

The Ba'al Shem Tov On Loving Your Fellow Jew

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In response to recent news from Eretz Yisrael, we are posting a few excerpts from the opening section of "[The Path of the Baal Shem Tov](#)," with a minor modifications. Sources include both early and later Chassidic traditions, including several from Chabad.

Ahavas Yisrael is the first gate which leads to the courtyard of the Creator (Likutey Dibburim II, p. 412).

The Baal Shem Tov once reproached an itinerant preacher who had delivered a fiery sermon to a group of simple villagers. "How can you speak evil of the Jewish people?" he cried. "All day long a Jew trudges through the marketplace until dusk, when he becomes anxious and says, 'It's getting late for *minchah* (the afternoon prayer).' So he runs off somewhere to pray and doesn't even know what he is saying—but nevertheless, the very angels tremble at his words" (*Shivchey Baal Shem Tov* 128).

The Maggid of Mezeritch taught: The Baal Shem Tov often used to say that love of the Jewish people is the same thing as love of God. The verse states, "You are children unto the Lord, your God." When one loves the father, one loves the children (*HaYom Yom*, p. 81).

“Israel in whom I will praise Myself...” (Isaiah 49:3). God cannot be [adequately] praised—for who can comprehend His Essence? Therefore, God brought the Jewish people into existence in order to praise Himself. Just as a father praises himself because of his children, so does the Holy One, Blessed be He, praise Himself because of Israel (*Sefer Baal Shem Tov, Ki Savo 4*, citing *Kisvey Kodesh*).

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18)—this is a reflection of the mitzvah, “You shall love the Lord, your God.” When one loves another Jew, he loves the Holy One, blessed be He. For the soul of a Jew is a “portion of God Above,” and when one loves a fellow Jew, he loves his innermost essence. Thus, he loves the Holy One, blessed be He, as well (*HaYom Yom 78*).

[God told Avraham: I Look to the heavens and count the stars ... Thus shall be your offspring” (Genesis 15:15). The Baal Shem Tov explained: The stars appear very small, but in heaven they are really very large. The same is true of the Jewish people. In this world, they appear very small. But in the Supernal World, they are really very great (Rabbi Zvi Hirsch of Ziditchov, *Beis Yisrael, Lekh Lekha 36*, cited in *Sefer Baal Shem Tov, Lekh Lekha 27*).

The Baal Shem Tov taught: The Holy One, blessed be He, sends a soul to the world to live seventy or eighty years, just to do another Jew a favor, materially in general or spiritually in particular (*Likutey Dibburim, Vol. III, p. 1126*, cited in *Kesser Shem Tov, Hosafos, 130*).

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