

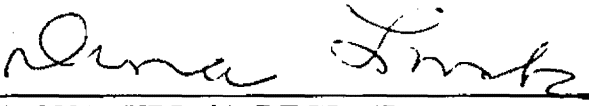
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Executive Summary

Author: Esther L. Lederman

Advisor: Dr. Alyssa Gray

Title: *V'ahavta et Adonai Elohecha*: The Commandment to Love God

Contribution: The purpose of this thesis is to develop an understanding of the commandment to love God from within the Jewish tradition. It covers love of God from the perspective of the Bible, the midrashic and Talmudic literature, as well as later medieval philosophers and *halakhists*. It examines the thinking of Maimonides, Bahya Ibn Pakuda and the *Hasidei Ashkenaz*.

In addition, this thesis will examine what Jewish tradition can teach us moderns about love of God in the 21st century. Does it still have value, not just for the purposes of study, but also from the perspective of our behavior?

Material Covered: This thesis covers a wide array of Jewish texts. The following is a list of these sources: Deuteronomy, Mishnah, Tosefta, Talmud *Bavli* and *Yerushalmi*, *Sifre Devarim*, *Seder Eliyahu Rabbah*, *Midrash Tanhuma*, Hebrew Crusader chronicles, Epistle on Martyrdom, *Mishneh Torah*, Guide of the Perplexed, *Hovot HaLevavot*, *Sefer Hasidim*.

Number of Chapters: Six Chapters

Chapter One: Love of God in the Bible

Chapter Two: Love of God through Action

Chapter Three: Love of God through Death

Chapter Four: Maimonides and Love of God

Chapter Five: Love of God in the Thought of Bahya Ibn Pakuda and *Hasidei Ashkenaz*

Chapter Six: Towards a New Understanding of Love of God

V'ahavta et Adonai Elohecha
The Commandment to Love God

Esther L. Lederman

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of Requirements for Ordination

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my late uncle, Sol Lederman, for his gift of Torah.

Acknowledgments

To Dr. Alyssa Gray – for your wise guidance and brilliant scholarship. I am blessed to have been your student.

To my professors –for your wisdom, your compassion, and your faith.

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To my friends – for still loving me and supporting me throughout these five years, even when your phone calls and e-mails went unanswered during the writing of this thesis.

To Jon – for believing in me, for making me laugh, for your delicious meals, and making all the hard work worth it, knowing that it would mean nothing unless I could share it with you.

Introduction

וְאָהַבְתָּ אֶת יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ כָּכָל לְבָבְךָ וּכָכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּכָכָל מְאֹדְךָ:
“you shall love *Adonai* your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your might.”

Every day, Jews around the world utter these words affirming the commandment to love God. They are remarkable words. To love God? What does this even mean? I can barely put into words what it means to love another human being, a living, breathing person with whom I have a relationship. But what does it mean to love God, a being that I can't see, touch, or hear, at least not in a way that makes sense? What kind of relationship could this be?

The purpose of this thesis is to develop an understanding of the commandment to love God from within the Jewish tradition. How does one understand love of God from the perspective of the Bible, the midrashic and Talmudic literature, as well as later medieval philosophers and *halakhists*? What can the tradition teach us moderns about love of God in the 21st century? Does it still have value, not just for the purposes of study, but also from the perspective of our behavior?

Beginning in chapter one, we will examine love of God from the perspective of the Bible, comparing the use of the term *ahav* to Near Eastern treaties. Chapter two will explore the theme of love of God through action, mainly by examining Talmudic and midrashic sources. The concept of love of God through death will be addressed in chapter three, with great emphasis on the narrative account of Rabbi Akiba's martyrdom in addition to other medieval material from both the Sephardic and Ashkenazic worlds. In chapter four, the thesis will head in a slightly different direction; rather than examine specific themes as found in the sources, I will take a more direct approach to the study of specific thinkers on the subject of love of God. The chapter will examine the work of

Maimonides in his two masterpieces – the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Guide of the Perplexed*. Bahya Ibn Pakuda and his work, *Hovot HaLevavot*, will be compared to the writings of *hasidei Ashkenaz* in chapter five. In chapter six, I take a more reflective approach, presenting an argument for how a liberal Jew can both understand and perhaps, live out the commandment to love God.

I chose to examine a specific verb – *ahav* – and a specific scriptural text – Deuteronomy 6:5, since this is the proof text for the commandment to love God, as I will demonstrate. I did not look at other words for love, such as *devekut*, cleaving, nor did I examine *Shir Hashirim*, the biblical book that the classical rabbis interpreted as an allegory for the love between God and the Jewish people. I also limited the discussion to specific time-periods, not wanting to venture beyond the late-medieval period. There is much rich material to speak of among the kabbalists, both in the zoharic circle and those residing in *Tzfat*. Further research must be done into their writings. I also did not examine this theme in the works of the Baal Shem Tov and his circle of Hasidic disciples.

In addition, there are a number of themes that are intimately connected with love of God in the tradition that are also beyond our scope. They include fear of God and reward and punishment.

We turn now to love of God as presented in the biblical text.

Chapter One: Love of God in the Bible

The obligation to love God is taken from Deuteronomy 6:5:

וְאָהַבְתָּ אֶת יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל מְאֹדְךָ:

You shall love Adonai your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might.

These words have found their way into Jewish liturgy, recited each day in both the morning and the evening service. There is also a tradition of reciting the *Sh'ma* at bedtime. The Biblical text is clear – one should love God with all of one's being. But how is this possible? This chapter will examine the concept of love of God from the perspective of the Bible, taking into account arguments presented by both Christian and Jewish scholars. It will demonstrate that love of God means to follow God's commandments. To love God means to swear loyalty to the Sovereign and serve His will. In addition, we examine the thinking of a Christian scholar who argues that the love of God through servitude must include a necessary emotional response.

What did it mean to love God in Biblical times? What can we learn about the word “love” – *ahavah*-- from other ancient Near Eastern sources?

I should note that love of God in the Bible is a vast subject; it could have been the sole topic of this thesis. However, I have chosen to take a narrow and deep approach, focusing solely on the use of the root *ahav*. I was more interested in examining love as a commandment, and it is for this rationale I am focusing on the word *ahav*. This study will not examine the metaphors and allegories of love of God found in the scriptural text, most prominent among them the Song of Songs and the prophet Hosea.

Love of God in the Bible is clearly a Deuteronomic concept. Although the word “love” appears in other books of the Bible, it is most prominent in the book of

Deuteronomy. A careful consideration of all the instances when some form of the word *ahav* is used leads to the conclusion that to love God means to follow and obey God's commandments. The following are just a few examples of this theme as they appear in the Biblical text:

וְאַהֲבַתְּ אֶת יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְשָׁמַרְתָּ מִשְׁמַרְתּוֹ וְחָק תִּיּוֹ וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו וּמִצְוֹתָיו כָּל הַיָּמִים:

Love the Lord your God, and always keep His charge, His laws, His rules, and His commandments.¹ (Deut. 11:1)

וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל מָה יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ שׂוֹאֵל מֵעַמְּךָ כִּי אִם לִירְאָה אֶת יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ לָלֶכֶת בְּכָל דְּרָכָיו וּלְאַהֲבָה אֹתוֹ וּלְעֹבֹד אֶת יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לֵבְבְךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ: לְשִׁמֹּר אֶת מִצְוֹת יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְאֶת חָק תִּיּוֹ אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם לְטוֹב לָךְ:

And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God demand of you? Only this: to revere the Lord your God, to walk only in His paths, to love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and soul, keeping the Lord's commandments and laws, which I enjoin upon you today, for your good. (Deut. 10:12-13)

וְיָדַעְתָּ כִּי יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ הוּא הָאֵל הַיּוֹם הָאֵל הַנָּאֶמְן שׂוֹמֵר הַבְּרִית וְהַחֲסֵד לֹא הִבִּיּוּ וְלֹא מָרִי <מִצְוֹתָיו לְאֵלֶיךָ דּוֹר...> וְשָׁמַרְתָּ אֶת הַמִּצְוָה וְאֶת הַחֻקִּים וְאֶת הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם לְעֹשׂוֹתָם:

Know, therefore, that only the Lord your God is God, the steadfast God who keeps His covenant faithfully to the thousandth generation of those who Love him and keep His commandments....Therefore, observe faithfully the Instruction – the laws and rules – with which I charge you today. (Deut. 7:9,11)

To love God means to follow His laws and rules, which have been outlined in the Bible.

As Blu Greenberg writes, "For a Jew to say, 'I will' or 'I do' is as powerful a statement of love as it is to say the words, 'I love' or 'I believe.'"²

¹ *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2000). All English translations of biblical verses use the JPS.

² Blu Greenberg, "Hear, O Israel: Law and Love in Deuteronomy," *Preaching Biblical Texts: Expositions by Jewish and Christian Scholars*, edited by Fredrick C. Holmgren and Herman E. Schaalman, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 153.

The Psalmist continues this theme in Psalm 119. To love God also means to love His Torah and commandments:

וְאֶשְׂתַּעֲשֶׂע בְּמִצְוֹתֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר אֶהְבֵּתִי:
וְאֶשָּׂא כָפִי אֶל מִצְוֹתֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר אֶהְבֵּתִי וְאֶשְׁיָחָה בְּהִקְיֶיךָ

I will delight in Your commandments, which I love; I study your laws. (Ps. 119:48-49)

שָׂקַר שִׁנְאַתִּי וְאַתְעֲבָה תוֹרַתְךָ אֶהְבֵּתִי:
שִׁבְעַת בְּיוֹם הַלֵּלְתִּיךָ עַל מִשְׁפָּטֶי צִדְקָתְךָ:
שְׁלוֹם רַב לֹא הָיָה תוֹרַתְךָ וְאִין לְמוֹ מְכַשּׁוֹל:

I hate and abhor falsehood; I love your teaching.
I praise you seven times each day for Your just rules.
Those who love Your teaching enjoy well-being:
They encounter no adversity. (Ps. 119:163-165)

What else does the Biblical text teach us about love of God? It is clear that love of God will result in a reward. The most famous verse is taken from Deuteronomy, chapter 11, which has found its way into the liturgy surrounding the *Sh'ma*:

וְהָיָה אִם שָׁמַעַתְּ תִשְׁמְעוּ אֶל מִצְוֹתַי אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי כִי מַצִּיחַ אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם לְאַהֲבָה אֶת יְיָ וְנָק אֶל הַיָּסֶם
וְלַעֲבֹדוֹ בְּכָל לִבְבְּכֶם וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁכֶם: וְנָתַתִּי מִטֶּר אֲרֻצְכֶם בְּעֵתוֹ יוֹרֵה וּמִלְקוֹשׁ וְאַסְפֶּת דָּגָנְךָ
וְתִיר אֲשֶׁן וְיִצְהָרֶךָ: וְנָתַתִּי עֵשֶׂב בְּשִׂדְךָ לְבִהְמֹתֶיךָ וְאָכְלָתָם וְשִׂבְעָתָם:

If, then, you obey the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, loving the Lord your God and serving Him with all your heart and soul, I will grant the rain for your land in season, the early rain and the late. You shall gather in your new grain and wine and oil. I will also provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and thus you shall eat your fill. (Deut. 11:13-15)

The consequence of loving God by obeying the commandments is God's protection and care. In this example, God will provide the rain for the fields and grass for the cattle.

However, should one be lead astray from loving God, the punishment will be severe:

וְחָרָה אַף יְיָ וְנָק בְּכֶם וְעָצַר אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלֹא יִהְיֶה מִטֶּר וְהִיאָדְמָה לֹא תִתֵּן אֶת יְבוּלָהּ וְאַבְדֶּתֶם
מִהֲרָה מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר יְיָ נָתַן לָכֶם:

For the Lord's anger will flare up against you, and He will shut up the skies so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its produce; and you will soon perish from the good land that the Lord is assigning you. (Deut. 11:17)

The Biblical author clearly paints love of God as an advantageous act for the follower. A little further in chapter 11, God promises to remove the nations of the land from before the Israelites in return for their devotion:

כִּי אִם שָׁמַר תִּשְׁמְרוּן אֶת כָּל הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי כִי מִצְוָה אֶתְכֶם לַעֲשׂוֹתָהּ לְאַהֲבָה אֶת יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם לְלָקֶחַת בְּכָל דְּרָכָיו וּלְדַבְּקָהּ בּוֹ: וְהוֹרִישׁ יְיָ וְנָק אֶת כָּל הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה מִלִּפְנֵיכֶם וַיִּרְשְׁתֶּם גּוֹיִם גְּדֹלִים וְנֹעְצָמִים מִכֶּם: כָּל הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר תֵּדָרֵךְ בְּרַגְלְכֶם בּוֹ לָכֶם יִהְיֶה מִן הַמִּדְבָּר וְהַלְבָנוֹן מִן הַנָּהָר נָהָר פָּרָת וְעַד הַיָּם הָאֲחֵרוֹן יִהְיֶה גְבֻלְכֶם:

If, then, you faithfully keep all this Instruction that I command you, loving the Lord your God, walking in all His ways, and holding fast to Him, the Lord will dislodge before you all these nations: you will dispossess nations greater and more numerous than you. Every spot on which your foot treads shall be yours: your territory shall extend from the wilderness to the Lebanon and from the River – the Euphrates – to the Western Sea. (Deut. 11:22-24)

The ultimate blessing of loving God and following His commandments is life:

וּבְחַרְתָּ בַחַיִּים לַמַּעַן תִּחְיֶה אִתָּה וְזָרַעְךָ: לְאַהֲבָה אֶת יְיָ וְנָק אֶל הֵיךְ לְשֹׁמֵר עֲבָדָיו וּלְדַבְּקָהּ בּוֹ כִּי הוּא הֵיךְ וְאֵךְ נִמְיֵךְ לְשֹׁכֵת עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נָשָׁבַע יְיָ וְנָק לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב לֵאמֹר לָכֶם:

Choose life – if you and your offspring would live – by loving the Lord your God, heeding his commands and holding fast to Him. For thereby you shall have life and shall long endure upon the soil that the Lord swore to your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give to them. (Deut. 30:19-20)

But the decision to worship another god will lead to death and destruction for the Israelite people. In fact, the Torah makes it quite clear that love is a sign of loyalty and obedience to the one God. One cannot love God and follow other deities:

