

5:19

כָּל אֲהָבָה שֶׁהִיא תְלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר – בְּטֵל דָּבָר וּבִטְלָה אֲהָבָה.
 וְשֵׂאִינָהּ תְלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר – אֵינָהּ בִּטְלָה לְעוֹלָם. אֵיזוֹ הִיא
 אֲהָבָה שֶׁהִיא תְלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר? זֶה אֲהָבַת אֲמִנוֹן וְתָמָר.
 וְשֵׂאִינָהּ תְלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר? זֶה אֲהָבַת דָּוִד וַיהוֹנָתָן.

Any love that depends on a specific cause, when that cause is gone, the love is gone; but if it does not depend on a specific cause, it will never cease. What sort of love depended upon a specific cause? The love of Amnon for Tamar. And what did not depend upon a specific cause? The love of David and Jonathan.

LOVE IS NOT fairy-tale romance, but full dedication to another being. To love another means that we wish to give ourselves to another. We give without expecting return, precisely because we love them. We're motivated by the relationship to develop into our best selves. When we love, we offer empathy, comfort, and support to others, motivated by their needs, rather than by our own.

In Jewish tradition, love is more action than emotion. Writing in the 1960s, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik explains:

The Bible spoke of the commandment to love one's neighbor (Leviticus 19:18). However, in Talmudic literature, emphasis was placed not only upon sentiment, but upon action, which is motivated by sentiment. The *Choshen Mishpat*, the Jewish code of civil law, analyzes not human emotions but actual human relations. The problem of *Choshen Mishpat* is not what one feels toward the other, but how he acts toward him.³⁸⁷

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the former chief rabbi of the United Kingdom, explains that deeds of loving-kindness shift one's inner being toward godliness and covenant building. He notes that *chesed*, usually translated as "kindness," may also be translated as "love." This is love expressed through deed, in a covenant of holiness. Here is mutual respect

for the integrity and freedom of the other through acts of *chesed*, which have a deep emotional component:

[*Chesed*] exists only in virtue of emotion, empathy, and sympathy, feeling-with and feeling-for. We act with kindness because we know what it feels like to be in need of kindness. . . . Societies are only human and humanizing when they are a community of communities built on face-to-face encounters—covenantal relationships.³⁸⁸

The late French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas writes that the image of a “face” is a key to what makes us human. Sacks interprets Levinas thus: “Society is faceless; *Chesed* is a relationship of face to face. The Pentateuch repeatedly emphasizes that we cannot see God face to face. It follows that we can only see God in the face of another.”³⁸⁹

Of course, if possible, we ought to strive to see the face of another even within our own families—though depending on individual family situations, this process may be more complex. In a story about the Kapishnitzer Rebbe, a prominent New York businessman was asked to see the rebbe about an opportunity to give charity. He stressed that he would go to the rebbe in Brooklyn, but the rebbe chose to go to the man’s office, for he had an important message.

When the Kapishnitzer Rebbe arrived, the man put his phone on hold and left his customers waiting while he invited the rebbe into his office. There, the rebbe detailed the dire financial situation of a family with many children. The breadwinner of the family had lost his job and was in poor health, and only immediate action would stave off ruin. The businessman offered \$1,000 but wondered why the rebbe had to deliver the message in person. The story concludes, “Pen poised above his checkbook, the man asked, ‘For whom is the check?’ The Rebbe stared at the floor for a few long moments, then answered, ‘For your brother.’”³⁹⁰

Love, of course, does not have to take the form either of money or of physical interaction. Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky, the Steipler Rav (twentieth century, Israel [born in Poland]), endured poverty and harassment by Russian authorities because of his Jewish observance. Yet, despite his hardships, Rabbi Kanievsky was a scholar renowned for

his combination of wisdom and common sense and was widely sought for advice. A young man once complained to the Steipler Rav, “I don’t know which way to turn. My home is in constant chaos. I come home every Friday afternoon before Shabbat and the dishes are still in the sink, there are diapers everywhere, and the floor is not even swept. My wife is just not getting things done. I can’t live like this anymore.” The Steipler Rav looked at the young man with incredulity and said, “You don’t know where to turn? I’ll tell you. Turn to the nearest closet and take out a broom. Has it occurred to you that you can help?!”³⁹¹

Accepting another for who one is, rather than what one might become or once was, guides us toward understanding the divine dimensions of love. Popular culture has altered the meaning of love into something akin to ephemeral amusement. When we love only one aspect of a person—their intellect, their power, or their physical appearance—we do not love. We are infatuated by that person, attracted to an element that overwhelms the heart, but subtracts from the analytical part of our mind; we act on base instinct alone. To love another means to love the full person, regardless of wealth, appearance, job, or faults. To love is to accept the fullness of the other’s being. Love is not tangential to Judaism, but fundamental: the love of God, the love of a spouse, the love between parent and child, the love of our people, and the love for all people. Love is more than mere emotion, for it is expressed through deeds, particularly acts of genuine loving-kindness.