraham Avinu, that of the love of God. At this level, one might reach more elevated spiritual heights, but it entails many dangers if the love is not balanced by fear. A person who only loves God but does not fear him is liable to see himself as God's equal. While it is true that the metaphor of the lover and his beloved is found in Scripture, it is not found in the Torah, because it is only true for a narrow aspect of reality. In general, the people of Israel are, of course, not equal to God, and therefore the metaphor of father and son, which includes fear as well, is more appropriate.

This also explains why it was precisely Avraham Avinu, the great lover of God, who had to stand the greatest test of fear in Scripture, *akeidat Yitzchak.* It was precisely through this experience, which was entirely one of fear, that Avraham proved that he was balanced and perfect, filled with love that is intertwined with fear.

(This *sicha* was delivered on Shabbat *Parashat Lekh-Lekha* 5777 [2016].)

1. The question of why is Avraham referred to as a "servant" will be addressed below. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)