וְאִם יִפְגֹּה לְבָבְךָ וְלֹא תִשְׁמָע וְנִדְחִיתָ וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתָ לְאֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְעַבַּדְתָּם: הִגַּדְתִּי לָכֶם הַיּוֹם כִּי אֲבִיד תִּאֲבִדוּן לֹא תִאֲרִיכוּ יָמִים עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אָמַר עֲבַר אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן לְבִיא שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ:

But if your heart turns away and you give no heed, and are lured into the worship and service of other gods, I declare to you this day that you shall certainly perish; you shall not long endure on the soil that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. (Deut. 30:17-18)

In an earlier passage, taken from Deuteronomy 13, God warns the Israelites not to follow after false prophets, claiming that He is testing the Israelites in their love for *Adonai*:

כִּי יָקוּם בְּקִרְבְּךָ נָבִיא אוֹ חֹלֵם הָלוֹם וְנָתַן אֵלֶיךָ אוֹת אוֹ מוֹפֵת: וּבָא הָאוֹת וְהַמּוֹפֵת אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֵלֶיךָ לֵאמֹר גִּלְקָה אַחֲרַי אֵלֵּי הַיָּם אַחֲרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַעְתֶּם וְנִעְבַּדְם: לֹא תִשְׁמַע אֶל דִּבְרֵי הַנָּבִיא הַהוּא אוֹ אֶל חֹלֵם הַחֲלוֹם הַהוּא כִּי מִנְסָה יְקֹנֶה אֶל הָיִים אֶתְכֶם לְדַעַת הַיִּשְׁכֶּם אֲהָבִים אֶת יְקֹנֶה אֶל הָיִים בְּכָל לִבְבְּכֶם וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁכֶם: אַחֲרַי יְקֹנֶה אֶל הָיִים תִּלְכוּ וְאִתּוֹ תִּירָאוּ וְאֶת מִצְוֹתָיו תִּשְׁמְרוּ וּבְקִלּוֹ תִשְׁמְעוּ וְאִתּוֹ תַעֲבֹדוּ וְבוֹ תִדְבָּקוּ:

If there appears among you a prophet or a dream-diviner and he gives you a sign or a portent, saying "Let us follow and worship another god" – whom you have not experienced – even if the sign or portent that he named to you comes true, do not heed the words of that prophet or that dream diviner. For the Lord your God is testing you to see whether you really love the Lord your God will all your heart and soul. Follow none but the Lord your God, and revere none but Him: observe His commandments alone, and heed only His orders: worship none but Him, and hold fast to Him. (Deut. 13:2-5)

To love God is to swear an oath of loyalty to the Sovereign of the universe.

In the language of the Bible, Abraham is the only character that is referred to as God's "lover" – *ohavi*. The text comes from Isaiah 41:8:

וְאַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל עַבְדִּי
נֵעַקֵּב אֲשֶׁר בְּחַרְתִּיךָ זֶרַע אֲבֹתֶךָם אֲהָבִי:

But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, Seed of Abraham My friend

The JPS translates the word *ohavi* as friend. However, the Torah does not elaborate on the meaning of "*ahav*." It does not answer the question why it considers Abraham the "lover" of God. As we shall see in the next few chapters, the task of interpreting this is left to the early rabbis and later medieval Jewish philosophers. Abraham becomes the biblical model par excellence for loving God "with all one's heart, soul and might."

William Moran in his seminal article "The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy," published in 1963, argues that love of God in the

Bible was a commanded love in the form of a covenant between God and the Jewish people:

Love in Deuteronomy is a love that can be commanded. It is also a love intimately related to fear and reverence. Above all, it is a love which must be expressed in loyalty, in service, and in unqualified obedience to the demands of the Law. For to love God is, in answer to a unique claim, to be loyal to him, to walk in his ways, to keep his commandments, to do them, to heed them or his voice, to serve him. It is, in brief, a love defined by and pledged in the covenant – a covenantal love.³

Moran is concerned with two questions. The first is whether there were other examples of covenantal love in the ancient Near East and if so, do they have an impact on the love described in the book of Deuteronomy.

Through his studies of extra-biblical sources from the 18th to the seventh centuries BC, he argues that the “the term love [is] used to describe the loyalty and friendship joining independent kings, sovereign and vassal, king and subject.”⁴ Love is the language of international relations: subjects are ordered to love their sovereign. Quoting a letter sent to the king of Mari, Yasma’-Addu, a servant defines himself as *ra'imka*, “the one who loves you.” This sounds like a form of “*rai'a*”, as in “*v'ahavata l'rai'akha kamokha*,” taken from Leviticus 19. He points to further examples of the use of the term “love” in treaties established between the Pharaohs and their vassals, as well as materials from the Assyrian sphere of influence.

Moran also points to biblical examples of how the word “love” connotes loyalty established between neighboring kingdoms. In 1 Kings 5, it is used to describe the relationship between King Hiram of Tyre and King David:

³ William L. Moran, “The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*. 25 (1963): 78.

⁴ *Ibid.*

וַיִּשְׁלַח הִירָם מֶלֶךְ צוּר אֶת עֲבָדָיו אֶל שָׁלֹמֹה כִּי שָׁמַע כִּי אֵתוּ מִשְׁחוֹ לְמֶלֶךְ תַּחַת אֲבִיהוּ כִּי
אֲהָב הָיָה הִירָם לְדָוִד כָּל הַיָּמִים:

King Hiram of Tyre sent his officials to Solomon when he heard that he had been anointed king in place of his father; for Hiram had always been a friend of David. (1 Kings 5:15)

Like we saw in Isaiah, chapter 21, the JPS translates *ohev* as friend. But here, love describes the relationship between David and Hiram. It is in the context of a treaty, a covenant between the two partners. In verse 26, we read that Hiram and Solomon established a treaty with each other. This makes some sense, as Hiram and David were already united in a treaty, based on the evidence from 2 Samuel 5:11.

Moran concludes that that evidence exists of covenantal love in the world of the ancient near east:

...we may affirm, on the basis of biblical and extra-biblical evidence, the existence of a conception of a profane love analogous to the love of God in Deuteronomy. This profane love is also one that can be commanded, and it is a love too that may be defined in terms of loyalty, service and obedience. It is, like the love of God in Deuteronomy, a covenantal love.⁵

Moran also claims that the language of Deuteronomy has likely been influenced by surrounding cultures. Quoting from an Assyrian document, he compares its similarity to a passage in Deuteronomy 28. The Assyrian text reads: "May they make your ground (hard) like *iron* so that none of you may flourish. Just as rain does not fall from a *brazen* heaven, so may rain and dew not come upon your fields..."⁶ He translates Deuteronomy 28:23 as follows: "The sky over your heads will become like *bronze* and the earth under your feet like *iron*." Moran's conclusion is that the concept of love demonstrated in ancient covenantal treaties between kings and their subjects sheds light on how we should

⁵ Ibid., 81-82.

⁶ Ibid., 83. Emphasis is in the original.

understand the love of God as presented in Deuteronomy. Love of God is a sign of obedience to His will and a commitment to His commandments.

Jacqueline Lapsley, writing 40 years later in the same journal, responds to Moran's arguments about love. She criticizes him, and others, for remaining silent on the role emotions may play in the love depicted in Deuteronomy. While she agrees that the covenantal love between God and the Israelites is one defined by action, too little attention, she argues, has been paid to whether deeds should be accompanied by a requisite feeling of love towards the Deity. She writes:

Implied in Moran's argument...is the conviction that love does not entail a particular emotional response to the deity. The people's love for God does not involve their affect in any significant way....the scholarly emphasis on dutiful action has remained consistent, and in terms of the ethics of Deuteronomy this concern for action has been deemed sufficient. On this view, one's emotional life is irrelevant for ethics, because what counts is whether one fulfills one's duty by obeying the commandments."⁷

Arguing against Moran, she claims that "...the divine command in Deuteronomy that the people 'love' God involves human emotions in a significant way and is not simply constituted by actions borne of obedience."⁸ Lapsley wishes to prove that emotions play a role in ethics:

Actions devoid of feelings of love, even those that fulfill the commandments, are morally suspect. The biblical clue for this appears in God's relationship with Israel. God's love for Israel is not expressed solely in action but in the divine emotional response to Israel. Somehow, God's love for Israel is born out of a feeling, and that feeling has moral weight and relates in a significant way to the actions God takes on Israel's behalf (Deut 7:8).... 'right' – emotional responses are, in fact, necessary for right moral thinking.⁹

⁷ Jacqueline E. Lapsley, "Feeling Our Way: Love for God in Deuteronomy," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*. 65,3 (2003), 350-351.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 354-355.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 368.

Lapsley argues that love of God must include obedience to God through actions accompanied by the necessary emotional response of loving the Deity. She claims that the language of love as used in the biblical text to connote this notion of loyalty and servitude is taken from family life, "...and that its emotional connotation in that context is transferred to the political context in the borrowing. Consequently, one cannot assume that the language of love in Deuteronomy has been decisively stripped of its emotional connotations...."¹⁰ She concludes:

If it can be shown that love for God in Deuteronomy is not limited to obedience or to an emotionless version of loyalty but, in fact, has emotion as a constitutive element, then it follows...that the emotionally loving response to the deity is not an irrelevant footnote to obedience to the law, but is fundamental to a proper relationship with God.¹¹

Similar to Lapsley, Jeffrey Tigay argues that love of God includes passion and desire in addition to actions: "The command to love God may accordingly be understood as requiring one to *act* lovingly and loyally toward Him."¹² He adds that the Torah holds that attitudes can be properly cultivated through the performance of ritual and *mitzvot*; it is possible to command love in the eyes of the Torah.

Blu Greenberg, a modern Orthodox author, also argues that love of God is established in a covenant between God and the Jewish people. It is a relationship enacted by fulfilling the commandments. In this regard, she is very similar to Moran. But, she argues, "it is a covenant of love and of law, not of political fidelities....It is based on a mutual love. The covenant is the fruit of love, the expression of love and not its

¹⁰ Ibid., 355.

¹¹ Ibid. 369.

¹² Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1996) 77.

replacement or alternative.”¹³ In this regard, Greenberg argues differently than Moran. Although the covenant must include action, it is equally expressed with feelings of devotion and love. The covenant is the product of a relationship already defined by loving feelings towards one another.

In this chapter, we have seen two contrasting positions regarding love of God in the Bible. One position, held by Moran, is that love should be understood as an obligation. We are commanded to love God and we do so by obeying His will and following His *mitzvot*. Lapsley presented a second viewpoint. She argued that love of God must necessarily include an emotional component in addition to behavior. Blu Greenberg emphasized the need to see love of God in the context of a covenant with God. Yet all three have a common thread – love of God, from the perspective of the Bible, does involve some degree of action. It is upon this note that we head into chapter two, as the rabbis of the early centuries of the Common Era pick up on this theme.

¹³ Greenberg, “Hear, O Israel : Law and Love in Deuteronomy,” 150.

Chapter Two: Love of God through Action

As demonstrated by the previous chapter, the biblical tradition treats love of God as a commandment we must fulfill. It is not merely something we feel but something we must *do*. The early rabbis agreed. They claimed that love is an act, not an emotion. As this chapter will argue, love of God through action has many forms. It includes the study of Torah and how study affects our behavior. We must live our lives in such a way – honestly, with kindness – that we turn others into lovers of God. But our good behavior must also be accompanied by our study of God’s words. As we shall see, particular emphasis is placed on the study of the Oral Law. Those who deeply love God must commit themselves to the study of Talmud. This chapter will also show how love of God includes the donation of money as well as the practice of prayer. Various midrashim and *sugyot* from the Talmud *Bavli* will be examined, with some comparison of the different sources.

This emphasis on action should not be surprising. In Jewish tradition, there is an overall Jewish preference for obedience to religious law rather than “feelings.” This preference explains the creation of the *halakhic* system and the development of law codes that stipulated the specific commandments one must obey.

But this drive toward action may not only be due to the *halakhic* nature of rabbinic Judaism. It is also due to the fact that loving God the way we love other human beings is extremely difficult, if not impossible. All the things that cause us to love another person are absent in our relationship with God. But yet, the love of God appears to be a commandment. As we shall see in chapter 4, Maimonides lists it as the third of

248 positive commandments. The rabbis “legally activate” the commandment to love of God with the concrete actions this chapter will describe.

One of the ways the rabbis interpret love of God through action is by Torah study. At first glance, it might seem that the study of Torah is the opposite of action. Study implies sitting, reading, understanding, almost a lack of movement. Yet study belongs under the rubric of action for two very important reasons. One relates to a teaching offered in Talmud *Bavli Kiddushin* 40b:

Rabbi Tarfon and some elders were reclining in an upper chamber in the house of Nitza in Lod when this question came up: Which is greater, study or action? Rabbi Tarfon answered and said: action is greater. Rabbi Akiba said: study is greater. The others responded and said: study is greater because it leads to action.

The whole tenor of Jewish tradition has been that if study does not lead to practice, then the study will have been in vain. When the Jews accepted the covenant from God, they said “*na’aseh v’nishmah*” – we will do and we will hear. Study is intended to lead us to act. In addition, although study may appear to be passive, it requires active examination on the part of the mind that involves reaching conclusions and new understandings: a student of the tradition is not meant to serve as a submissive receptacle of earlier material. Maimonides will also emphasize this, as we will demonstrate in chapter 4.

The second reason study should be viewed as action will become obvious as we look at the selected texts on study. The included passages prove that the study of Torah divorced from acceptable practice and behavior is ruinous to fulfilling the commandment of love of God. At the same time, being a good person acting without the benefit of Jewish learning is equally harmful to establishing love of God.

The following *sugya* from Talmud *Bavli Masekhet Nedarim* 62a demonstrates that love of God is the appropriate motivator for studying Torah:

תניא: +דברים ל+ לאהבה את ה' אלהיך לשמוע בקולו ולדבקה בו - שלא יאמר אדם: אקרא שיקראוני חכם, אשנה שיקראוני רבי, אשנן שאהיה זקן ואשב בישיבה. אלא למד מאהבה וסוף הכבוד לבא, שנאמר: +משלי ז+ קשרם על אצבעותיך כתבם על לוח לבך, ואומר: +משלי ג+ דרכיה דרכי נועם, ואומר: +משלי ג+ עץ חיים היא למחזיקים בה ותומכיה מאושר.

