YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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*Avodat Hashem*

Foundations of Divine Service

**By Harav Baruch Gigi**

**Shiur #22: Loving God (XII): Cause Him to Be Beloved**

**Two Ways to Cause God to Be Beloved**

There is an additional tier to the *mitzva* of loving God that arises from the *Sifrei*’scommentary on the verse, “You shall love the Lord your God”:

Another interpretation: “You shall love the Lord your God” – Make Him beloved to humanity, as did our father Avraham in the matter referred to in the verse, “And the souls that they had acquired in Charan” (*Bereishit* 12:5). But is it not true that if all the creatures in the world were to convene in order to create just one gnat and endow it with a soul, they would not be able to do so? Hence we learn that Avraham converted people, thus bringing them under the wings of the *Shekhina*. (*Sifrei*, *Devarim* 32)

The *midrash* learns from Avraham that one must cause God to be loved by His creations. This gives rise to the understanding that the *mitzva* to cause God to be beloved can be fulfilled by spreading the knowledge of God’s existence and God’s ways.

As we have seen in previous *shiurim*, Rambam’s approach is that the love of God is achieved through knowing God – “a greater amount of knowledge arouses a greater love.” Consequently, one who wishes to cause God to be loved by His creations must first know God on his own and bestow this knowledge upon those who surround him. This is the only way he can succeed in causing others to love God and bringing them under the protection of the *Shekhina*.

As we read in Rambam’s *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*:

Our Sages also said that this *mitzva* includes calling out to all mankind to serve God, exalted be He, and to believe in Him. This is because when you love a person, for example, you praise him and call out to others to draw close to him. Similarly, if you truly love God – through your understanding and realization of His true existence – you will certainly spread this true knowledge that you know to the ignorant and the foolish. As the *Sifrei* states: “‘You shall love the Lord your God’ – Make Him beloved to humanity, as did our father Avraham in the matter referred to in the verse, ‘And the souls that they had acquired in Charan’ (*Bereishit* 12:5).” The meaning of this is that Avraham, as a result of his deep understanding of God, acquired love for God, as the verse testifies, “Avraham, My beloved” (*Yeshayahu* 41:8). This powerful love therefore caused him to call out to all mankind to believe in God. So too, you shall love Him to the extent that you draw others to Him. (Rambam, *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*, Positive Commandment 3)

The Talmud cites a *beraita* that expounds upon the verse “You shall love the Lord your God” as well. The *beraita* also views this verse as the demand that a person cause God’s name to be beloved to humanity, but it seems that the implied direction of the *beraita* is different from that of the *Sifrei*:

“You shall love the Lord your God,” that is, that God’s name be beloved because of you. If one studies Scripture and Mishna and attends on the disciples of the wise, is honest in business and speaks pleasantly to persons, what do people then say concerning him? “Happy is the father who taught him Torah; happy is the teacher who taught him Torah; woe unto people who have not studied the Torah.” For this man has studied the Torah; look how fine his ways are, how righteous his deeds! Of him does Scripture say: “And He said to me: ‘You are My servant, Israel in whom I glory’” (*Yeshayahu* 49:3). But if one studies Scripture and Mishna and attends on the disciples of the wise, but is dishonest in business and discourteous in his relations with people, what do people say about him? “Woe unto him who studied the Torah; woe unto his father who taught him Torah; woe unto his teacher who taught him Torah!” This man studied the Torah: Look, how corrupt are his deeds, how ugly his ways; of him Scripture says: “In that it was said of them, ‘These are the people of the Lord, yet they had to leave His land.’” (*Yoma* 86a)

The approach of the *beraita* is different from the approach of the *Sifrei* in two respects. First, while the *Sifrei* addresses the person directly and demands that he take action in order to make God’s name beloved, according to the *beraita* in *Yoma*, one must merely focus on one’s own divine service, without relating directly to other people in any way.

In addition, the approach of the *Sifrei* includes an obligation toward humanity and toward one’s surroundings. One must call out to them and encourage them to engage in divine service by informing and teaching others about knowing and comprehending God. In contrast, according to the *beraita*, it is not expected of a person to turn to others and encourage them to pursue faith and divine service. One must only mold one’s own behavior to that which is expected of a divine servant. Doing this will cause others who see him to appreciate his character, his virtues, and his behavior, thereby causing God’s name to become beloved.

