



Likkutei Sichos

Volume 21 | Shemos* | Sichah 3

The Child Sage

* As well as a *siyum* on tractate *Berachos* (Section 6 and on)

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Considerable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the translation while maintaining its clarity. However, as in all translations, inadvertent errors may occur.

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1.

MY FIRSTBORN ISRAEL

The first place where the Torah calls the Jews Hashem's "children" — in this week's *parshah* — it says,¹ "**My firstborn** son, Israel." {Rashi explains:} "*My firstborn* — a term denoting **greatness**."²

However, in several teachings of our Sages,³ the virtue of Jewish people being "children" is connected with the idea of **youth**. Namely, a Jew is like a **young child** — "Israel is a **lad**" (and therefore) "I love him."⁴ In this regard, an analogy is offered of a king who "had many sons. But he loved the youngest more than all the others."⁵

We need to clarify:

The love for a young son is "**more** than all the others." This implies that the inherent virtue of a "son" is **more** apparent in a young child than in an adult. Why, then (when speaking of the virtue of the Jewish people as "children"), does **this** verse emphasize, "**My firstborn son, Israel**" — "a term denoting **greatness**"?

2.

NOTHING TO GET IN THE WAY

We can answer this question by first explaining why the love for a young son is "**more** than all the others."

When it comes to an adult son who has matured physically, intellectually, and emotionally, the father loves him, not always just because the adult son is his child. The father surely loves his son because he is also wise and reasonable or possesses fine qualities. Alternatively, his son may be loved because he meticulously honors his father. All this is conditional love.

However, a father's love for a young child is purely an **essential** love. The young child does not possess a fully developed intellect or a refined personality. Moreover, the child's obedience and honor for his father are not due to the child's qualities but are an inherent

¹ *Shemos* 4:22.

² *Rashi*, commenting on the verse (in his explanation according to *pshat*).

³ See *Aggadas Bereishis*, ch. 5, sec. 1; *Devarim Rabbah*, ch. 5, sec. 7.

⁴ *Hoshea* 11:1.

⁵ *Devarim Rabbah*, ch. 5, sec. 7.

aspect of the child because the child **feels** that this is his father. Consequently, the father's love for his son, in turn, is not based on (a reason, such as) the son's **virtues**. Instead, it is an **essential** love. The father loves his child because he is the father's child, and they share one essence.⁶

For an adult son, although he is also one essence with his father since there is a feeling of conditional love, **it conceals** the essential love between them.

However, since a young child is not loved based on reason, the essential love is **exposed**. Therefore, the father loves the youngest most.

3.

HASHEM'S TWO LOVES

Just as this holds for an earthly father and son, it also holds Above, as it were, between Hashem (our Father in Heaven) and the Jewish people (His children).

On the contrary, parents' essential love for their children derives from Hashem's essential love for His children, the Jewish people. (**Therefore**, the love between parents and their children is indeed an apt analogy — presented by the Torah of **truth** — for Hashem's love for the Jews.)

There are two possibilities (levels) in Hashem's love for the Jewish people:

When the Jewish people serve Hashem, and their virtues, compared with all other nations, are manifest, Hashem's love for the Jewish people is (also) based on reason, similar to the love of a father for his adult son.

[Therefore, we find that the Midrash⁷ connects the verse, “My firstborn {בְּכֹרִי} son, Israel” with the good deeds of the Jews — “because they excelled in good deeds before G-d at Sinai” — because the term “firstborn” (“an expression of greatness”) alludes to the (revealed) virtues of the Jewish people.]

⁶ See *Sefer Ha'erchim Chabad*, entry “*Ahavah*,” pp. 243 ff, and the sources there.

⁷ *Midrash Mishlei*, ch. 6, sec. 1 {*Yalkut Shimoni on Nach*, ch. 938}; see *Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 15, sec. 27.

However, Hashem also loves the Jews on an **essential** level because they are “a literal part of Hashem Himself”⁸ (part of His essence),⁹ like a father’s love for his **young** son, simply because he is his child. This love is independent of the Jewish people’s *avodah*.¹⁰

[As the Midrash says,¹¹ “Just as in the case of a man’s son, when he is a young child, even if he sins, his father does not forsake him because he is a child... so, too, Israel, even if they sin, He regards the sin as inadvertent because Israel is like a **young** child.”]

This essential love is revealed when a Jew sees himself (in his *avodah*) like a young child:

When a person **feels** that he has “spiritual status” — he understands G-dliness, loves Hashem, fears Him, etc. — and this feeling is **revealed** within the person, then Hashem’s love for him is also based on reason, which **obscures** the essential love.