It was taught in a baraita: "To love Adonai your God, to listen to His voice, and hold fast to him" (Deut. 30:20) so a man will not say: "I will read Torah so they will call me wise, study Mishnah so they will call me rabbi, I will study so they can treat me like an elder and sit in the academy." Rather study out of love, and in the end honor will come, as it says: "Bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablets of your heart," (Proverbs 7:3) and say "Her ways are paths of pleasantness," (Proverbs 3:17) and say "She is a tree of life to those who grasp her, and whoever holds on to her is happy." (Proverbs 3:18)

This particular *sugya*, using a verse from Deuteronomy, makes the argument that studying Torah should not be motivated by personal gain. Rather, study of Torah should be a consequence of loving God. Although there is a positive result to study – the honor and respect accorded the person – this should not influence one's decision to learn. In addition, this excerpt highlights the importance of studying more than just the Biblical text, or the Written Torah. Loving God is also demonstrated through the study of Oral Torah. The significance of studying the oral tradition in addition to the Written Torah will emerge in additional texts we will examine. However, we should remember that for the Sages, both represented the word of God. Although delivered to the Israelites in different forms, they held equal weight. Moshe Herr argues in his article in the *New Encyclopedia Judaica* that the oral law is "the authoritative interpretation of the Written Law which was regarded as given to Moses on Sinai. The Written and Oral Laws constitute together 'two that are one.'" He later quotes from the *Bavli*, Tractate *Gittin* 60b that "the Holy One made a covenant with Israel only for the sake of that transmitted orally."¹⁴

¹⁴ Moshe Herr, "Oral Law," *Encyclopedia Judaica*. Eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 15: 454.

The phrase *למד מאהבה* is complicated. Does this mean that love is the commandment and we fulfill the commandment by studying? Or alternatively, is it teaching us that love is the motivating force behind Torah study? In this light, love could be seen as an emotion, a mental state rather than an action. This tension between love as something we do versus something we feel, appears later in the works of Maimonides, and the German-Jewish pietists of the 13th century. After examining the material before us, we will address this theme in greater detail in the chapter devoted to Maimonides.

A brief excerpt from Talmud *Bavli Masechet Ketubot* 111b broaches the notion of loving God through study. As this text demonstrates, if one is not able to demonstrate love of God through one's own intellectual acumen, support of Torah scholars is just as legitimate. The *sugya* is below:

+דברים ל' לאהבה את ה' אלהיך ולדבקה בו - וכי אפשר לאדם לידבק בשכינה?
אלא, כל המשיא בתו לתלמיד חכם, והעושה פרקמטיא לתלמידי חכמים, והמהנה תלמידי
חכמים מנכסיו, מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו מדבק בשכינה.

“Loving Adonai your God, listening to His voice, holding fast to him.” (Deut 30:20) Is it possible for a person to cleave to the *Shechinah*? Rather, whoever marries his daughter to a *talmid chacham*, and the one who takes care of business affairs for Torah scholars, or who benefits Torah scholars with his possessions, the Torah regards him as if he is cleaved to the *Shechinah*.

The care shown to a *talmid chacham* is one way to demonstrate our love of God. By marrying our daughters to these wise scholars or providing for their economic stability, we have strengthened the pursuit of Torah study in the world. Although the actor in this scenario is not engaged in study directly, he fulfills the command to love God by enabling others to study God's word.

As we saw in *Masechet Nedarim*, study of Torah for its own sake, without the desire of a reward, is one way to demonstrate love of God. However, as we shall see in a

moment, study of Torah is only relevant in so far as it is attached to proper behavior. The following *sugya* from Talmud *Bavli Yoma* 86a demonstrates:

אביי אמר: כדתניא, +דברים ו+ ואהבת את ה' אלהיך - שיהא שם שמים מתאהב על ידך, שיהא קורא ושונה ומשמש תלמידי חכמים, ויהא משאו ומתנו בנחת עם הבריות, מה הבריות אומרות עליו - אשרי אביו שלמדו תורה, אשרי רבו שלמדו תורה. או להם לבריות שלא למדו תורה, פלוני שלמדו תורה - ראו כמה נאים דרכיו, כמה מתוקנים מעשיו, עליו הכתוב אומר +ישעיהו מט+ ויאמר לי עבדי אתה ישראל אשר בך אתפאר. אבל מי שקורא ושונה ומשמש תלמידי חכמים ואין משאו ומתנו באמונה, ואין דבורו בנחת עם הבריות, מה הבריות אומרות עליו - אוי לו לפלוני שלמד תורה, אוי לו לאביו שלמדו תורה, אוי לו לרבו שלמדו תורה, פלוני שלמד תורה - ראו כמה מקולקלין מעשיו וכמה מכווערין דרכיו! ועליו הכתוב אומר +יהזקאל לו+ באמר להם עם ה' אלה ומארצו יצאו.

Abaye said: "Like it was taught in a baraita, 'you shall love Adonai, your God,' (Deut. 6:5) which means that the name of heaven becomes beloved through your hand, that one should read Torah, study Mishnah and serve Torah scholars, that one's dealings with other people should be pleasant. What do people say about him? Praised is the father who taught him Torah, praised is the teacher who taught him Torah. Oy to the ones that do not study Torah. This one who learned Torah – see how pleasant are his paths, how perfected are his deeds. Upon him the text says, 'And He said to me, 'You are my servant, Israel, in whom I glory.' (Isaiah 49:3)

But, whoever reads Torah and studies Mishnah and supports Torah scholars and does not deal faithfully in his dealings, and does not speak pleasantly with other creatures, what will people say about him:? Oy to so-and-so who studied Torah! Oy to the father who taught him Torah! See how cursed are his doings and how ugly are his ways. Upon him the text says, 'These are the people of Adonai, yet they had to leave His land. (Ezekiel 36:20)."

This *sugya* argues that being learned is simply not enough. For as the second half of the excerpt demonstrates, being a Torah scholar who acts dishonestly and speaks maliciously will lead others to curse the learning and teaching of Torah. Implicitly, the Talmud seems to be saying that if one were to behave in an objectionable fashion, it would be better if one were not a student of Torah. However, the opposite is also true. Good behavior is not good enough. One must study Torah in addition to being a good person. For it is the study of Torah coupled with moral behavior that will encourage others to

become students of Torah. Proper behavior alone does not turn one into a lover of God; it is also having the words of God in one's heart, on one's mind and on one's lips.

The *baraita* quoted by Abaye defined love of God to mean turning others into lovers of God. How is one to do that? Through proper action coupled with Torah study. If people see your good acts, and know that you are an observant Jew, they will praise the study of Torah and curse those who do not engage with Torah. What we might have expected to see in this *sugya* is a commitment by these "bystanders" to study Torah or a curse regarding themselves because they did not study Torah. But that is not what we find. However, a very similar text from *Seder Eliyahu Rabbah*, chapter 26 adds this. This midrash is as follows:

דבר אחר ואהבת את ה' אלהיך (שם/דברים ו' ה'). שאתה מאהב על הבירות שם שמים, שתהא יודע משאך ומתנך והוליכך בשוק ועסקך עם בני אדם, ובזמן (שאם) [שאדם] יודע משאו ומתנו והוליכו בשוק ועסקו עם בני אדם וקורא ושונה, בני אדם הרואים אותו אומרים, אשרי פלוני שלמד תורה, אוי לו לאבא שלא לימדני תורה, פלוני למד תורה, ראו כמה נאים מעשיו, כמה יפין דרכיו, העבודה, נלמד תורה ונלמד את בנינו תורה, ונמצא מתקדש שם שמים על ידיו, בזמן שאין אדם יודע משאו ומתנו והוליכו בשוק ועסקו עם בני אדם וקורא ושונה, בני אדם שרואין אותו אומרים, אוי לו לפלוני שלמד תורה, אשרי (אבה) [אבא] שלא לימדני תורה, פלוני שלמד תורה, ראו כמה רעים מעשיו, כמה מקולקלין דרכיו, העבודה, לא נלמד תורה לא נלמד את בנינו תורה, ונמצא שם שמים מתחלל על ידיו.

Another interpretation: "And you shall love Adonai your God" (Deut. 6:5): that you are to cause the name of Heaven to be loved by all creatures. You are to act lovingly in your give-and-take, in your going about in the marketplace and in your business with people. For when a man is loving in his give-and-take, in his dealings in the marketplace, and in his business with people, and reads Torah and studies Mishnah, people who see him will say: 'Praised is so-and-so who learns Torah. Oy to my father who did not teach me Torah. The man who learns Torah – see how beautiful are his works, see how beautiful are his ways. By the Temple Service! Let us study Torah and teach our children Torah. The Name of Heaven is sanctified by his hands.'

When a man is not loving in his give-and-take, in his dealings in the marketplace and in his business with other people, and he reads Torah and studies Mishnah, the men who see him say, 'Oy to so-and-so who studies Torah. Praised is my father who did not teach me Torah. So-and-so has studied Torah – see how evil are his ways, how cursed are his paths. By the Temple Service! Let us not study Torah nor teach our sons Torah. The Name of Heaven is cursed by his hands.'

This midrash is very similar to the *sugya* we saw earlier in *Yoma*. It makes the same argument – we demonstrate love of God by converting others into lovers of God by coupling the study of Torah with modeling exemplary behavior. By seeing this example, others will choose to praise and love God’s name by studying the Torah themselves.

The midrash begins in an almost identical fashion to *Yoma*. Working from the same verse, Deuteronomy 6:5, it states its central thesis – that we should make the Name of Heaven beloved by others. Its structure is also similar. First, it shows the positive consequences of studying Torah with proper behavior. Then, it shows the negative effects of being a *talmid chacham* while acting in a deleterious fashion.

However, there are significant differences between the two texts. This midrash places the desire to study Torah in the first person: “Oy to my father who did not teach me Torah.” What was missing from *Yoma* is included here. When one witnesses the behavior of a Torah scholar, one will commit to studying Torah and teaching it to one’s children. It makes the midrash from *Eliyahu Rabbah* stronger.

Two other differences are important. While *Yoma* states that one should be kind in one’s dealings with other human beings, the text from *Eliyahu Rabbah* is more detailed regarding proper behavior. It states that one should act lovingly in dealing with other human beings, in walking through the marketplace, and in one’s business with others. Not only does the midrash give more examples of the proper behavior that is expected but also describes it as “loving.” Secondly, the midrash is in reverse order from *Yoma*. While the Talmudic text states that if one studies Torah and Mishnah and is kind in one’s dealings with others, his father and teacher will be praised, the midrash reverses it to read

that if one behaves accordingly and also studies Torah and Mishnah, he will be blessed for his Torah study.

These differences importantly demonstrate that the text from *Eliyahu Rabbah* places a stronger emphasis on action. Ultimately, it is one's behavior that has the ability to affect the actions of others. How we treat those we come into contact with, whether friends, business associates, or strangers on the street, will determine whether God becomes beloved by them. If we study Torah and act decently, people will want to become followers of the tradition. But if we study Torah and we act poorly, people will curse the Torah.

One of the puzzling questions about the midrash is the language it uses. It uses the word *אֲהַב* to describe how one should act towards others. I translated that word as loving, following one of the possible interpretations offered by the Jastrow dictionary.¹⁵ It is also the translation given by William Braude and Israel Kapstein.¹⁶ It raises the question – what does it mean to behave in a loving fashion regarding those with whom we come into contact? Is love meant to be something we feel towards these individuals or does it define the actions we take towards them? Within the confines of this midrash, I would argue the latter point. Given the emphasis placed on proper behavior, the word *אֲהַב* should be defined as how we act towards others. Yet as noted earlier, this debate will continue to arise throughout our examination.

¹⁵ Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, (Jerusalem: Chovev, n.d.), 565-565.

¹⁶ William G. Braude and Israel J. Kapstein, *Tanna Debe Eliyahu: The Lore of the School of Elijah*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1981), 346.

While *Eliyahu Rabbah* and the *sugya* from *Yoma* are very similar, there are also significant differences. A comparison of their dates could provide an answer. According to scholars, dating *Seder Eliyahu Rabbah* is very difficult. While Margalioth argues for an early date, the first half of the third century, S.J. Rapoport and others claim our current text is from the tenth century. Jacob Elbaum argues that “an examination of the sources of the Midrash as a whole makes it clear beyond question that it utilizes both the Babylonian Talmud and Midrashim which are later than it.”¹⁷ If we follow Elbaum and Rapoport, it is possible that the authors of *Eliyahu Rabbah* took material from *Yoma* and deepened its particular emphases on behavior.

One of the assumptions made by both the *sugya* in *Yoma* and this midrash is that the average person is aware of another’s learnedness. To the modern mind, this seems a little strange. When we gather in our markets, we are barely aware of each other’s religious leanings, unless there is some defining marker that sets someone apart: a *kippah*, a *sheitel*, a cross or hijab. Yet, those signs still do not tell us to what degree that person follows their religion’s teachings. The *kippah* connotes a Jew but could it be sitting on the head of a thief? Might the cross belong to an adulterer?

There are two possible ways to solve this problem. One option is to read the texts quite literally. While dealing with others in business or in the marketplace, one is reading Torah and Mishnah at the same time. Imagine a vendor with his wares in one hand and a page of Talmud in the other. Although, given that most teachings at this time were still in oral form, and any texts that did exist were likely kept in the *beit* midrash or in the

¹⁷ Jacob Elbaum, “Tanna de-vei Eliyahu,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*. Eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 15: 508.

homes of wealthy individuals, this is an unlikely scenario. What is more likely is that people studied Torah and Mishnah while working, with the words of the holy text on their mouths at the same time. Picture a man negotiating over the price of meat while simultaneously reciting Psalms by heart. His Torah knowledge becomes known to the rest of the vendors and customers in the market. If he acts dishonestly, others will be aware of the contradiction between his learning and his behavior.

Another possibility is to consider the sociological situation of the Jews as the time these texts were developed. People were living in much smaller communities than we live in today. People knew each other in a much more intimate way. They knew who was a student of Torah and who wasn't. There was no way to escape into anonymity. If one acted in an inappropriate manner, there was nowhere to hide.