It seems that the goal of the *beraita* in *Yoma* is to demonstrate to all of humanity that divine servants are righteous people, whether in the realm of activity between them and God (“studies Scripture and Mishna and attends on the disciples of the wise”) or between them and the society that surrounds them (“is honest in business and speaks pleasantly to persons… how fine his ways are, how righteous his deeds!”). One who sees a divine servant falls in love with his way of life because of the results it engenders, and it may be that he will even choose to adopt this way of life as well.

This is how Rambam formulated the matter in *Hilkhot Yesodei Ha-Torah*, in the course of dealing with the *mitzva* of sanctifying God’s name:

When a sage is stringent with himself, speaks pleasantly with others, his social conduct is attractive to others, he receives them pleasantly, he is humbled by them and does not humble them in return, he honors them – even though they disrespect him – he does business faithfully, and does not frequently accept the hospitality of the common people or sit with them, and at all times is seen only studying Torah, wrapped in *tzitzit*,crowned with *tefillin*, and carrying out all his deeds beyond the measure of the law – provided he does not separate too far [from normal living] and thus become forlorn – to the extent that all praise him, love him and find his deeds attractive – such a person sanctifies God’s name. The verse says of him: “And He said to me: ‘You are My servant, Israel in whom I glory’” (*Yeshayahu* 49:3). (*Hilkhot Yesodei Ha-Torah* 5:11)

A person’s behavior – between him and his Creator and between him and his fellow – can influence an observer significantly. It can generate in others feelings of identification and sympathy, and possibly even love and the desire to imitate this behavior.

In *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*, in his discussion of the mitzva of sanctifying God’s name, Rambam writes:

The ninth *mitzva* is that we are commanded to sanctify God’s name, as it says: “That I may be sanctified in the midst of the people of Israel” (*Vayikra* 22:32). This *mitzva* requires us to publicize this true religion to the masses. This must be done without fear of retribution, to the extent that even if a powerful tyrant tries to force us to deny God (exalted be He), we may not obey him. We must rather unquestioningly submit to death, not even allowing him to think that we have denied God (exalted be He), even if we still maintain belief in Him in our hearts.

This is the *mitzva* of sanctifying God’s name, in which all Jews are obligated. This means to allow ourselves to be killed by a tyrant for love of God (exalted be He) and belief in His oneness. This is similar to the actions of Chanaya, Mishael, and Azarya in the time of the wicked Nevukhadnetzar, who forced people to bow down to a statue, and everyone — including Jews — bowed down. There was nobody there to sanctify God’s name, and this was a tremendous shame to Israel. Everyone did not fulfill this *mitzva*, and there was nobody to fulfill it; everyone was afraid.

This commandment is obligatory only in such an awesome setting, when all inhabitants of the world were terrified, and it was then necessary to spread and announce His oneness in public.

But God had already promised through His prophet Yeshayahu that the people of Israel would not be completely disgraced on that difficult occasion; and that a few children would be present who would not be afraid of death, and would give up their lives and publicize faith in God, sanctifying God’s name in public as we have been commanded through Moshe. This promise is in the verse: “No more shall Ya’akov be shamed, no longer his face grow pale. For when he – that is, his children – behold what My hands have wrought in his midst, they will sanctify My name….” (*Yeshayahu* 29:22-23). As the *Sifra* states: “Upon this condition I took them out of Egypt – on condition that they publicly sanctify My Name” (*Sifra*, *Emor* 89). (*Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*, Positive Commandment 9)

The *mitzva* of sanctifying God’s name establishes the power of faith in the oneness of God and the love of God in the world. Through self-sacrifice, we publicize our faith to the masses. The more willingness there is to cling to faith and love, even in extreme cases of mortal danger or religious persecution, the more God’s existence and oneness in the world is publicized.

It seems that this distinction is rooted in the language of the *Tanna’im* in the various *beraitot*. In the *Sifrei*, the expectation is that one will “make Him beloved to humanity” by engaging in direct actions to cause God to be beloved to His creations. As Rambam emphasizes, through one’s love of the truth, he will feel the need to broadcast this truth to all of humanity.

In contrast, according to the *beraita* in *Yoma*, one is expected to direct his efforts inward – “that God’s name be beloved because of you.” The meaning of this is that the love of God will be the result of your personal, day-to-day behavior. Through your actions, an observer will be able to understand the power and beauty of faith.

It seems that Rambam only incorporated the position of the *Sifrei* – imparting the true religion and the correct belief system to all of humanity – in his discussion of the *mitzva* of loving God. In contrast, the position of the *beraita* in *Yoma* is cited there only as part of the discussion of the *mitzva* of sanctifying God’s name, the most important part of which is to publicize God’s name and the truth of our faith in Him to the masses. If an observer wants to cling to this path, he will need to begin on his own to learn, know, and comprehend the One who spoke and brought the world into being.