Only when the person feels like a small child, regardless of how magnificent his virtues maybe — he is small in his own eyes¹² to the extent that he feels like a toddler who has no (manifest) virtues — then his *avodah* is (not based on reason and pleasure, but it is) done with **kabbalas ol**¹³

— analogous to a small child whose **nature** is to be submissive; he obeys his parents even when he does not understand their directives.

This evokes Hashem’s essential love for the Jewish people in a **revealed** form.

4.

THE BETTER YOU GET, THE LESS LOVE?!

However, we still need to clarify:

Based on the above, it turns out that when a person’s *avodah* remains spiritually juvenile, it leads to the revelation of Hashem’s essential love. On the other hand, when a Jew’s *avodah* in Torah and mitzvos is performed in a manner that brings out his manifest qualities

⁸ *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 2.

⁹ See *Sefer Hamaamorim Kuntresim*, vol. 1, *Discourse “Zos Toras Habayis 5689,”* ch. 4 ff.

¹⁰ {Divine service.}

¹¹ *Aggadas Bereishis*, ch. 5, sec. 1.

¹² In line with *Maharzu’s* commentary on *Devarim Rabbah*, ch. 5, sec. 7.

¹³ {Lit., “accepting the (Heavenly) yoke,” connoting an unequivocal commitment to Hashem, grounded not on a person’s own desire or understanding, but rather on his selfless submission to Hashem.}

of intellect and emotions, etc. (which, therefore, also brings out Hashem's love for him based on reason), it **conceals** the essential love!

True, when in a state of self-abnegation and youthful simplicity, the revealed virtues of Jews do not conceal the essential love, as discussed above. But this result is not a direct cause of his **avodah of self-abnegation**. The **self-abnegation itself does not bring about** essential love. Instead, **despite** the person's visible virtues, the essential love — present **from the outset** — **can remain revealed** (because his self-abnegation covers up the **manifest virtues**).

However, Hashem instilled within us the nature to grow, and the trait of greatness is (not self-abnegation and youthful simplicity but) personal growth in terms of intellect, emotions, etc. Indeed, the intent is not for the essential love to be concealed. Thus, we must assume that *avodah* stems from the trait of greatness itself, which (when performed appropriately) augments (and heightens) the revelation of **essential love**.

5.

USING REASON BECAUSE HASHEM SAID SO

The explanation is as follows:

A Jew's intellectual and emotional *avodah* is not, G-d forbid, contradictory to his self-abnegation to Hashem. Just the opposite — his intellectual and emotional *avodah* is a result and extension of his self-abnegation. The very fact that a person must strive to **understand** the wisdom of Hashem (Torah) and to **feel enthusiastic and relish** Torah and mitzvos is because this is **Hashem's will**. So, he surrenders himself to Hashem's will **in everything**.

This is analogous to the explanation¹⁴ regarding the difference between mitzvos that are *mishpatim*,¹⁵ *eidus*,¹⁶ and *chukim*,¹⁷ respectively. (This is a legitimate division that the Torah itself creates.) Even if we assume that mitzvos are divided not only by the degree of rationale they possess but also by how the mitzvos are observed — *eidus* should be observed while keeping in mind that they **testify** to certain truths, *mishpatim* should (also) be observed while keeping in mind that they are also necessitated by reason — yet this requirement itself that those rational mitzvos are also performed because they make sense must be done with

¹⁴ See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 8, pp. 130, ff.; et al.

¹⁵ {Lit., “judgements”; mitzvos that human intellect also mandate.}

¹⁶ {Lit., “testimonies”; mitzvos whose rationale can be understood once they have been commanded.}

¹⁷ {Lit., “statutes”; mitzvos with no intellectual basis. Indeed, they may even be illogical. As such, they can and must be observed with *kabbalas ol* alone.}

kabbalas ol. In other words, they should be performed this way because Hashem **decreed** that these mitzvos observances are (also) compelled by reason.

It turns out that the spiritual virtues of a Jewish person (of his intellect and emotions) do not conceal nor weaken his youthful simplicity, self-abnegation, and *kabbalas ol*. On the contrary, when a Jew applies his intellect and emotions in the service of Hashem because this is what Hashem commands, he proves that his *kabbalas ol* has matured. His self-subordination has not remained isolated from his self-abnegation; it has entirely enveloped the Jew with all his faculties.

Therefore, not only do his virtues not conceal the essential love, but on the contrary, there is an increased revelation of the essential love so that it takes over the person entirely.

6.