One of the key themes these texts emphasize is that the commandment to love God is fulfilled, essentially, by converting others. Love of God is demonstrated by bringing people under the wings of *Shechina*, as exhibited by the following midrash in *Sifre Devarim, piska 32*:

דבר אחר ואהבת את ה' אלהיך, אהבהו על הבריות כאברהם אביך כענין שנאמר +בראשית יב ה+ ואת הנפש אשר עשו בחרן, והלא אם מתכנסים כל באי העולם לבראות יתוש אחד ולהכניס בו נשמה אינם יכולים אלא מלמד שהיה אברהם אבינו מגיירם ומכניסם תחת כנפי השכינה.

Another interpretation: "And you shall love Adonai your God" (Deut 6:5): Make God loved by all creatures, like Abraham your father did, as it is written, "and the persons they had acquired in Haran." (Genesis 12:5) But isn't it true that if all the creatures of the world came together to create one fly and give it a soul, they would not be able to? Rather, this teaches us that Abraham our father converted them and brought them under the wings of the *Shechina*.

The midrash quotes a verse from Genesis 12. When God calls to Abram in the *parashah*, the Torah says that he and Sarai took with them all the people – *hanefesh* – they had acquired in Haran. The midrash tries to unpack the meaning of this word. It couldn't

possibly mean that Abram and Sarai created new souls. Only God is capable of that. This is why all the creatures of the world are not able to create a soul for a fly. Then what could “*hanefesh*” mean? It implies conversion. Abram was responsible for converting people in Haran to his religion – a monotheistic worship of Yahweh. This is what it means to love God – turning people into those who worship God. Although this midrash does not explain how Abram succeeded in doing that, the texts we examined earlier shed light upon how we, through our actions, can turn people into followers of God.

As stated earlier, these texts emphasize the importance of studying the Oral Law in addition to the Written Law. No midrash makes that clearer than the following excerpt from Midrash *Tanhuma, Parashat Noah*:

לפי שאין לומד אותה אלא מי שאוהב הקב"ה בכל לבו ובכל נפשו ובכל מאודו שנא' ואהבת את ה' אלהיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך ובכל מאודך (דברים ו'). ומגין אתה למד שאין אהבה זו אלא לשון תלמוד, ראה מה כתיב אחריו והיו הדברים האלה אשר אנכי מצוך היום על לבבך ואי זה זה תלמוד שהוא על הלב הוי אומר ושננתם לבניך זו תלמוד שצריך שנון.

No one studies her [the Oral Law] unless one loves the Holy One, blessed be He, with all one's heart and with all one's soul, and with all one's might, as it says, “You shall love Adonai your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deut. 6:5). From where do we learn that the word “love” refers only to the language of the Talmud [Oral Law]? See what is written afterwards: “And these words which I command you today shall be on your heart.” (Deut 6:6) What words? It is the Talmud that is on your heart. Then it says, “And teach them to your children.” (Deut. 6:7) It is Talmud that you are required to teach.

This midrash argues that it is only through the study of Oral Law that one can demonstrate a love for God. It bases this claim on an interpretation of Deuteronomy 6:6: “And these words which I command you today shall be on your heart.” The heart represents love in this analogy; *hadevarim*, the words, are a reference to the Oral Tradition.

A few lines later, the midrash argues that only a special type of person is capable of studying Oral Torah:

ובפ' שנייה כתיב בה בכל לבבכם ובכל נפשכם ולא כתב בכל מאדכם ללמדך שכל מי שאוהב עושר ותענוג אינו יכול ללמוד תורה שבע"פ לפי שי"ש בה צער גדול ונדוד שינה ויש מבלה ומנבל עצמו עליה לפיכך מתן שכרה לעה"ב שנאמר העם ההולכים בחשך ראו אור גדול.

In the second paragraph [of the *Sh'ma*], it is written: "with all your heart and with all your soul," and it is not written, "with all your might." This is done to teach you that anyone who loves wealth and pleasure is not capable of studying Oral Torah since with it comes great sorrow and unsteady sleep, and it will cause one to wither and waste. Therefore, the gift of its reward will arrive in the world to come, as it says, "the people that walked in darkness have seen a brilliant light." (Isaiah 9:1).

Throughout this midrash, the author has emphasized the difficulty in studying the Oral Law. It becomes clear that love of God, only hinted at in the texts we looked at earlier, may be the reserve of an elite few. Only those with the strongest of wills may succeed at loving God.

This text is important for two reasons. One is to stress how the tradition has accentuated the study of Oral Torah, equal if not surpassing that of the Written Law. This is what we would expect from rabbinic texts, particularly one as late as Midrash *Tanhuma*.

In addition, this midrash contains an ominous notion, developed simultaneously in other texts we will examine from the medieval period in chapter 5, that love of God must involve a denial of pleasure or worldly pursuits. As we shall see in chapter 3, love of God may even lead to the sacrifice of one's life. Somehow, the study of Oral Torah leads to greater stringency in terms of behavior and attitude.

The Mishnah contains one of the first interpretations of the commandment to love God found in Deuteronomy 6:5. In *Mishnah Brachot* 9:5, it states:

ובכל מאדך בכל ממונך

“With all your might,” (Deut. 6:5): with all your money.

One way to declare love for God is through one’s material possessions. The Mishnah does not elaborate on such questions as to whom does one give, how much, in what capacity, etc. But this theme, that מאדך refers to ממוןך, will keep appearing throughout the tradition.

A famous *baraita* of Rabbi Eliezer interprets מאדך similarly and repeats in a variety of sources.¹⁸ I’ve included the version from *Sanhedrin* 74a:

דתניא, רבי אליעזר אומר: +דברים ו'+ ואהבת את ה' אלהיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך ובכל מאדך, אם נאמר בכל נפשך למה נאמר בכל מאדך, ואם נאמר בכל מאדך למה נאמר בכל נפשך. - אם יש לך אדם שגופו חביב עליו מממונו - לכך נאמר בכל נפשך, ואם יש לך אדם שממונו חביב עליו מגופו - לכך נאמר בכל מאדך.

It was taught in a *baraita*, Rabbi Eliezer said: “You shall love Adonai your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might.” (Deut. 6:5) If it says, “with all your soul,” why does it say “with all your might?” And if it says, “with all your might,” why does it say, “with all your soul?” If there is a man whose body is more beloved to him than his money, therefore it says “with all your soul.” If there is a man whose money is more beloved to him than his body, therefore it says “with all your might.”

I selected this *baraita* because it interprets מאדך as ממוןך. One’s love for God can be implemented through the giving away of one’s possessions.

We must also pick up on a theme that we saw earlier in Midrash *Tanhuma*. The phrasing of the *baraita* implies that we must deny something out of our love for God. In this example, if money is what is most beloved to us, we must sacrifice it for the sake of love. If it is our body that is most dear to us, we must forfeit it. We will address the *baraita*’s meaning for love through death in chapter three. The lesson is clear – love is

¹⁸ See also *Talmud Bavli Brachot* 61b, and *Sifre Devarim, Piska* 32.

not some emotion we might have towards the Holy One but an action we must take in response to the relationship we have to God.

Although defining “might” as “money” appears in the *Mishnah*, the *Tosefta* makes no such claim. In fact, the *Tosefta* does not interpret the word מַאֲדָךְ at all.¹⁹ However, we do not know if this is something the *Mishnah* added or the *Tosefta* left out. Since it is not clear which came first, the *Mishnah* or the *Tosefta*, it could be that the *Tosefta* didn’t interpret “*meodecha*,” but the redactors of the *Mishnah* created the concept of “might” as “money.” It does, however, get picked up by the later medieval commentators Rashi and Ramban, who include it as part of their Biblical commentaries.²⁰

One of the ways to exhibit love and devotion to God is through prayer. An argument could be made that worship belongs in another category – perhaps in one less tangible than “action.” However, prayer is action – it is *avodah*, instituted to replace the daily sacrifices at the Temple.²¹ Prayer is something you engage in with your body. In worship, one is an actor, acting upon God. The *Amidah* is the classic example of our acting upon God, petitioning Him to engage in our world.

The following *sugya* from Talmud *Bavli Ta'anit* 2a discusses prayer as a symbol of love:

ומנא לן דבתפלה? - דתניא: +דברים י"א+ לאהבה את ה' אלהיכם ולעבדו בכל לבבכם, איזו היא עבודה שהיא בלב - הוי אומר זו תפלה. וכתוב בתריה +דברים י"א+ ונתתי מטר ארצכם בעתו יורה ומלקוש.

What is our source for putting it [the prayer for rain] in the *Tefillah*? It was taught in a *baraita*: “loving Adonai your God and serving Him with all your heart” (Deut. 11:13), and what is the service of the heart? You must conclude it is the *Tefillah*.

¹⁹ *Tosefta Brachot* 6:7.

²⁰ See *Torat Haim: Devarim* (Jerusalem: Rav Kook, 1993) 55-58.

²¹ Support for this can be found in Talmud *Bavli Brachot* 26b and *Ta'anit* 2a.

It is written right afterwards: "I will grant the rain for your land in season, the early rain and the late." (Deut. 11:14)

Although this *sugya* is there to explain why the prayer for rain is in the *Amidah*, it also explains how prayer, the *Tefillah* specifically, became associated with love of God. How do we show love of God -- through worship.

What is specific to the *Amidah* that makes it the appropriate venue for establishing one's love of God? A brief summary of its themes may help answer this question. The daily *Amidah* (consisting of 19 blessings: the original 18 plus a nineteenth added during the Talmudic period) is divided into three broad categories: 1) praise of God (blessings 1-3); 2) petitions to God (blessings 4-14); and 3) thanks offered to God (blessings 17-19).²² This is then followed by a moment of silent, personal, and unscripted prayer. Although none of the prayers specifically mention love of God, it is through our words that we declare our relationship to God. Through praise and thanksgiving, we acknowledge God's sovereignty of the universe. It is through the petitions that we ask God to love us and take note of us.

Interestingly, a section of *Sifre Devarim*, from *piska* 32, strengthens this line of argumentation. In the excerpt sighted below, מאדך is interpreted as thanks:

בכל מאדך, הוי מודה לו כיעקב אביך שנאמר +שם/בראשית/ לב יא+ קטנתי מכל החסדים ומכל האמת אשר עשית את עבדך כי במקלי עברתי את הירדן הזה ועתה הייתי לשני מחנות

"With all your might," one should thank Him, like Jacob your father, as it says, "I am unworthy of all the kindness that You have so steadfastly shown Your servant: with my staff alone I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps." (Genesis 32:11)

²² For more information about the themes of the *Amidah*, see Lawrence A. Hoffman, ed. *My People's Prayer Book: The Amidah*. Vol. 2 (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 1998).

Using a verse from Genesis, the midrashist argues that we demonstrate love for God by emulating Jacob's example of offering up words of thanksgiving to the Creator. Through prayer, love for God becomes a reality.

As this chapter has shown, one of the ways Jewish tradition interprets the commandment to love God is through action. It is what we do in living our lives that matters. Whether through the study of Torah, treatment of our fellow human beings, through our money and material possessions, or through prayer, we fulfill the commandment to love God.

Chapter Three: Love of God through Death

Throughout the Jewish tradition, loving God “with all your soul” has come to mean through death. As I will discuss in this chapter, love of God through death encompasses a variety of interpretive traditions. It begins with seeing one’s death as the result of God’s will, and loving God despite the end of life. The chapter will continue with a detailed examination of love of God through martyrdom.

At first glance, martyrdom might seem to be outside the purview of our topic, love of God. How does dying for God, traditionally understood as *Kiddush Ha-Shem* – the Sanctification of the Name – demonstrate love of God? As this chapter will show, martyrdom is one response to persecution. The three instances we will examine are the Roman persecutions in Palestine in the early years of the Common Era, the Crusades of 1096, and the attacks of the Almohads upon the Jews of the Iberian Peninsula in the 12th century. Each of these examples demonstrates ruling authorities who wish to prevent the Jews from practicing their faith. For some Jews, the appropriate response to these attacks is death. If we understand love of God to mean fulfillment of His commandments and loyalty to God, then dying is a way of declaring one’s love for God. If the choice is between transgression and death, death is the only way to demonstrate one’s willingness to be a faithful servant of God. As we will see, there is some debate as to whether martyrdom is the only answer to such persecutions. Some attention will be paid to the differences between the Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jewish communities.

We will conclude this chapter with an examination of textual evidence of how study and prayer can be used to fulfill the commandment to love God through death, (with all one’s soul), without actually dying. These practices were suggested by leading

Jewish authorities as a way to fulfill the commandment to love God through death when historical circumstances were such that a martyr's death was no longer a necessity.

Mishnah Brachot 9:5 states:

ובכל נפשך אפילו הוא נוטל את נפשך

“with all your soul” – even if he takes your soul away.

Using the word *nefesh* to indicate life, the mishnah understands “loving God” to include love up to the point of death. The reference to a male in the third person should be read as God: love God even if God takes your life away. In other words, even at the moment of our death, we are to praise and love God. This may explain why the custom arose to recite the *Sh'ma* after the final confession moments before one's death.²³ Even as we utter our final breath, it is to be filled with an acknowledgment of God's eternity and oneness.

Appearing much later, in the sixteenth century, Rabbi Shabbetai Sheftel Horowitz, a kabbalist from Prague, wrote about the need to commit oneself ahead of time to loving God in death. In his glosses to the *Shenei Lukhot ha-Berit*, he writes:

Let a person choose some time while he is still in good health to isolate himself and confess the following long confession; and [when doing so] he should consider himself [*yahashov be-da'ato*] as if [*ke'ilu*] he were dying.... he should think of his death and dying day and devote himself to die in love whenever God, be He praised, may will it.²⁴

²³ Although I could find no textual support from either the Talmud or the legal codes for the inclusion of the *Sh'ma* in the final *viddui*, it has become common practice to do so. For evidence, please note the following sources: Rabbi Reuven P. Bulka, *RCA Lifecycle Madrikh*, (New York: Rabbinical Council of America, 2000), 136; Harry Rabinowicz, “Death,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*. Eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 5: 513 There may also be some support for this because of Rabbi Akiba's recitation of the *Sh'ma* at the moment of death.

²⁴ Michael Fishbane, *The Kiss of God: Spiritual and Mystical Death in Judaism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 21.