In practice, even the matter of sanctifying God’s name is made up of two aspects: sanctifying God’s name by sacrificing one’s life rather than violating the most severe transgressions (see discussions in *Avoda Zara* and *Sanhedrin*); and sanctifying God’s name through one’s normal daily human behavior (see the *beraita* in *Yoma* 86a).

With respect to sanctifying God’s name through avoiding the most severe transgressions, the main part of one’s perspective is directed outward. It involves displaying one’s faith in God outwardly, so that others can see the power of faith and love. Even within this perspective, there are different levels of visibility – both public and private types self-sacrifice (see Rambam, *Yesodei Ha-Torah* 5:1-2). In contrast, with respect to sanctifying God through one’s basic behavior, the main part of one’s perspective is directed inward. When a person acts in the proper way, those surrounding him observe him and appreciate him and the faith that drives him and his actions.

**The Desire to Inform Others About the True Religion**

Rambam writes in *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*: “This powerful love therefore caused him to call out to all mankind to believe in God. So too, you shall love Him to the extent that you draw others to Him” (*Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*, Positive Commandment 3). From this statement, one might think that it is possible to fulfill the *mitzva* of loving God sufficiently merely by drawing others to love God. However, in light of what we have learned above, a person’s obligation is not complete until he actively informs others about God’s name and teaches them the principles of faith and divine service.

This notion was emphasized in the passage from the *Sifrei* cited above: “Hence we learn that Avraham converted people, thus bringing them under the wings of the *Shekhina*” (*Sifrei*, *Devarim* 32). The *Sifrei*’s source is the verse, “And the souls that they had acquired in Charan” (*Bereishit* 12:5), according to the understanding that Avraham converted them. Therefore, we must explain that Rambam’s intention in *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot* was to outline an obligation to draw others to God. This obligation also includes the willingness and desire to inform others about the true religion.

This approach is also expressed in the description that Rambam presents in *Hilkhot Avoda Zara*:

After this mighty man was weaned, he began to explore and think. Though he was a child, he began to think throughout the day and night, wondering: How is it possible for the sphere to continue to revolve without having anyone controlling it? Who is causing it to revolve? Surely, it does not cause itself to revolve.

He had no teacher, nor was there anyone to inform him. Rather, he was mired in Ur Kasdim among the foolish idolaters. His father, mother, and all the people [around him] were idol worshipers, and he would worship with them. [However,] his heart was exploring and [gaining] understanding.

Ultimately, he appreciated the way of truth and understood the path of righteousness through his accurate comprehension. He realized that there was one God who controlled the sphere, that He created everything and that there is no other God among all the other entities. He knew that the entire world was making a mistake. What caused them to err was their service of the stars and images, which made them lose awareness of the truth.

Avraham was forty years old when he became aware of his Creator. **When he recognized and knew Him, he began to formulate replies to the inhabitants of Ur Kasdim** and debate with them, telling them that they were not following a proper path. He broke their idols and began to teach the people that it is fitting to serve only the God of the world. To Him [alone] is it fitting to bow down, sacrifice, and offer libations, so that the people of future generations would recognize Him. [Conversely,] it is fitting to destroy and break all the images, lest all the people err concerning them, like those people who thought that there are no other gods besides these [images].

When he overcame them through the strength of his arguments, the king desired to kill him. He was saved through a miracle and left for Charan. [There,] he began to call in a loud voice to all people and inform them that there is one God in the entire world and it is proper to serve Him. **He would go out and call to the people, gathering them in city after city and country after country, until he came to the land of Canaan – proclaiming [God’s existence] – as it states: “And He invoked there the name of the Lord, the everlasting God” (*Bereishit* 21:33). When the people would gather around him and ask him about his statements, he would explain [them] to each one of them according to their understanding, until they turned to the path of truth. Ultimately, thousands and myriads gathered around him. These are the men of the house of Avraham. He planted in their hearts this great fundamental principle, composed texts about it** and taught it to Yitzchak, his son. Yitzchak also taught others and turned [their hearts to God]. He also taught Ya’akov and appointed him as a teacher. [Ya’akov] taught others and turned [the hearts] of all those who gathered around him [to God]. He also taught all of his children. He selected Levi and appointed him as the leader. He established him [as the head of] the yeshiva to teach them the way of God and observe the *mitzvot* of Avraham. [Ya’akov] commanded his sons that the leadership should not depart from the descendants of Levi, so that the teachings would not be forgotten. This concept proceeded and gathered strength among the descendants of Jacob and those who collected around them, **until there became a nation within the world that knew God**. (*Hilkhot Avoda Zara* 1:3)

Rambam creates a fundamental distinction between the reality that existed from the time of the patriarchs to the time of Moshe and the reality that began to exist from the time God chose Moshe as a prophet.

