



With All Your Heart

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Parashat Va'Ethanan 5785

There is no such thing, for a Jew, as loving God without loving human beings as well.

Our love for God is bound up with our love for others: for the parents who taught us His name, and the grandparents who taught them. For the children we raise to know Him. For every ancestor, too far back for us to remember their names, who remembered God's covenant with our people and dedicated their lives to transmitting that memory.

For Moshe himself, who first taught us how to love Him.

As he prepares them to cross the Yarden and journey on without him, Moshe speaks the words that will become the most widely known Jewish prayer:

דברים ו:ד-ז

⁴שִׁמְעוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד: ⁵וְאַהֲבַתְּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל מְאֹדְךָ: ⁶וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים
הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם עַל לִבְבְּךָ: ⁷וְשָׁנַנְתָּם לְבָנֶיךָ וְדִבַּרְתָּ בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבִלְכֹתְךָ בַּדֶּרֶךְ
וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ:



Devarim 6:4-7

⁴Hear, Israel: Hashem is our God—only Hashem. ⁵Love Hashem with all your heart, all your breath, and all your might. ⁶These are things that I command your hearts. Teach them to your children. ⁷Speak of them when you sit in your homes, when you travel on the road; when you lie down, and when you arise.

Love of God, Moshe is saying, is not an individual, isolated experience. It is something that I am imparting to you today, and that you, after I am gone, will impart to your children. The instruction to speak “these things” (the imperative to love God) constantly is not simply a way of saying that God should constantly occupy our thoughts. Speech is connective: it is our way of engaging with one another, of bringing our minds and hearts into connection with others. Our love for God is not something we meditate about alone. It is a bridge between us and the human beings we love.

Moshe, according to Rashi, is not the first to connect our love for God with our love for others. Commenting on Yosef’s reunion with his father Ya’akov in Bereishit, Rashi notices that the *pasuk* indicates that only Yosef is crying. Ya’akov, Rashi says, is doing something different:

רש"י על בראשית מו:כט

אָבֶל יַעֲקֹב לֹא נָפַל עַל צִוְּיָאֵרֵי יוֹסֵף וְלֹא נִשְׁקָו, וְאָמְרוּ רַבּוּתֵינוּ, שֶׁהָיָה קוֹרֵא אֶת שְׁמַע

Rashi to Bereishit 46:29

Ya’akov, however, did not fall upon Yosef’s neck nor did he kiss him. Our Rabbis say: the reason was that he was reciting the Shema.

The *midrash* Rashi cites is, initially, strange. Why would Ya’akov, at the moment of reunion with his long lost son, decide to recite Shema?



While some commentaries on Rashi interpret Ya'akov's Shema recitation as a statement that Ya'akov's love of God is even greater than his love for his son, the Gur Aryeh¹ offers a different interpretation: it is not that Ya'akov's loves God more than Yosef. It is that Ya'akov's love for Yosef at this moment of reunion helps him love God:

גור אריה על רש"י שם

לפי שכאשר בא יעקב וראה את יוסף בנו מלך, בא בלבו אהבתו ויראתו של הקב"ה

Gur Aryeh to Rashi, above

Because when Ya'akov came and saw that Yosef, his son, was a ruler, his heart was filled with love and awe of God.

Far from being a moment where Ya'akov subdues his love for his son because of his love for God, says the Gur Aryeh, this is actually a moment where the two loves support one another: Ya'akov's love for his son fosters his love of God.

According to Devarim Rabbah, this is not the only moment that the Shema is part of a moment of love between Ya'akov and his children:

דברים רבה ב:יב

מהיכן זכו ישראל לקריאת שמע? משעה שנטה יעקב למיתה קרא לכל השבטים ואמר להן שמע משאני נפטר מן העולם אתם משתחווים לאלוה אחר? ... אמרו לו, שמע ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד

Devarim Rabbah 2:12

From did the Jewish people merit the recitation of the Shema? At the moment when Ya'akov was nearing death, he called all the tribes together and said to them: Perhaps

¹ R. Yehudah Loew ben Betzael (1522-1609), also known as the Maharal of Prague, who wrote this supercommentary on Rashi's commentary to the Torah.

when I pass from this world you will turn to worship another God? They said to him: Hear, Israel: Hashem is our God, Hashem alone.

Ya'akov, on his deathbed, is consumed with worry: will his sons remain loyal to God after his death? Will the legacy he has worked all his life to create and to transmit live on after he is gone?

Speaking the words of what will come to be the Shema, Ya'akov's children reassure him. "Listen, Yisrael," they say, using Ya'akov's second, God-given name. "Hashem is our God, Hashem alone." The Shema, in the mouths of Ya'akov's sons, is not only a pledge of loyalty to God, but to their dying father as well. In this moment when their earthly relationship is about to end, Ya'akov's children promise him that they will maintain faith with him and his God even after his death. Their relationship with Ya'akov will remain alive through their commitment to relationship with God.

Moshe, in this moment, mirrors Ya'akov's deathbed experience. Here, it is the dying father-figure who speaks the words of the Shema to his metaphorical children rather than they to him. The Shema, in Moshe's mouth, becomes a charge. I may be leaving you, Moshe implies. But our relationship is not over. In your relationship with God and the Torah, you continue your relationship with me as well.

For many Jews, our associations with the Shema are shaped by childhood memories: of our fathers prompting us, word by word, at bedtime; of mothers patiently reminding us which hand is our right before we covered our eyes. Those memories are not incidental to the Shema. Instead, they are intrinsic to what the Shema has always been: a recitation that binds us not only to God, but also to one another, in love.



When we teach our children to recite the Shema at night, we continue a legacy of love through covenant that stretches back through generations of parents and children—biological or spiritual—to Moshe and Ya’akov before them.

May we merit to transmit that covenant in love.