God is understood as the agent of death. In Rabbi Horowitz's thinking, we must prepare ourselves spiritually to love God at the moment when God decides to end our lives.

Although loving God in death is crucial to an understanding of this text, no hint of martyrdom is evident in this passage. This is important to note since, as we shall soon see, sacrifice for the sake of God becomes a constant theme in Jewish interpretations of the commandment to love God.

Tosefta Brachot 6:7 contains the same passage from the Mishnah. However, the *Toseftan* material is longer. It includes an elaboration of this interpretation but also provides a different meaning. The full passage is below:

ובכל נפשך ואפי' הוא נוטל את נפשך וכן הוא או' כי עליך הורגנו כל היום דבר אחר בכל נפשך בכל נפש ונפש שברא בך שנ' תחי נפשי וגו' ואו' כל עצמותי תאמרנה ה' מי כמוך בן עזי או' בכל נפשך תן נפשך על המצות.

“With all your soul” – even if he takes your soul away. For it says: “It is for Your sake that we are killed all day long.” (Psalm 44:23) Another interpretation: “with all your soul” – with every soul that has been created in you, as it is written: “Let me live,” (Psalm 119: 175) and says “All my bones shall say, Adonai, who is like You?” (Psalm 35:10). Ben Azzai said, “with all you soul”: give your soul for the commandments.

The scriptural verse, from Psalm 44, completely changes the meaning of the text. While I argued that the Mishnah said we are to love God at the moment of our death, the *Tosefta* claims that we ought to sacrifice our lives for God's sake due to the love we owe Him. Verse 23 is saying we offer up our lives because we are followers and worshippers of *Adonai*. It is due to that love we are willing to be killed. The verse from Psalm 44 is used again and again in other sources to support the concept of martyrdom.

Why the difference between these two sources? That is difficult to answer, since scholars are still debating which is earlier, the *Tosefta* or the Mishnah. One hypothesis is that the *Tosefta* appeared before the Mishnah. The connection to martyrdom could have

originated in the *Tosefta*; then, the redactors of the *Mishnah* may have wanted to broaden the notion to include loving God at times of death, not just those limited to the violent death of martyrdom. It is also possible that the original text was the *Mishnah*, and the *Tosefta* developed later, using additional material from the *Tannaim*.

Ben Azzai's interpretation is hard to discern. Does he mean one has to die for the sake of the commandments? Alternatively, does he mean we should devote our total lives for the commandments? In her article "A Contribution to the Study of Martyrdom and Identity in the Palestinian Talmud," Alyssa Gray demonstrates through the analysis of multiple *sugyot* in the Palestinian Talmud that "keeping God's Law at great personal cost – be it financial, as in the Sabbatical year or intensely personal, as in a case of fatal illness – can be a form of martyrdom, even if death does not result."²⁵ The *Tosefta*, like the Talmud *Yerushalmi*, is of Palestinian origin. It is possible that Ben Azzai was making a similar argument to the rabbis of the Jerusalem Talmud – keeping God's law is quasi-martyrdom, even if it does not end in death.

Although the *Tosefta* provides additional readings of "with all your soul," we will not examine them here, as they are beyond the purview of this chapter. However, their presence in the *Tosefta* demonstrates that loving God through death is not the only option for interpreting Deuteronomy 6:5. Alternative views existed, although they certainly do not appear to have been the dominant thread in the texts.

Sifre Devarim, piska 32 contains the same verse from Psalm 44, although it includes the full verse, the second half of which is not present in our edition of the *Tosefta*:

²⁵ Alyssa M. Gray "A Contribution to the Study of Martyrdom and Identity in the Palestinian Talmud." *Journal of Jewish Studies* 54, 2 (Autumn 2003) 261.

בכל נפשך, אפילו הוא נוטל את נפשך וכן הוא אומר +תהלים מד כג+ כי עליך הורגנו כל היום
נחשבנו כצאן טבחה,

“With all your soul” – even if he takes your soul away. For it says: “It is for Your sake that we are killed all day long, that we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” (Psalm 44:23)

The theme of martyrdom continues in this midrash:

שמעון בן עזי אומר בכל נפשך. אהבהו עד מצוי נפש. רבי אליעזר אומר אם נאמר בכל נפשך
למה נאמר בכל מאדך ואם נאמר בכל מאדך למה נאמר בכל נפשך. יש לך אדם שגופו חביב
עליו מממונו לכך נאמר בכל נפשך ויש לך אדם שממונו חביב עליו מגופו לכך נאמר בכל
מאדך.

Shimon ben Azzai said “with all your soul.” love Him until you’ve squeezed the soul out of the body. Rabbi Eliezer said: if it says “with all your soul” why does it say “with all your might” and if it says “with all your might” why does it say “with all your soul”? If there is a man whose body is more beloved to him than his money, therefore it says “with all your soul.” If there is a man whose money is more beloved to him than his body, therefore it says “with all your might.”

Shimon ben Azzai’s statement is quite vivid and the strongest seen so far in this chapter.

The phrase *מצוי נפש*, according to the Jastrow dictionary, means the “squeezing of the soul out of the body,” or, more poetically, the “agony of death.”²⁶ There are no limits to loving God. Even on extreme pain of death should one continue to love the Almighty.

The midrash continues to quote the *baraita* of Rabbi Eliezer that we saw in chapter two. It asks the question of why the verse needs to mention both “with all your soul” and “with all your might.” Answering its own query, it states that if a person’s body is his most beloved possession, then he must sacrifice it for the sake of his love for God. The notion that love of God includes a demand for sacrifice keeps getting stronger. This *baraita* will continue to appear in various sources, including the two Talmuds.

Later in the same *piska* of *Sifre Devarim*, we find the following:

²⁶ See Jastrow Dictionary, p. 778, for translation of ben Azzai phrase.

רבי מאיר אומר הרי הוא אומר...ובכל נפשך, כיצחק שעקד עצמו על גבי המזבח כענין שנאמר
+בראשית כב י+ וישלח אברהם את ידו ויקח את המאכלת.

Rabbi Meir said, "Scripture says... 'with all your soul,' like Isaac who bound himself on the back of the altar, as it says 'Abraham laid out his hand and took the knife.'" (Genesis 22:10)

This reading of Genesis 22 is based on an interpretation of Isaac's behavior, found in early midrashim, that he willingly gave up his life for the sacrifice. One such story recounts Isaac telling Abraham he should bind his arms and legs because he would fight back and did not wish to do so.²⁷ Although Abraham is remembered as one who loves God with all his heart, it is Isaac and not Abraham who is the one who is willing to be sacrificed for God. Later, Isaac becomes the model for the Jews of the Rhineland, who slaughtered themselves and their children to avoid conversion at the hands of the Crusaders. Below is just one citation of how Isaac became the exemplary case for martyrdom:

There was a man there by the name of Meshullam, son of Isaac, and he called out in a great voice to his beloved wife Mistress Zipporah and to all those present: "Here me, adults and children! God gave me this son; my wife Zipporah bore him in her advanced age. His name is Isaac. I shall now offer him up as a sacrifice as our Father Abraham did his son Isaac."...He bound Isaac, his son, and took the knife in his hand to slaughter him, reciting the blessing for Ritual Slaughter. The boy responded: "Amen." And he slaughtered the boy.²⁸

While it is Isaac who becomes the biblical figure associated with love of God through death, Rabbi Akiba becomes the rabbinic model for such a sacrifice. Probably

²⁷ See *Genesis Rabbah* 56:3-4 and *Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer* 31.

²⁸ Shlomo Eidelberg, trans. and ed., "The Narrative of the Old Persecutions, or Mainz Anonymous," *The Jews and the Crusaders*, (Hoboken: Ktav Publishing, 1996), 103-104.

one of the more famous stories told of Rabbi Akiba is the story of his death. Below is the version in the Babylonian Talmud, *Brachot* 61b:²⁹

תנו רבנן: פעם אחת גזרה מלכות הרשעה שלא יעסקו ישראל בתורה, בא פפוס בן יהודה ומצאו לרבי עקיבא שהיה מקהיל קהלות ברבים ועוסק בתורה. אמר ליה: עקיבא, אי אתה מתירא מפני מלכות? אמר לו: אמשול לך משל, למה הדבר דומה - לשועל שהיה מהלך על גב הנהר, וראה דגים שהיו מתקבצים ממקום למקום, אמר להם: מפני מה אתם בורחים? אמרו לו: מפני רשתות שמביאין עלינו בני אדם. אמר להם: רצונכם שתעלו ליבשה, ונדור אני ואתם כשם שדרו אבותי עם אבותיכם? אמרו לו: אתה הוא שאומרים עליך פקה שבחיות? לא פקה אתה, אלא טפש אתה! ומה במקום היותנו אנו מתיראין, במקום מיתתנו על אחת כמה וכמה! אף אנהנו, עכשיו שאנו יושבים ועוסקים בתורה, שכתוב בה +דברים ל'+ כי הוא חייד וארך ימך - כך, אם אנו הולכים ומבטלים ממנה - על אחת כמה וכמה. אמרו: לא היו ימים מועטים עד שתפסוהו לרבי עקיבא וחבשוהו בבית האסורים, ותפסו לפפוס בן יהודה וחבשוהו אצלו. אמר לו: פפוס! מי הביאך לכאן? אמר ליה: אשריך רבי עקיבא שנתפסת על דברי תורה, אוי לו לפפוס שנתפס על דברים בטלים. בשעה שהוציאו את רבי עקיבא להריגה זמן קריאת שמע היה, והיו סורקים את בשרו במסרקות של ברזל, והיה מקבל עליו עול מלכות שמים. אמרו לו תלמידיו: רבינו, עד כאן? אמר להם: כל ימי הייתי מצטער על פסוק זה בכל נפשך - אפילו נוטל את נשמתך, אמרתי: מתי יבא לידי ואקיימנו, ועכשיו שבא לידי לא אקיימנו? היה מאריך באחד עד שיצתה נשמתו באחד. יצתה בת קול ואמרה: אשריך רבי עקיבא שיצאה נשמתך באחד. אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא: זו תורה וזו שכרה? +תהלים י"ז+ ממתים ירך ה' ממתים וגו'! - אמר להם: חלקם בחיים. יצתה בת קול ואמרה: אשריך רבי עקיבא שאתה מזומן לחיי העולם הבא.

The rabbis taught in a baraita: once, the evil kingdom [Rome] decreed that the Jews should not busy themselves with Torah. Pappus the son of Judah came and found that Rabbi Akiba was calling public assemblies to teach Torah. He said to him: "Akiba, are you not afraid of the kingdom?" He replied: "I will tell you a parable. To what is this similar? To a fox that was walking alongside a river, and he saw fishes that were jumping about from place to place. He said to them: 'What are you running away from?' They said to him: 'From the nets that humans bring upon us.' He said to them: 'Do you want to come up on dry land, and we shall live together, me and you, just like my fathers lived with your fathers?' They said to him: 'Are you the one they say is the brightest of the animals! You are not smart, rather you are stupid! If in the place of our lives we are in fear, in the place of our death how much the more so!'"

And so it is with us – if it is thus with us now as we sit and busy ourselves with Torah, in which it is written 'for thereby you shall live and shall long endure.' (Deut 30:20), if we quit studying Torah – how much the more so [will we be in danger!]."

It was said: it was only a few days later they captured Rabbi Akiba and imprisoned him in jail, and they captured Pappus son of Judah and imprisoned him next

²⁹ Two other versions exist in the Talmud *Yerushalmi*: *Brachot* 9:5, 14c and *Sotah* 5:5, 20c.

to Akiba. He said to him: "Pappus! Who brought you to here?" He said to him: "Fortunate are you Rabbi Akiba who was captured for words of Torah, but oy to Pappus who was captured for vain things." At the hour that they brought Rabbi Akiba out to kill him, it was the time for the *Sh'ma*, and they raked his flesh with combs of iron, and he took upon himself the yoke of the kingdom of heaven. His students said to him: "Our rabbi, up to this?" He said to them: "All my life, I despaired about this verse 'with all your soul' – even if he carries away your soul. I said: 'when will this come to me and I can fulfill it, and now that it has come to me and I won't fulfill it!'" He lengthened with "one" until his soul departed with "one." A heavenly voice came out and said: "Blessed is Rabbi Akiba that his soul departed on 'one.'" The ministering angels said before the Holy One, blessed be He: "This is Torah and this is its reward?" "from men. Oh God, with Your hand, from men whose share" (Psalm 17:14) God said to them: "share in life" (Psalm 17:14). A voice from heaven came out and said: "Fortunate is Rabbi Akiba who has been invited to life in the world to come."

The parable that Akiba offers to Pappus, explaining why he refuses to give into the demands of the Roman authorities, offers us insight into Akiba's thinking. In his mind, refraining from Torah study may be compared to death. If he will be killed for teaching Torah, how much the more so will he die for ceasing to study God's words! The words of Torah are words of life.

But Akiba does not stop there. Even while his executioners are raking his flesh with iron combs, he continues to recite words of Torah. Rather than break down into tears or screams of rage, Akiba "took upon himself the yoke of heaven." He began to recite the *Sh'ma*. The questions posed to him by his students allow Akiba to use the moment of death as a teaching opportunity. He explains to his students that he had always yearned to offer up his love to God "with all his soul." Now the moment has finally arrived when Akiba can fulfill the obligation. The commandment to love God must include the willingness to give up one's life for the sake of Torah.

Just as Akiba uses the moment of his death to impart teaching to his disciples, the *sugya* is framed in such a way as to convey a lesson to its readers. In the words of Michael Fishbane:

The narrative is thus designed for instruction – a stylized martyrology to inspire imitation. The concluding coda...reinforces this point. After the saint's death a heavenly voice asserts that Akiba has earned life in the World to Come. The message to the faithful is clear.³⁰

Although Akiba was not concerned with a reward, for he made his sacrifice out of love, the text teaches us that love of God through death will be rewarded in the world to come. The narrative indication that this behavior will be rewarded in the next life is also important because it shows that God approved of this behavior.

