

B”H

Leadership

From Love to Unity

from Harav Yitzchak Ginsburgh

From Love to Unity

One of the *chassidim* once said that he heard from Rabbi Dunin o.b.m., a famous Chabadnik in *Eretz Yisrael* (the Land of Israel), that for a long time he believed that the goal is *Ahavat Yisra’el*, the love of every Jew. But, as time passed—and by noting this he indicated that there is a psychological process of maturity involved—he understood that the goal is to achieve *Achdut Yisra’el* (unity of Israel) and that *Ahavat Yisra’el* is only the means for achieving this ultimate end. Let us expand on this point.

There is a great difference between *Ahavat Yisrael* and *Achdut Yisra’el*. We are all obligated by the *mitzvah* of *Ahavat Yisra’el* and, as the Alter Rebbe says in the *Tanya*,¹ “Whether one is successful or not in drawing a person closer to Torah and to serving God—he still gets the merit of loving his fellow Jew.” But, when it comes to *Achdut Yisra’el*, the unity of the Jewish people, there has to be a focal point, a central point around which everything revolves. In other words, unity can be achieved only when there is some light, some idea around which people are united.

Meditating on Monotheism

This we see in the way that the word “one” (אחד), the final word and the goal of the *Shema*, the essential statement of Jewish faith is understood. It is understood that the letters of this word allude to God’s unity, that He is one—this constitutes the first letter, א, whose value is 1; in the 7 firmaments and the earth—this constitutes the second letter, ה, whose value is 5; and that He is one in all 4 directions—this constitutes the third and final letter, ד, whose value is 4. Even the most all-encompassing and absolute state of unity—God’s oneness—even for that to capture us, we have to fill it with some content.

A Lesson about Love from Abraham

The point we are making is that love is simply not enough. Let’s look at Abraham. We know that Abraham dedicated his life to spreading monotheism—faith in unity, that



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God is one. To do this he opened his tent to every passerby—tremendous love of mankind by any measure. In fact, Abraham's conduct is the greatest example of love of man ever. He gave every passerby everything he might need, food to eat, a bed to rest, and even money for his journey. But, there was a purpose to all of this. At the end of the meal, Abraham asked his guest to bless the Almighty. And if the guest refused, for whatever reason, Abraham went against his own loving nature and said, "If you do not bless the one God, the true source of all that you received, you will have to pay me for my hospitality." This is what it takes to seek unity. This is how Abraham worked toward uniting mankind under the faith in one God. This was what separated between those who saw Abraham as simply a kind and giving individual, and those who were willing to bless God, join him, and unite with him around the central focal point of God's unity. The latter became converts, which the Torah describes as, "the souls that they [Abraham and Sarah] made in Haran." Indeed the message is clear. The beginning point is love, but the goal is to reach unity, based on rectified faith.

Jewish Unity Requires a King

Now, going another step further, it is not enough to just have some idea, some content, as a focal point. To truly achieve unity there has to be someone setting the content that will serve as a focal point. In other words, a king is needed. In the third part of his Guide for the Perplexed, Maimonides deals with the various logical reasons behind the *mitzvot* of the Torah. Maimonides addresses the reason that the Torah did not explicitly state that the Holy Temple should be built on Mt. Moriah, even though this location was well known to Moshe Rabbeinu and to the other leaders of the generations, as this was the spot that Abraham had brought Isaac to be sacrificed. He writes that the strongest reason for keeping the location implicit in the Pentateuch was to prevent the tribes from quarrelling and dividing over ownership of Mt. Moriah. Therefore, writes Maimonides, "the commandment to build the Holy Temple is conditional on first appointing a king, so that the power be in one individual's hands and there should be no war between brothers, as there was when the priesthood was established."² Maimonides is saying that only thanks to the king can there be unity and peace between Jews. This may sound like a simple and obvious point, but apparently you have to be a great philosopher like Maimonides to state it.

Democracies can be loving and pluralistic, but unity necessitates appointing a king. Looking at these two words, love (אהבה) and unity (אחדות) numerically, we find that their average value is 216, the value of "awe," or "fear" (יראה). We can interpret this to mean that the common denominator of love and unity is awe. When the Torah

commands us to appoint a king it stipulates that the king should be treated in a manner that we feel awe and fear of him. Still, as we will explore in an upcoming article, the king is able to produce the unifying message for the Jewish people only because of his own tremendous love for each and every Jew. We will explore this topic further in an upcoming article.

Democracy in Israel

The political system that was adopted in the modern state of Israel is democracy, and this is the reason why everything is falling apart and there is absolutely no unity, because in the end there is no king, no leadership, and therefore there is no real content that we can all focus on and unify around. There is a very harsh saying from the Ba'al Shem Tov that every community has to appoint a leader, someone who will head it. And if it does not, then God forbid, the *samech mem* (evil inclination) himself will become their head.

In the end, love and unity have to go together. This is similar to the unification that a person experiences when he learns Torah—where the Torah both encompasses him and fills him.³ Love is the environment, the atmosphere that should encompass us. People are naturally drawn and attracted to a loving atmosphere. And then these same people are united when they find the focal point around which they can unite. Thus, we can also say that love is like all the commandments (including learning Torah). All the *mitzvot* are described as enclosures, or surrounding light in Kabbalah. But, unity is like understanding the inner meaning of the Torah, finding a central point around which we can all unite.

(based on a farbrengen held on Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh Shevat, 5767 – Ramat Aviv)

1. Chapter 32.

2. *Guide for the Perplexed* III:45.

3. See *Tanya*, chapter 5.