

Is Love All You Need?

Background

In this week’s Torah portion, *Vayetze*, we read about love at first sight:

Now Laban had two daughters, ... Leah... and Rachel. Leah had weak eyes. Rachel was shapely and beautiful. Jacob loved Rachel, so he [told Laban], “I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.” [Gen. 29:16-18]

And Jacob served seven years for Rachel. And they seemed to him only a few days, because of the love he had for her. [Genesis 29:20]

Tricked into marrying Leah first, Jacob does not hide his feelings:

וַיִּבֹא גַם אֶל-רָחֵל וַיִּצְטַב גַּם-אֶת-רָחֵל מִלֵּאָה And Jacob also slept with Rachel. [But] Jacob also loved Rachel more than Leah. [Gen. 29:30]

But at least he did “love” Leah. Yet immediately afterwards it says:

The Lord saw that Leah was hated [שְׂנוֹאָה] and he opened her womb. But Rachel was barren. [Gen. 29:31]

The phrase is repeated. Leah says:

שְׂנוֹאָה אֲנִי -- I was hated. [Gen. 29:33]

Leah was “loved” but “hated”. How can that be? Neglected? A love-hate relationship? Jacob wishes she would just go away. She was in the way.

Love. The most irrational of feelings:

The heart has its reasons that reason does not know. [Pascal, *Pensées* 277]

Love in the Torah

Love (אַהֲבָה) is mentioned very often in Torah.

Romantic love:

-**Love** of Jacob for Rachel (above).

-[Shechem] was strongly drawn to Dinah, daughter of Jacob, and in **love** with the maiden, and he spoke to her tenderly. [Genesis 34:3]

Spousal love:

Isaac **loved** [Rebekah], and thus found comfort after his mother's death. [Genesis 22:2]

Parental love:

-And [God] said [to Abraham]: Take, I pray you, your son, your only one, the one you **love**, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and bring him up there as a burnt-offering on one of the mountains. [Genesis 22:2]

-Now Isaac **loved** Esau, because he did eat of his venison; and Rebekah **loved** Jacob. [Genesis 25:28]

And Israel [Jacob] **loved** Joseph more than all his sons, for he was the son of his old age. [Genesis 37:3]

Love of God for Israel:

-The Lord did not set his **love** upon you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any people; for you were the fewest of all peoples... [Deut 7: 6-7; 14:2] ...The Lord your God does not give you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stiff-necked people. [Deut 9:6]

-[If you sin and repent,] then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and take you back in **love**. [Deuteronomy 30:3]

-At services, we recognize God's love:

-Morning: *Ahava Rabbah* (אהבה רבה): You [God] have **loved** us with abundant **love**, and You have bestowed great compassion on us.

-Evening: *Ahavat Olam* (אהבת עולם): With everlasting **love** You have **loved** the House of Israel your people.

-Conclusion: ברוך אתה יהוה הבוחר בעמו ישראל באהבה

Blessed are You O Lord, Who has chosen his people Israel in **love**.

-*Song of Songs* likens the love between God and Israel to romantic love.

-God is often described as "jealous", as a lover would be.

-It's a first: Other "deities" were angry and needed to be "pacified".

Love of Israel for God (a commandment):

-You shall **love** the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might. [Deuteronomy 6:5]

Love of neighbor, even stranger (a commandment):

-You shall **love** your neighbor as yourself. [Leviticus 19:18]

-You shall **love** the stranger as yourself, for you were once strangers in the Land of Egypt. [Leviticus 19:34]

Love is not all you need

You need justice too. ("Love" and "fear" God are two themes in Torah.)

-Love unites (Jacob and Rachel) but also divides (Jacob and Leah, Rachel and Leah) – unfair!

-Love unites (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and a son each) but also divides (other sons jealous) – unfair!

-Love is particular and selective, justice is universal.

-Love can vary in intensity; justice does not:

When love was strong, we could have made our bed on the blade of a sword. Now that our love has grown weak, a 60-cubit [25-meter] bed is not large enough for us. [Sanh. 7a].

-Love calls for no punishment. Justice does. Thus, love allows the proliferation of wrongdoing. Justice does not.

Indeed, the Torah says:

Tzedek, tzedek tirdof lemaan tichyeh -- Justice, justice shall you pursue that you may live. (Deut. 16:20)

We simply can't live without justice. The world cannot endure with love alone.

In the Torah, we are told the physical world was created with God's attribute of justice:

Bereshit bara Elokim...

In the beginning, Elokim created... [Gen. 1:1]

The name *Elokim* for God is associated with God's attribute of justice, that is: Laws, order, cold equations.

A few lines later in the Torah, God's other main name, HaShem [the Tetragrammaton] is introduced, representing the attribute of mercy.

The Midrash says:

[God] said: If I create the world with the attribute of mercy, sin will be plentiful; and if I create it with the attribute of justice, how can the world [continue to] exist?

Therefore I will create it with both attributes, mercy and justice, and thus may it endure. [Gen. R. 12:15]

On Yom Kippur, we say:

Avinu malkenu 'aseh 'imanu tzedakah va-chesed.

Our Father, our King, deal with us with justice and with mercy.

How *do* you temper justice with mercy? How much of each do you allow? How do you rule in a court of law? Extenuating circumstances may encourage a judge to reduce a sentence, but by how much?

Problem: Justice defined in great detail, but not mercy. Since mercy is poorly defined, it cannot be a direct commandment. One must use compassion and judgment to apply mercy, but there is no guidance on “how much is enough”. The Mishna says this clearly:

The practice of loving-kindness [*gemiluth Hasadim*] is one of the things for which no definite quantity is prescribed. [Peah 1:1]

There are some answers in our tradition. The prophet Micah said: [Micah 6:8]

It has been told you, O man, what is good and what the Lord requires of you:

-Only to act justly [*'asot mishpat*],

-to love mercy [*ahavat chesed*]

-and to walk humbly with your God [*latzneah lechet 'im elokecha*].

Note that the word *lechet*, to walk, comes from the same root as *halacha*, or Jewish law. So: Justice, mercy, and *halacha*, in that order. In truth, *halacha* includes justice and mercy in its ethical commandments, but not in its ritual commandments.

Along those lines, the Talmud says: [Sukkah 49b]

'To do justly' means [to act using] justice [which includes charity].

'To love mercy' refers to acts of loving-kindness ...

Loving-kindness is greater than charity, for it is said [in the Book of Hosea],

Sow to yourselves according to your charity, but reap according to your mercy. [Hosea 10:12]

Mercy means loving-kindness. If a man sows, it is doubtful whether he will eat [the harvest] or not, but when a man reaps, he will certainly eat... *The reward of charity depends entirely on the extent of the loving-kindness in it...*

Our Rabbis taught: Loving-kindness is greater than charity in three respects:

-Charity can be done only with one's money, but loving-kindness can be done with one's person and one's money.

-Charity can be given only to the poor, but loving-kindness can be given both to the rich and the poor.

-Charity can be given only to the living, but loving-kindness can be given both to the living and to the dead.

Conclusion

We need both love and justice in our lives. Only one of them is not enough. However, we have leeway in deciding how much of each to apply in any given situation.