Two additional versions of this story exist in the Talmud *Yerushalmi*, although the details are quite different. Excerpted below in full is the version from *Brachot* 9:5,

14c:

רבי עקיבה הוה קיים מיתדין קומי טונוס טרופוס הרשע רחנת ענתה דקרית שמע שרי קרי
קרית שמע וגחך אמר ליה סבא אי חרש את אי מבעט בייסורין את אמר ליה תיפה רוחיה
דהוא גברא לא חרש אנא ולא מבעט בייסורין אנא אלא כל יומי קריתי פסוק זה והייתי
מצטער ואומר אימתי יבואו שלשתן לידי ואהבת את ה' אלהיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך ובכל
מאודך רחמתי בכל לבי ורחמתי בכל ממוני ובכל נפשי לא הוה בדיקה לי וכדון דמטת בכל
נפשי והגיעה זמן קרית שמע ולא אפלגא דעתי לפום כן אנא קרי וגחך לא הספיק לומר עד
שפרחה נשמתו

Rabbi Akiba was standing in judgment before Turnus Rufus the evil one. The time came for the recitation of the *Sh'ma*. He began to recite the *Sh'ma* and laughed. He said to him: "Old man. Either you are a sorcerer or you rebel against your pain." He said to him: "Let despair come upon him. I am neither a sorcerer nor do I rebel against my pain. Rather, all my life I have read this verse. I was troubled and would say: when will I be able to fulfill all three? 'You shall love Adonai your God with all your heart, with all you soul, and with all your might.' I loved God with all my heart. I loved God with all my possessions. And with all my soul has not yet been examined of me. The time has come for me to 'love God with all my soul' and the time of reciting the *Sh'ma* has come and my mind isn't distracted [i.e. isn't torn away from concentrating on the *Sh'ma*]. Because of this I recite and laugh." He did not stop speaking until his soul flew off.

There are significant differences between the version recorded here and the narrative in the *Bavli*. To begin with, there is no recording of a conversation between

³⁰ Michael Fishbane, *The Kiss of God*, 70.

Akiba and Pappus, and thereby, no explanation for why Akiba is imprisoned. While the *Bavli* suggests that Akiba is arrested for his resistance to the Roman edicts concerning Torah study, it is not clear from this version why he has been placed behind bars. This represents a key ideological difference between the Talmuds. Richard Kalmin stresses this point in his article "Rabbinic Traditions about Roman Persecutions of the Jews: A Reconsideration." He writes:

For Babylonian rabbis, Torah study is the *summum bonum* of human existence. For Palestinian rabbis, Torah study is only one among many important religious observances and practices; significant, yes, but not to the extent that it overshadows other religious activities as it does for their Babylonian counterparts.³¹

The Babylonian rabbis can't imagine that a sage like Rabbi Akiba would have been killed for anything other than Torah study. Therefore, Akiba is depicted as brazenly resisting the Roman edicts by teaching Torah in public settings.

It is clear from the framing of the narrative in the *Bavli* that Akiba is both teaching his students a lesson, and through them, the reader or listener as well. No such frame exists in the *Yerushalmi*. In fact, there are no students present in this version. It is Turnus Rufus who asks Akiba the question. And the question is of quite a different order. In the *Yerushalmi*, the executioner wants to know why Akiba is laughing. No such emotion is present in the *Bavli*.

The laughter is indeed puzzling. Why does he laugh? In response to Turnus Rufus' question, Akiba claims it is because he is being executed at the exact time when the *Sh'ma* is to be recited, allowing him to finally fulfill the obligation to offer up his soul

³¹ Richard Kalmin, "Rabbinic Traditions about Roman Persecutions of the Jews: A Reconsideration," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 54, 1 (Spring 2003), 49.

to God in love. It is only at the hands of the enemy that Akiba is granted the possibility of fulfilling a commandment. Because they will kill him, he can now offer up his being as a sacrifice to God. It is in that moment, while he recites *Adonai Ehad*, he denies the divine authority of the Roman empire. Rather than serving as a moment of defeat, Akiba believes this to be the moment of his greatest triumph. As Michael Fishbane proposes, "...his laugh is neither an incantation nor an expression of contempt. Much more is it the joy of obedience, a transfigured joy that allows Akiba to transcend physical pain."³²

Joy experienced at the moment of one's greatest sacrifice is a theme that reappears in the Hebrew chronicles of the Crusades. These martyrs are continually described as "happy" and full of "joy": "Happy are we if we fulfill His will, and happy is he who is slain or slaughtered and who dies attesting the Oneness of His Name....for such a one world of darkness is exchanged for a world of light, a world of sorrow for one of joy."³³ However, we should keep in mind that this may well be the conscious adaptation by those chroniclers of an older literary motif, and not a straightforward representation of what "really" happened, historically speaking.

Returning to the story of Akiba for a moment, why did he believe that love of God required such a sacrifice? Additionally, was Akiba's sacrifice unique, and if it was, why did others not offer up their lives in the same way? Is love of God through death mandatory or optional? I will now address these questions.

The first question is the easiest to answer. As I have already argued, the notion that loving God with all one's soul includes death was already a part of the tradition. It

³² Fishbane, *The Kiss of God*, 69.

³³ Shlomo Eidelberg, trans. and ed., "The Chronicle of Solomon bar Simson," *The Jews and the Crusaders*, (Hoboken: Ktav Publishing, 1996) 31.

was already within the realm of possibility. Immediately preceding the story of Akiba's death in *Brachot* 61b, we find the following teaching attributed to him:

רבי עקיבא אומר: בכל נפשך אפילו נוטל את נפשך.

“‘with all your soul’ – even if God carries away your soul.”

This is the same phrase, except for the missing pronoun, that we encountered in both the Mishnah and the *Tosefta*. Two conclusions are possible. One is that the teaching in the Mishnah and *Tosefta* are attributable to Rabbi Akiba. Another option is that the teaching became attached to Akiba's name because of his sacrificial death. In either case, the idea that loving God included death was beginning to emerge as part *Tannaitic* literature.

The story of Akiba begs the question – are we meant to die for the commandments? If we cannot obey the commandments, must we choose to die rather than transgress? Is this what God demands of us through the words “love *Adonai* your God with all your soul”? The answer is found in a *sugya* from the Talmud *Bavli*

Sanhedrin 74a:

אמר רבי יוחנן משום רבי שמעון בן יהוצדק: נימנו וגמרו בעלית בית נתזה בלוד: כל עבירות שבתורה אם אומרין לאדם עבור ואל תהרג - יעבור ואל יהרג, הוץ מעבודה זרה וגילוי עריות ושפיכות דמים. ועבודה זרה לא? והא תניא, אמר רבי ישמעאל: מנין שאם אמרו לו לאדם עבוד עבודה זרה ואל תהרג מנין שיעבוד ואל יהרג - תלמוד לומר +ויקרא כ"ב /ח"ב+ וחי בהם - ולא שימות בהם. יכול אפילו בפרהסיא - תלמוד לומר +ויקרא כ"ב+ ולא תחללו את שם קדשי ונקדשתי.

Rabbi Yohanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon son of Yehotzadak: they voted and decided in the attic of the House of Natzah in Lod: “all the sins that are in the Torah, if they say to a man ‘sin and we won’t kill you,’ transgress and you won’t be killed, except for idol worship, illicit sexual relations and the spilling of blood.” And can you transgress the sin to not worship idols? It was taught in a baraita: Rabbi Ishmael said: “from where do we learn that if someone says to a man, ‘worship these idols and you won’t be killed,’ he can worship then and won’t be killed? Torah says ‘and live by them,’ (Leviticus 18:5)

and not die by them. Is it possible even in public? Torah says 'You shall not profane My holy name, that I may be sanctified.' (Leviticus 22:32)."

The opening statement of this *sugya* states that one can break every commandment on punishment of death, except for idol worship, illicit sexual relations and murder. It appears that in the majority of cases, it is better to transgress rather than sacrifice one's life for the sake of the commandments. We are not meant to die for the commandments but, as the verse from Leviticus states, we are meant to live by them. However, as we shall soon see, the debate does not end here.

The *baraita* from Rabbi Ishmael needs to be explained. He argues that one can engage in idol worship, in response to a death threat, but only if the transgression will happen in private. Although we are meant to live by the commandments, the Torah still holds that God's name cannot be violated and must be sanctified "in the midst of the Israelite people." (Lev. 22:32) "In the midst" refers to the public domain. If a Jew were to pray to an idol in the public square, this would be the opposite of sanctifying God's name among the Israelites—it would be a profanation of the Name.

However, Rabbi Ishmael's reading of the law is rejected. We continue reading the *sugya* from *Sanhedrin*:

כי אתא רב דימי אמר רבי יוחנן: לא שנו אלא שלא בשעת השמד, אבל בשעת השמד - אפילו מצוה קלה יהרג ואל יעבור. כי אתא רבין אמר רבי יוחנן: אפילו שלא בשעת השמד, לא אמרו אלא בצינעא, אבל בפרהסיא - אפילו מצוה קלה יהרג ואל יעבור. - מאי מצוה קלה? - אמר רבא בר יצחק אמר רב: אפילו לשנויי ערקתא דמסאנא. וכמה פרהסיא? - אמר רבי יעקב אמר רבי יוחנן: אין פרהסיא פחותה מעשרה בני אדם.

For when Rav Dimi came, he said in the name of R. Yohanan: "this was taught only if there was no royal decree of persecution [forcing Israel to transgress their religion], but during the time of a royal decree of persecution, even for a minor commandment, one should be killed rather than violate it." When Rabin arrived, he said in the name of R. Yohanan: "even without a royal decree of persecution, it was said only regarding 'in private,' but in public, even for a minor mitzvah one should be killed rather than violate

it.” What is a minor mitzvah? Rava son of Rav Isaac said in the name of Rav: “even to change one’s shoe strap.” And how many people make it public? Rabbi Jacob said in the name of Rabbi Yohanan: “it is not public if there are less than 10 people.”

Rav Dimi claims that when the ruling kingdom persecutes the Jews, making it illegal for them to faithfully follow their religion, they are obligated to die rather than be caught transgressing even a minor commandment. Rabin adds further, declaring that even when no such decree of persecution exists, you must accept death over transgressing even a minor commandment in public.

This *sugya* from *Sanhedrin* demonstrates that the rabbinic authorities held a difference of opinion *in degree* regarding martyrdom. While some claimed, like Dimi and Rabin, that it is incumbent upon a Jew to sacrifice himself for the sake of even minor commandments, there are others, like Rabbi Ishmael, who argued that martyrdom was only required in the case of idolatry, murder and illicit sexual relations committed in public. However, the *Bavli* does not leave Rabbi Ishmael’s statement as a valid option. It rejects his argument; the opinion of the Talmud remains that one must be willing to die rather than commit a transgression, even a minor one, in public. However, it is still not clear if the rabbis in *Sanhedrin* would advocate death for Torah study. Torah study is a positive commandment and the *sugya* seems to be discussing the transgression of negative commandments. Since love of God requires fulfillment of the commandments, one must be willing to die rather than transgress any *mitzvah* in public to demonstrate that love.

Rabbi Akiba believed that love of God required a sacrifice of life for the sake of all the commandments. Abraham Joshua Heschel described Akiba in the following way:

In Rabbi Akiva’s heart burned a boundless love for God. How should one love God? Rabbi Akiva answered by interpreting: “Therefore do maidens love you”

(Song of Songs 1:3) – read not *alamot* “‘maidens.’” but ‘*ad mot*’ – unto death.” He preached self-sacrifice and martyrdom in public....Self-sacrifice was not optional but mandatory. It was taught in Rabbi Akiva’s school: “[God says,] I brought you out of Egypt on condition that you should lay down your lives for the sanctification of My name.”³⁴

But Heschel also points out that not all the rabbinic authorities agreed with Akiba. He brings in numerous examples to prove this point. Quoting from the Babylonian Talmud, *Bava Kamma* 61a, Heschel writes:

Perhaps the harshest rebuke to Rabbi Akiva’s approach has been preserved in the following statement: “This has been transmitted to me from the Court of Law presided over by Samuel of Ramah, that no *halakha* may be quoted in the name of one who surrenders himself to martyrdom for the sake of words of Torah.”³⁵

Citing a passage from the *Shnei Luhot Ha-Berit*, Heschel writes:

There developed a prevailing view that offering one’s life as a sacrifice on the altar of martyrdom was not an obligation. “On the contrary, if one could flee from danger, or ransom one’s life in any way possible, even by relinquishing all of one’s wealth, one should choose that path and not be killed.”³⁶

Maimonides argues something similar in his *Epistle on Martyrdom*, written to the Jewish communities of North Africa in response to the Muslim Almohad persecutions of the 12th century. He urged the Jewish communities to flee the persecution and live in a land that would allow one to live out one’s Judaism publicly and freely, much like Maimonides’ own family did, fleeing the Iberian Peninsula to eventually settle in what is now Egypt. The following is taken from his Epistle:

What I counsel myself, and what I should like to suggest to all my friends and everyone that consults me, is to leave these places and go to where he can practice religion and fulfill the Law without compulsion or fear. Let him leave his family and his home and all he has, because the divine Law that He bequeathed to us is

³⁴ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Heavenly Torah: As Refracted through the Generations*, ed. and trans. by Gordon Tucker and Leonard Levin, (New York: Continuum, 2005), 145-146.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 147.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 146.

more valuable than the ephemeral, worthless incidentals that the intellectuals scorn.³⁷

Throughout this exploration, different strands have emerged. In the worldview of the *Bavli*, Torah study is worth dying for. For the sake of loving God, it legitimately can lead to martyrdom, as exemplified by Akiba. In addition, the *sugya* in *Sanhedrin* 74a emphasized the need to die rather than transgress the negative commandments in public. Although Rabbi Ishmael raised an alternative viewpoint, that one only needs to submit to death if required to transgress the sins of idol worship, illicit sexual relations, and murder in public, he is rejected by the *sugya*. A few centuries later, Maimonides urges others to flee from the Almohad persecutions rather than commit to conversion or death.

As these sources demonstrate, love of God is intricately bound up with notions of martyrdom for the sake of the commandments. It is difficult to examine the notion of love of God through death without also delving into questions surrounding sanctification of God's name. *Kiddush Ha-shem* was one way people demonstrated their love for God. It was better to die an observant Jew rather than transgress God's law, a sign of disloyalty. As we begin to look at later medieval sources, we will notice how closely connected these two threads are.