THE CONCLUSION COMPLEMENTS THE BEGINNING

This point mentioned above — that a Jew’s intellectual and emotional *avodah* must be a result of and the continuation of his *kabbalas ol* — is also hinted at in the fact that the conclusion of the **first** tractate of the Talmud, *Berachos*,¹⁸ speaks about the virtues of Torah scholars: “Torah scholars have no rest... ‘They move from strength to strength....’¹⁹ Torah scholars increase peace in the world, as the verse says,²⁰ ‘And all your children will be disciples of Hashem....’”

The **first** tractate of the Talmud points to the **beginning** of a person’s *avodah*, *kabbalas ol*. As the *Rishonim*²¹ say:²² The Talmud begins with tractate *Berachos* because “the **beginning** of wisdom is the **fear** of Hashem.”²³ This tractate discusses (the *Shema*, which entails) “the {declaration of} Hashem’s unity and accepting upon oneself the yoke of Heaven and Torah and mitzvos, etc.”

However, the conclusion of the tractate — “Everything follows the conclusion”²⁴ — speaks about the virtue of **Torah scholars**, the study of Torah (intellect), and even more so,

¹⁸ {*Berachos* 64a.}

¹⁹ *Tehillim* 84:8.

²⁰ *Yeshayahu* 54:13.

²¹ {Torah sages of the 11th through 15th centuries.}

²² *Piskei Riaz* on *Berachos*, at the beginning (quoted in a gloss in *Rambam’s* introduction to his *Commentary on Mishnah*); see also, *Meiri* in his introduction (toward the end), and at the beginning of tractate *Berachos*.

²³ *Tehillim* 111:10.

²⁴ *Berachos* 12a.

their virtue in that “they have no rest... they move from strength to strength” — which is contrary to the idea of *kabbalas ol*, where there should be no changes.²⁵

The allusion here is that the conclusion (epitome) of the “tractate”²⁶ (*avodah*) of *kabbalas ol* is attained when *kabbalas ol* also saturates a person’s intellect, even consummate intellect (the intellect of Torah). When this occurs, the Jew’s scholarly affairs are a component of the “tractate” (*Berachos*) of the fear of Hashem, an expression of his *kabbalas ol*.

7.

SMALL BUILDERS

This unity of *kabbalas ol* (which expresses the essential virtue of Jewish people as Hashem’s children, as mentioned above in Section 3) with the manifest virtues (intellect and emotions, etc.) is also hinted at (in the teaching) at the end of the tractate itself, “*And all בְּנֵיךָ {your children} will be disciples of Hashem, and your children’s peace will be abundant*”²⁷ — do not read ‘בְּנֵיךָ {your children},’ but, ‘בּוֹנֵיךָ {your builders}.”

The verse mentions two things: (a) “And all your children will be disciples of Hashem” — where “your children” means children literally; and (b) “and your children’s peace will be abundant,” about which the Gemara says, “do not read ‘your children,’ but, ‘your builders,” — this refers to Torah scholars who build the world; they increase peace in the world.

Understood simply, the reason why the Gemara quotes the beginning of the verse is only to show that (a) the verse speaks about “disciples of Hashem,” Torah scholars,²⁸ and (b) the second time the verse says, “your children,” it is expounded as, “your builders” because the verse already said, “your children,” earlier.

In a more profound sense, we can suggest that the words “And all your children will be disciples of Hashem” (also) serve as an **explanation** for the teaching, “Do not read ‘your children,’ but ‘your builders.’”

As known, when our Sages employ the hermeneutic principle “Do not read... but...,” the alternate reading does not **negate** the verse’s initial reading; it is an **additional** reading.²⁹

²⁵ *Torah Or*, “*Vayakhel*,” 89d.

²⁶ {Colloquially, the *aramaic* term for “tractate,” *mesechta* (מסכתא), can be used used informally, in a broader sense, representing a challenging and comprehensive goal or subject.}

²⁷ {*Yeshayahu* 54:13.}

²⁸ See *Radak* and *Metzudos* on this verse.

²⁹ See *Halichos Eli*, ch. 3; *Guide for the Perplexed*, vol. 3, ch. 43; *Responsa of Radbaz*, vol. 3, responsun 1068 (643); *Encyclopedia Talmudis*, vol. 2, entry “*Al Tikri*.”

Likewise, in our instance, even after the teaching “Do not read ‘your children’ but ‘your builders,’” the literal interpretation “your children” remains.

How does this translate into a person’s *avodah*? Torah scholars are builders; they increase peace in the world. But this only applies when they study the Torah like **children** (“your children”). The virtue of a child is primarily in the case of a **small** child (as mentioned above) when the study is with a sense of smallness³⁰ and **self-abnegation**.