The patriarchs’ initiative of invoking God’s name was the fruit of their desire and understanding. From the depths of their love of God and the recognition of the truth that burned within their hearts, they strove to broadcast this truth and this comprehension of God to their surroundings.

However, when God chose Moshe, He commanded him through prophecy to impart the knowledge and comprehension of God to the people. Thus, it was expected of Moshe to invoke God’s name before the people of Israel. As Rambam writes in *Moreh Nevukhim*:

Anyone who, in those days, laid claim to authority, based it either, like Avraham, on the fact that by reasoning and by proof he had been convinced of the existence of a being who rules the whole universe, or that some spiritual power was conferred upon him by a star, by an angel or by a similar agency. But no one could establish his claim on prophecy, that is to say, on the fact that God had spoken to him, or had entrusted a mission to him; before the days of Moshe no such assertion had ever been made. You must not be misled by the statements that God spoke to the patriarchs or that He had appeared to them. For you do not find any mention of a prophecy that appealed to others or that directed them. Avraham, Yitzchak, or Ya’akov, or any other person before them, did not tell the people, “God said to me: You shall do this thing, or you shall not do that thing,” or “God has sent me to you.” Far from it! For God spoke to them on nothing but of what especially concerned them, i.e., He communicated to them things relating to their perfection, directed them in what they should do, and foretold them what the condition of their descendants would be; nothing beyond this. They guided their fellow men by means of argument and instruction, as is implied, according to the interpretation generally received amongst us, in the words, “And the souls that they had acquired in Charan” (*Bereishit* 12:5). When God appeared to Moshe our master and commanded him to address the people and to bring them the message, Moshe replied that he might first be asked to prove the existence of God in the universe, and that only after doing so he would be able to announce to them that God had sent him. For all men, with few exceptions, were ignorant of the existence of God; their highest thoughts did not extend beyond the heavenly sphere, its forms or its influences. They could not yet emancipate themselves from sensation, and had not yet attained to any intellectual perfection. **Then God taught Moshe how to teach them and how to establish among them the belief in the existence of Himself, which is Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh, a name [of God] derived from [the verb] “*haya*” (“was”) in the sense of “existence”**… God thus showed Moshe the proofs by which His existence would be firmly established among the wise men of His people. Therefore, the explanation of the name is followed by the words, “Go and assemble the elders of Israel” (*Shemot* 3:16), and by the assurance that the elders would understand what God had shown to him and would accept it, as is stated in the words, “They will listen to you” (*Shemot* 3:18). (*Moreh Nevukhim* 1:63)

At this stage, Moshe is commanded to impart this message to Israel, but on the fundamental level the command is much broader; it includes informing all of humanity about God’s name. Our goal and aspiration is that a day will come when all of humanity will call on God’s name.

R. Yerucham Fishel Perlow, in his commentary on R. Saadia Gaon’s *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*, recorded a fascinating insight on this matter in connection to the obligation to accept a convert. R. Yitzchak Albargeloni, in the *azharot*[[1]](#footnote-1) that he composed, enumerated this obligation as a distinct *mitzva*, and others included it within the *mitzva* of loving the convert. However, R. Perlow connected it specifically to the *mitzva* of loving God:

And in my view, it must be said simply that according to the enumerators of the *mitzvot*, **it rests on the *mitzva* of loving God**. As explained in the *Sifrei*, “‘You shall love the Lord your God’ – Make Him beloved to humanity, as did our father Avraham in the matter referred to in the verse, ‘And the souls that they had acquired in Charan’ … Hence we learn that Avraham converted people, thus bringing them under the wings of the *Shekhina*.” And it was cited in Rambam’s *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot* (Positive Commandment 3); and he added to it, writing: “The meaning of this is that Avraham, as a result of his deep understanding of God, acquired love for God, as the verse testifies, ‘Avraham, My beloved.’” This powerful love therefore caused him to call out to all mankind to believe in God. So too, you shall love Him to the extent that you draw others to Him. (Commentary on *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot* by R. Yerucham Fishel Perlow, Positive Commandment 19)

Translated by Daniel Landman

1. The *azharot* were *piyyutim* enumerating the *mitzvot* that written by various authors. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)