As stated earlier in this chapter, Rabbi Akiba becomes the rabbinic model, par excellence, for loving God "with all one's soul." During the First Crusade of 1096, many Jews killed themselves and their children rather than submit to the forced conversions of the Christian Crusaders. *The Chronicle of Solomon Bar Simson* tells this brutal tale, and within its pages, records how the martyrs were acting, consciously, in imitation of Akiba:

³⁷ Abraham Halkin and David Hartman, *Crisis and Leadership: Epistles of Maimonides*. (Philadelphia: JPS, 1985), 31.

We shall offer ourselves as a sacrifice to the Lord, as a whole-burnt-offering to the Most High One, a sacrifice upon the altar of God. Then we shall enter the World-that-is-All Day, the Garden of Eden...We shall sit there amongst the pillars of the world and dine in the company of the righteous in the Garden of Eden, and we shall be in the company of Rabbi Akiba and his companions.³⁸

They believed that upon arriving in Paradise, they would meet Rabbi Akiba. For Akiba had submitted to the knife in similar fashion and inherited the World to Come, thanks to his sacrifice. "Repeatedly in the chronicles, the righteous who are willing to die for the sanctification of the name are compared to Akiba, who expressed his love of God by allowing his life to be taken."³⁹ However, there is one crucial difference between Akiba's actions and those martyrs of the First Crusade. Akiba submitted to the torture of his Roman oppressors: it was death they wanted from him. However, the Jews of the Rhineland committed mass suicide and slaughtered their children: their death was a result of their own hands. The Christian Crusaders wanted the Jews to convert, and not to die.

In his book *God, Humanity, and History*, Robert Chazan delves deeply into an analysis of the Hebrew Crusader narratives, comparing them with earlier Jewish traditions of martyrology. He argues that the Jewish communities of the Rhineland needed to link their acts to the behavior of Jewish figures such as Akiba and Abraham in order to legitimate the lengths to which they would go to avoid conversion to Christianity. He writes:

...association of the First Crusade hero figures with their predecessors served to erase any questions that might be raised over their radical martyrological behaviors. If the martyrs of 1096 were recapitulating the actions of prior Jewish

³⁸ Eidelberg, "The Chronicle of Solomon bar Simson," 56.

³⁹ Elliot R. Wolfson, "Martyrdom, Eroticism and Asceticism in Twelfth-Century Ashkenazi Piety," *Jews and Christians in Twelfth-Century Europe*, Eds. Michael A. Signer and John Van Engen, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 184.

stalwarts, then obviously their behaviors – however unprecedented and radical they might seem – were more than justified.⁴⁰

Chazan continues by pointing out key differences in the narrative frame of the Akiba story as compared to the Crusader chronicles. Chazan argues that the picture we have of the situation of 1096 is “more realistic, more human, more conflicted, and ultimately more heroic.”⁴¹ Whereas the Akiba narrative ends with the promise of eternal life, placing God at the center of the story, the Crusader chronicles have no such reference. The narrators of these stories “regularly express conviction that their heroes in fact superseded these predecessors.”⁴²

Notions of martyrdom also found their way into *Ashkenazic* law codes of the medieval era. Rabbi Isaac of Corbeille, a 13th century *halakhist* living in France, penned the code *Sefer Amudei Golah*, otherwise known as *Sefer Mitzvot Katan* (*Samak*). He lists love of God as the third commandment, under a general category of commandments which are dependent on the heart. The following is the relevant excerpt:

לאהוב שמו של הקב"ה בכל לב כדכתיב (דברים ו') ואהבת את ה' אלהיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך ובכל מאודך, וזו היא עבודת הבורא מאהבה.... בכל נפשך, שיחשב עליו נפשו לכולם שלא ימנע מעשות מצות הבורא בשביל סכנת נפשו. ופירשו רבותינו (סנהדרין ע"ד) בעכו"ם וגילוי עריות ושפיכות דמים. ואפילו בצנעה יהרג ואל יעבור, ושאר מצות בצנעה יעבור ואל יהרג, (אם ירצהו). אבל מדת חסידות שלא יעבור.... ומה שאמרו (סנהדרין ע"ד) בצנעה יעבור ואל יהרג, ה"מ כשהגוי עושה בשביל הנאת עצמו, אבל במתכונן להעבירו על דת יהרג ואל יעבור. וראיה מיבמות (דף קכ"א) דקאמר ההוא גוי דאמר ליה לישראל שקול אספסתאט בשבתא ושדי קדם היותאי ואי לא קטילנא לך יעבור ואל יהרג. אבל אם אמר לו שקול אספסתא ושדי לנהרא יהרג ואל יעבור, ואם בפרהסיא דהיינו בפני עשרה ישראל אפילו אמר שדי קדם היותאי יהרג ואל יעבור. לישנא אחרינא, בכל נפשך, כלומר אפילו בשעה שנוטלים אויבים נפשו ממנו יעבוד בוראו באהבתו אותו כמו שמצינו (ברכות ס"א) ברבי עקיבא שהיה מאריך באחד בשעת נטילת נשמה.

⁴⁰ Robert Chazan, *God, Humanity and History: The Hebrew First Crusade Narratives*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 175.

⁴¹ Ibid., 187.

⁴² Ibid.

To love the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, with all one's heart, as it is written "You shall love Adonai your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut 6:5)... "With all your soul" – so you will consider your soul as nothing and you won't prevent yourself from doing the commandments of the Creator because of the danger to your soul, and the interpretation of the rabbis in Sanhedrin 74a -- In idol worship, illicit sexual relations, and the spilling of blood, and even in private, be killed and do not transgress, and the rest of the mitzvot in private, one can transgress and not be killed, if one wants, but from the measure of mercy, don't transgress....

And what was written (in Sanhedrin 74a): in private you may transgress and not be killed. This only applies when the gentile does this for the purpose of his own pleasure, but if his intention is to cause [the Jew] to transgress his religion, be killed and do not sin. There is evidence from *Yevamot* 121b: a non-Jew said to an Israelite 'cut some grass on Shabbat and throw it to my cattle, and if not, I will kill you' – transgress and do not be killed, but if he said to you to cut the grass and throw it into the river, be killed and do not transgress, and if in public, that is before 10 Israelites, even if he says to throw it to his animals, be killed and do not transgress.

"With all one's soul" as it says even at the hour that the enemies take his life from him, serve your Creator and love Him, like we found with Rabbi Akiba who was lengthening with "one" at the hour his soul was leaving. (*Brachot* 61b)

Rabbi Yitzhak records what we have seen in previous sources. He cites material from tractate *Brachot* regarding the death of Rabbi Akiba, and from tractate *Sanhedrin* regarding the requirements for martyrdom for the sake of love of God. When he interprets "with all one's soul" to mean one should do the *mitzvot* in spite of the danger to one's soul, he sounds very similar to Ben Azzai in *Tosefta Brachot* 6:7 who interpreted to "b'chol nafshecha" to mean giving one's soul for the sake of the commandments.

He also codifies the role that gentile intention has on the requirement of martyrdom. Basing himself on a *sugya* from *Yevamot* 121b, he argues that the stated intention of the non-Jew is important in determining whether martyrdom is warranted.⁴³ If the gentile's express intention is to cause the Jew to abandon his religion, then one must be willing to be killed, rather than transgress, whether in public or private. If,

⁴³ Material is also found in *Sanhedrin* 74b.

however, the gentile is asking the Jew to break a negative commandment so the gentile can benefit, he may transgress the *mitzvah*, but only in private. In a quorum of 10 Jewish males, the law must still be upheld and death is the only response. Maimonides, also basing himself on the Talmud, makes a similar claim in his *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Yesodai Hatorah* 5:2-3 and his *Epistle on Martyrdom*. However, the Rambam adds that in the time of a decree of persecution against the Jews, one should be willing to die rather than transgress even in the company of gentiles.

While Jewish leaders penned four chronicles of the Crusade experience⁴⁴ that attested to the Jews' willingness to die for God, no such historical evidence exists regarding the Muslim Almohad persecutions of the 12th century or the Spanish Inquisition of 1492. It appears that the Jews of this era either accepted conversion or expulsion in response to their Muslim and Christian oppressors. Therefore, we have come to associate this type of martyrdom, as exemplified by Akiba and the Jews of the Rhineland, only with an Ashkenazi Jewish tradition. However, textual evidence exists from the Sephardi world that proves otherwise.

In response to the Muslim Almohad persecutions of the Jewish communities living in the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa, Maimonides penned his *Epistle on Martyrdom*.

Writing in response to a rabbi who had argued that those Jews who had converted under duress should not continue to obey the *mitzvot*, claiming that to do so would constitute a double sin, conversion being the first, the Rambam claimed that these actions were not in fact sins at all. However, Maimonides still upheld the law that one must die

⁴⁴ See Eidelberg, *The Jews and the Crusaders*.

rather than commit the sins of illicit sexual relations, idolatry, and murder. But, in addition to the fact that he did not consider a speech act, as required by a Muslim conversion, to be idol worship, he also argued that one should not be cut off from the Jewish people if one converted under duress: "Even if he worships idols under duress his soul will not be cut off, and he is certainly not executed by court order."⁴⁵ Of course, in a post-Talmudic era, there would have been no *beit din* capable of punishing a Jew by execution.

While Maimonides approved of martyrdom in general, for the purposes of *kiddush ha-shem*, he was not a vociferous advocate for it. He explains:

Anyone who suffered martyrdom in order not to acknowledge the apostleship of "that man," [Muhammad] the only thing that can be said of him is that he has done what is good and proper, and that God holds great reward in store for him. His position is very high, for he has given his life for the sanctity of God, be He exalted and blessed. But if anyone comes to ask me whether to surrender his life or acknowledge, I tell him to confess and not choose death.⁴⁶

Maimonides saw another option: moving to a place where one could freely uphold the commandments. He argues that if one is capable of leaving but refuses because of "his attachments" or the "dangers of a sea voyage....[he] must look upon himself as one who profanes God's name, not exactly willingly, but almost so."⁴⁷

Maimonides strikes a balance between the *halakha* and other prudent political calculations. Should he tell the Jewish community of their obligation to accept death or steer another course and save Jewish lives? Or, would the decision to convert leave the Jewish community weakened in the face of their mightier oppressors? As David Hartman writes:

⁴⁵ Halkin and Hartman, *Crisis and Leadership: Epistles of Maimonides*, 29.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

Maimonides decided to challenge the rabbi's halakhic judgment and to fortify the Moroccan Jews by arguing that martyrdom was not absolutely required under the particular conditions of this persecution....Maimonides and the rabbi were forced to make a practical political judgment of whether choosing not to act heroically in the existing situation might create social conditions leading to the disappearance of the community.⁴⁸

While we do not have documentation that Jews did in fact kill themselves in response to these persecutions in Sepharad, we do have proof that the leaders of the Spanish Jewish community lifted up love of God through death as a model they should consider.

Megillat Amraphel is one such example. Written by Rabbi Abraham ben Eliezer Halevi, a Spanish Kabbalist and exile from the expulsion in 1492, this discourse "is a tremendous testimonial from the time of the Inquisition to the attempt of Jewish leaders to exhort their communities to remain steadfast before the threats and torments besetting them."⁴⁹ Refusing to give into the demands of his oppressor, the Jew offers up his life, out of his love, in sanctification of the divine name. The following excerpt, located near the end of the *Megillah*, provides a glimpse into the rhetoric surrounding the commandment to love God through a martyr's death. The text portrays love of God as a protective armor against the suffering and pain of torture and death:

It would seem that it is with respect to the soul of the martyr who devotes his soul to God – who persists in love of Him, dies in the midst of the wicked, and gives his body to the pyre....For the love of her Beloved her body falls to pieces [*peraqim peraqim*] in the terrible trials wreaked upon it....But God, the Lord of peace, for love of whom she suffers all this, looks down from His [heavenly] dwelling and says of the righteous [martyr] whose soul is ascending to Him: "Behold, you are pure and upright!"...

Then the righteous [martyr] answers his Creator: "...Remember the love with which I have loved You, for even if they kill me for love of You, I shall not feel it, 'for love is as strong as death' [Songs 8:6]....And even if they burn me and cast

⁴⁸ Ibid., 50.

⁴⁹ Fishbane, *Kiss of God*, 53.

me into the fiery furnace, this too is nothing compared to my love of You, for my love of You is a wonder wrought upon me and burns within me like flaming torches, 'the flashes thereof are flashes of fire, a very flame of the Lord' [Song 8:6]. How, then, could my soul suffer from that little fire when the mighty flame of love for You burns mightily within me? And 'great' tortures and horrors, which are like 'water,' 'cannot quench' the flame of my 'love' [Songs 8:7]. And though torment come as a 'flood' [Songs 8:7], the spirit of the Lord inspires me to devote myself to You. I am not speaking of my property or wealth, for wealth is less than nothing, and if anyone should boast that he gave 'all the substance of his house for love,' those who are perfected, those who come before God, 'would surely scorn him' [Songs 8:7] – for this is without value to those who hold the treasures of the world in contempt.” But there is something that one may truly boast of – that he devotes his body to the pyre and all the other terrible tortures I spoke about. For such a one will God deem true and place him as a seal upon His right arm...⁵⁰

With an exegetical reading of Song of Songs 8:5-7, ben Eliezer Halevi creates a dialogue between God and the martyred soul. As the soul rises up to the heavens, God welcomes the martyr with words of praise, bestowing upon it an appellation of purity. The martyred soul responds with a declaration of his love for God, with a long list of ways that the tortures and pain inflicted by the fire of his inquisitors cannot be felt due to the encompassing love he feels for *Adonai*. The reward for such a sacrifice is to serve as the seal upon God's right arm.

Love of God through death can also be achieved through study and prayer. When historical circumstances did not allow for this level of devotion, Jewish texts recorded practices that allowed one to demonstrate love of God *as if* one were suffering a martyr's death. For example, *Yosef 'Ometz* written by Rabbi Yosef Yuzpe Hahn, a German rabbi who lived in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is a collection of liturgical and other such practices. He explains how the study of the laws of martyrdom is equal to a real death for the love of God:

⁵⁰ Ibid., 55-57.