What connection does self-abnegation have with learning? Seemingly, they are opposites! Therefore, the verse prefaces this: “**And all your children will be disciples of Hashem.**”

Being “disciples of Hashem” is not a distinct virtue that the Jew attains; instead, it comes together with “Your children” — being a child of Hashem — the essence of a Jew is one with G-dliness. This automatically results in all his matters being **one** with G-dliness [his intellect is used so that he becomes “a disciple of **Hashem**” (through Torah study); his emotions express his love and fear of **Hashem**, etc.]. Thus, “And **all** your children will be disciples of Hashem” — if a person is among “your children,” then he is “a disciple of Hashem.”

Therefore, even when a person studies Torah — when at that time it is revealed (not that he is among “your children,” but) that he is among “your builders” (“Do not read ‘your children,’ but ‘your builders’”), this, too, is based on the premise of him being among “your children,” that he is a child of Hashem, which expresses itself in smallness and self-abnegation, as mentioned above.

8.

KIDS KIDS KIDS

We can suggest that a fascinating observation can be made about this {interplay of characteristics}:

Just as we can appreciate the essential value of a Jew as a child of Hashem, using an analogy of the relationship between a father and a **small** child in the physical realm

— because the essential love of parents for children **derives** from Hashem’s (our Father’s) essential love of the Jewish people, as mentioned above in Section 3 —

³⁰ See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 19, pp. 38 ff., where this concept is discussed at length.

the same applies to the specifics — “And all your children will be disciples of Hashem” — that expressing the level of “your children” brings in its wake the superior quality of being “disciples of Hashem”:

This matter {i.e., interplay of characteristics}, as found in Jews (Hashem’s son), is also telescoped into an **actual** small child. A child possesses not only the traits of smallness and self-abnegation (as mentioned above in Section 3) but also that of **learning**:

As we see in real life, children constantly ask and inquire about everything happening around them. They keep asking “what” and “why.” If they do not receive an answer that satisfies them, they ask again and again.

Moreover, the virtue of Torah scholars mentioned in the (first) teaching at the end of tractate *Berachos* — “Torah scholars have no rest... they go from strength to strength” — is also evident in a child (a small child). As we see in real life, children (in a healthy state) do not rest. A child does not stay in the same place for long; he keeps moving, seeking to do something, etc.

Moreover, **these** traits are present in children **to a much greater extent** than in adults. Unlike in adults, this is a **natural** tendency in children.

On a deeper level, we can suggest the following reason: “All your children” (children of Hashem) automatically make the children “**disciples of Hashem.**” Therefore, the traits of being a disciple are also {latent} in “children,” literally. Since the traits of “your children” are more revealed in a child, so are the traits of a disciple.

(And from the fact that this is true in the case of Jewish children, it is then expanded to characterize children in the rest of the world — this is the nature of every child).³¹

³¹ We can posit that for this reason, these traits are more pronounced in Jewish children than in the children of other nations. This is similar to the explanation provided regarding parents’ essential love for their children, and children’s essential love for their parents — how this love is stronger among the Jewish people than among other nations, since its source stems from Hashem’s love for the **Jewish people** and **their** love for Him. (see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 6, p. 8, and fn. 33 there [and *Sefer HaMaamarim Melukat*, vol. 4, p. 71].

9.

ILLUSTRATING THE ESSENTIAL LOVE

Based on all the above, we can also appreciate why the verse says, “My **firstborn** son, Israel” — even though the virtue of a “son” is more revealed in a **young** son (and therefore, Jews are compared in several places to a young child, as mentioned above in Section 1).

The manifest qualities of Jews, which result in them being “*My firstborn* — a term denoting **greatness**,” are not separate from their essential virtue as “children” (of Hashem). On the contrary, the perfection of the essential virtue of a Jew as a child of Hashem expresses itself when it also comes out in his manifest qualities, as explained above.

When we want to express the essential love of Hashem for Jews **in and of itself**, we use the analogy of a father’s love for his **young** son because, in this context, the essential love reveals itself **naturally**. In the case of a young son who does not have manifest qualities, the father’s love for him is purely essential. This love contrasts with that of a grown child, who already has manifest qualities and virtues that arouse the father’s love based on reason, **naturally** concealing the essential love.

Only through effort and toil can this adult child reach a level where the essential love remains revealed, to the extent that the manifest qualities further strengthen the revelation of the essential love, as mentioned above).

But when we want to express the essence of the Jew, we use the description “My **firstborn** son” (similar to “And all your children will be disciples of Hashem”). This expresses how the essential virtue of the Jewish people as children dominates them, becoming their whole existence—in all respects.

From talks delivered on *Shabbos parshas Balak* and the 20th of Av, 5741 (1981)