

From the school of the Ramchal

- Jacob Solomon

Hear O Israel. The Lord is our G-d.
The Lord is One!

You shall love the Lord your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might (6:4-5).

Love is an emotion. It is not a choice. It happens. All those who have personally experienced love know exactly how it electrifies and galvanizes.

Yet here, the Torah appears to ask for a feeling of emotion rather than an act of service: “You shall love the Lord your G-d with all your heart, all your soul, and all your might”.

The oft-quoted explanation is the one given by the Talmud (Berachot 62a): “You must love G-d, even if He takes your life”. As the Alshich elaborates, if facing martyrdom, it should not be the attitude of being a victim of murder, but attaining the ultimate spiritual height of surrendering one’s very soul and being to the Creator. The Talmud exemplifies with the story of Rabbi Akiva. Whilst being tortured to death by the Romans, he explained to his incredulous disciples: “All my life I prayed that I would be able to maintain my love of G-d even if it cost me my life. Now

that I am succeeding in doing so, should I not be happy?”

The Ramchal (Da’at Tvunot 2:3) brings a profound insight that also sees loving G-d as, more generally, a consequence of the imperfections, evil, and unpleasantness that exist in the world. These negative forces, situations, and societies are not separate entities to G-d’s oneness, but part of G-d’s oneness, part of His scheme of things. G-d’s being One means that nothing exists outside His scope. Thus, the Ramchal explains, G-d created the world with its evil and its imperfections so that we can interact with it and become His Partners by working on addressing the evils that exist and improving things. In short, G-d brings imperfections to the world for which He gives humanity the potential to work on positively influencing, person by person, community by community, generation by generation. It is that work that makes us partners with G-d. And by working together with G-d, we become closer to Him (and to each other). Loving G-d is thus a consequence of coming close to Him. Loving G-d is a natural consequence of interaction with G-d, and engagement with His Interests.

Indeed, the Anshei Knesset Hagedola declared that the world stands on

three things: Torah, Avodah, and Gmilit Chasadim, acts of kindness. According to this explanation, we can suggest that it is the Torah values that give the directions for improvement as well connecting with G-d. The Avodah extends to all work that seeks to improve the world, at all different levels. And the Gmilit Chasadim means that it should be done happily, willingly, and with generosity of spirit and the welfare of the other in mind.