In addition to this [foregoing] reason [for learning the rules of martyrdom], there is, in my opinion, a greater one: that a person should learn those laws upon which the foundation of our faith depends: for [their very name proves this, since] they are called [the laws for the] sanctification of the Name. Accordingly, whoever studies them in all their details and devotes himself in love for the sanctification of His great Name, then this theoretical recollection and acceptance will be considered as a deed in fact – in accordance with what the sages have said concerning whoever studies the [biblical] portions of sacrifices....Because there are indeed a number of commandments that certain persons will never be obligated to perform, these will be accounted in his favor if he [but] studies their laws and affirms to fulfill them if necessary....This acceptance will be deemed a deed in fact. In just this way did the sages expound the [biblical] verse ‘For Your sake are we killed all day long’ in the [Midrash] *Sifre*, [saying,] ‘And is it conceivable that one be killed every day? Rather, [the sense is] that should one accept upon himself daily to sanctify His great Name, it will be accounted as [if he were] a sheep [led] to the slaughter.’⁵¹

Study of the laws of martyrdom turns death into an actuality. It is as if you have offered yourself to God in love for the purposes of sanctifying the Holy Name. A precedent for this already existed. In the Talmud, the sages stipulated that the study of the laws of sacrifice, no longer possible due to the destruction of the Temple, was an acceptable substitution for fulfilling the commandment.⁵² So it is with love of God through death.

Alyssa Gray makes a similar case in her article analyzing various *sugyot* from the Palestinian Talmud. She argues that the editors of the Talmud have appropriated martyr language regarding the study of Torah:

...the editor has effectively redefined martyrdom language to refer to deep, fully engaged, physically wearying study of Torah. Although the phrase ‘study of Torah’ is not employed, the Yerushalmi employs the phrase ‘wearing oneself out over the Torah’ to mean study....the editor signals his agreement with the notion of ‘silent martyrdom’ – a rabbi who wears himself over the study of Torah is, in effect, a martyr.⁵³

⁵¹ Ibid., 76.

⁵² *Talmud Bavli, Menahot* 110a.

⁵³ Alyssa M. Gray “A Contribution to the Study of Martyrdom and Identity in the Palestinian Talmud,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 54, 2 (Autumn 2003), 262.

Michael Fishbane highlights how prayer can complete the obligation to love God in death, explaining the proper procedure for the recitation of the *Sh'ma*:

...one must recite the opening proclamation of unity and the succeeding determination to love God with 'all your soul' with absolute sincerity. Since the last clause was undoubtedly understood in the Akivan sense, 'even if He takes your soul,' the requirement is that one should recite the prayer as if (*ke'ilu*) one were giving up one's soul at that very moment (and also intending to do so in fact, circumstances permitting). Performed this way, the verbal utterance would fulfill the physical *mitzvah*.⁵⁴

The combination of prayer with intention cannot be missed. Words become acts, as long as the proper *kavanah* is present.

For the kabbalists, the notion that study of law could be equivalent to carrying out the law was central to their doctrine of the transmigration of the soul. As recorded in the *Yosef 'Ometz*:

They [the Kabbalists] said that a person could not acquire perfection without fulfilling [all of] the 613 commandments: and were he to omit even one of the commandments of God his supernal garment would be wanting, and he would have to return to the round of rebirth until he had performed all 613 commandments....If one were to study such laws, and determine to fulfill them if the occasion should arise...this [theoretical] acceptance would be accounted a deed in fact.⁵⁵

In the kabbalistic doctrine of reincarnation, one's soul can only be released from the cycle of rebirth if the "supernal garment" that will clothe the soul is completed.

However, that is contingent upon the fulfillment of all 613 commandments. Therefore, the notion that study of a given law was equal to its execution was crucial for the kabbalists. Without this doctrine, their souls would never be capable of achieving final salvation. "For the *mitzvah* of sanctification of God's name, the solution provided was

⁵⁴ Fishbane, *Kiss of God*, 77.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 78.

ritual study of the rules of martyrdom and proper martyrological meditations – the readiness to die for love of God --- during prayer.”⁵⁶

Rabbi Moshe de Leon, a thirteenth century Spanish kabbalist, also discusses how love of God through death can be fulfilled in prayer. In his *Sefer Ha-Rimmon*, he writes:

Every person who loves his Creator, whenever he reaches the verse “and you shall love (etc.)” in the recitation of the *Sh'ma*, should direct his mind and thoughts toward love for his Maker, as if [*ke'ilu*] he were giving up his soul for His sake in love, with absolute sincerity, and accepting death upon himself. And it is obligatory upon each person to resolve [lit., “determine”; *lignor be-nafsho*] this matter daily. And this is like what [the sages meant when] they said, “For Your sake we are killed all day long, and regarded as sheep for the slaughter.” And how splendid if he employs this intention daily in love for his Maker and devotes his soul for His sake, as we have said, and He, may He be blessed, wants intention [in worship].⁵⁷

At the moment when the worshipper utters “*v'ahavta et adonai elohecha...b'chol nafshecha*,” he must imagine that he is dying for his God. The *Sh'ma* “is then as much a preparation for saintly death as it is a credo of living love of God. The ritual recitation is thus an interiorization of death, such that the true devotee is already in life a spiritual martyr in deed.”⁵⁸ Twice daily, the worshipper can fulfill the commandment to love God through the offering of one's soul. Prayer is a means to fulfilling this commandment.

While love of God through death, realized either as actual death or via prayer and study, is a commandment worth observing for its own sake, the literature describes two advantages to its fulfillment. One such reward is atonement. The other is ultimate unity with God. Ben Eliezer Ha-Levi writes in the *Megillat Amraphel* that the proper recitation of the *Sh'ma* can lead to atonement for one's sins:

⁵⁶ Ibid., 78-79.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 101.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 102.

...if a person recites the *Sh'ma* both morning and eve and sets his mind with a correct and focused intention when he recites the love of God's Name and its unity, and determines in his heart [*gomer be-libho*] to devote to Him his body and soul and wife and children and to love Him with all his heart and all his soul and all his might, even when he prostrates himself in prayer, after he has stood alive during the Amidah prayer, and to confess his sins and say, "I commit my soul to You, O Lord" [Psalm 25:1], and he deposits his soul with his God, and his God bears his soul and spirit and gathers his breath to Himself, as if he were going to his eternal home – truly that person has a share in Life and will go to the Light by the Light of Life....[For such a person] even those sins which would go unatoned until the day of his death are atoned for at that time; for he has truly determined in his heart [*gamar be-libho*] and devoted himself to his God as if he were dead [*ke'ilu meit*], gone and annihilated from this world.⁵⁹

The worshipper's simulated death atones for sins that otherwise would have remained unforgiven during his lifetime.

Yet in kabbalistic thinking, love of God through death is one of the ways to achieve unity with the Godhead, the central goal of the kabbalist's life. Rabbi Meir Ibn Gabbai, a sixteenth century kabbalist, wrote in his treatise, *'Avodat ha-Qodesh*, the following:

Rabbi Akiba...devoted himself to the sanctification of the Name out of love, this being the most complete unity, for his soul departed at "One."...And thus the love of the companion [*re'a*] for his Companion [*re'ehu*] should go so far as to remove the division which separates them, [so as] to be present with Him 'face to face' and to cleave to Him steadfastly. And for this reason he should devote his body, which impedes this conjunction, to be sacrificed before Him; and then his spirit shall cleave to the spirit of His Companion [*re'ehu*], 'the one touching [*masiquot*] the Other' [Ezekiel 3:13]. And the two [of them] will then be one entity (*kelal*); and this is [the true meaning of the phrase] 'a great principle [*kelal*] in the Torah.'⁶⁰

This exegesis is based on a mystical reading of Leviticus 19:19 -- "you shall love your neighbor as yourself"-- whereby the neighbor in this analogy is God. You love God until He becomes "as yourself" -- as one. The body is an impediment to achieving unity

⁵⁹ Ibid., 79-80.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 81.

with God. By loving God through death, one's soul reaches God "face-to-face." Notice also how Rabbi Akiba is again held up as an example of sanctification of the Name.

In his examination of the Crusader chronicles, Elliot Wolfson argues that "martyrdom as the ultimate expression of love for God is intertwined with love in the human plane between man and woman."⁶¹ He tells the story of Judah ben Abraham to prove his point. This man had a son, Abraham, who was betrothed to Sarit. Upon witnessing how the people were slaughtering each other, she began to flee. Wanting to prevent her from running away and marrying anyone else, Judah kills Sarit. "The bond of love between Abraham and Sarit was to be secured by their mutual death."⁶²

He [Judah] seized her and held her outside the window and kissed her on the mouth and raised his voice in weeping along with the lass. He cried out loudly and bitterly and said to all those standing there: "Behold, all of you. This is the bridal canopy of my daughter, my bride, that I make this day."...The pious Judah said to her: "My daughter, come and lie in the bosom of Abraham our ancestor. For in one moment you shall acquire your future and shall enter the circle of the saintly and pious." He took her and placed her in the bosom of his son Abraham, her betrothed, and cut her with his sharp sword into two pieces. Subsequently he also slaughtered his son.⁶³

The ground upon which Abraham and Sarit die becomes their *chuppah*. "The sacrificial death is thus eroticized not only on account of the love of the martyrs express for God in their willingness to die, but also because the love of man and woman is fully consummated in their shared death."⁶⁴ Death becomes the means to express love to God but also to each other.

As we have seen, love of God through death has a rich interpretative tradition among Jewish sources. It encompasses a devotion to God at the moment of one's natural

⁶¹ Wolfson, "Martyrdom, Eroticism, and Asceticism," 185.

⁶² Ibid., 184

⁶³ Ibid., 185.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

death, in addition to taking one's own life when forced to either convert or transgress a commandment, in the appropriate circumstances. This latter point, though, has its detractors. According to some, there can be limits to loving God: death is not always required. Lastly, we witnessed how prayer and study can lead to a ritualization of death, allowing one to fulfill the commandment to love God without actually dying. Worship, study, and deed all allow one to fulfill the commandment to love God "with all your soul" into a reality.

Chapter Four: Maimonides and Love of God

While in the previous two chapters we examined love of God through particular themes – action and death, as we discuss the medieval period, it will be useful to take a more systematic approach regarding particular thinkers. This chapter examines love of God in the work of Maimonides, a philosopher and legal codifier of 12th century Egypt. Focusing on the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Guide of the Perplexed*, I will discuss Rambam's argument for how the knowledge of God leads to love of God. For Rambam, it is through an apprehension of scientific and philosophical principles that the proper devotion to God is developed. Through the study of nature, metaphysics and Torah, love of God can be achieved. This chapter will also examine the Rambam's arguments that much of this work must be done in seclusion, removed from the distractions of the world. Finally, we will also see how Maimonides views love of God as both a commandment and an emotion. He describes the love of God one should feel in passionate terms, comparing it to one who is lovesick and obsessed. He makes a claim that it is this feeling that will propel one to observe the *mitzvot*. Love can be both an act one fulfills and a motivator for fulfilling the rest of the commandments.

In *Hilchot Yesodai Ha-Torah* 2:1 the Rambam explicates what he means by love of God. He begins by citing the biblical proof text for love of God – our verse from Deuteronomy 6:5:

אל הנכבד והנורא הזה מצוה לאהבו וליראה אותו שנאמר ואהבת את ה' אלהיך, ונאמר את ה' אלהיך תירא.

2:1 God, the revered and honored one, it is a mitzvah to love him and fear him, as it says: 'You shall love Adonai your God,' (Deut 6:5) and it says 'Adonai your God, you should fear.' (Deut. 6:13)

As we can see already from this first *halakha*, Maimonides believes that love of God is a commandment. Although he claims that it is also our duty to fear Him, we will not examine fear of God, which, as we already stated in the introduction, goes beyond the scope of this thesis.

After clearly stating the legal obligation to love God, Maimonides goes on to explain how one attains love of God:

והיאך היא הדרך לאהבתו ויראתו. בשעה שיתבונן האדם במעשיו וברואיו הנפלאים הגדולים ויראה מהן חכמתו שאין לה ערך ולא קץ מיד הוא אוהב ומשבח ומפאר ומתאווה תאוה גדולה לידע השם הגדול, כמו שאמר דוד צמאה נפשי לאלהים לאל חי, וכשמחשב בדברים האלו עצמן מיד הוא נרתע לאהוריו ויפחד ויודע שהוא בריה קטנה שפלה אפלה עומדת בדעת קלה מעוטה לפני תמים דעות, כמו שאמר דוד כי אראה שמך מעשה אצבעותיך מה אנוש כי תזכרנו, ולפי הדברים האלו אני מבאר כללים גדולים ממעשה רבון העולמים כדי שיהיו פתח למבין לאהוב את השם, כמו שאמרו חכמים בענין אהבה שמתוך כך אתה מכיר את מי שאמר והיה העולם.

2:2 And what is the path to love and fear Him? At the moment when a person reflects upon His wonderful and great acts and creations, and understands from them His wisdom, which has no measurement of value nor end – immediately he loves and praises and glorifies and yearns with a great desire to know the Great Name. Like David said: “My soul thirsts for God, the living God.” (Psalm 42:3)

When he considers these very things, immediately he will recoil backwards and will be afraid, and he will know that he is a tiny creation, lowly, dark, standing with simple and scanty knowledge, before the One who has perfect knowledge, like David said: “When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers...what is man that You have been mindful of him.” (Psalm 8:4-5)

Based on these things, I will explain important principles regarding the works of the Master of the world, in order that there is an opening for one who understands to love God, like the sages said regarding love, out of this, you will recognize who spoke and brought the world into existence.

For Maimonides, loving God is achieved by understanding and contemplating the way God works in the world; through His creations and His acts. We achieve love of God through knowledge of God. Shubert Spero outlined Maimonides' thinking in four steps:

- 1) Contemplation of God's works and creatures, i.e., the natural world.

- 2) Realization of the wisdom of the Maker of the natural world, i.e., God.
- 3) Experience of a love for God (which follows immediately and necessarily from #2)
- 4) Development of a desire and passion to know about God, to come closer to Him. (The more knowledge that man has, the greater his love.)⁶⁵

As we can see, knowledge serves as the path to loving God and in addition, it is knowledge of God we will desire knowledge of God once we come to love Him.

Maimonides makes a similar claim about the importance of knowing God's ways in *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Here is the relevant passage from III:52:

As for the opinions that the *Torah* teaches us – namely, the apprehension of His being and His unity, may He be exalted – these opinions teach us *love*, as we have explained several times. You know to what extent the *Torah* lays stress upon *love*: *With all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might*. For these two ends, namely, *love* and *fear*, are achieved through two things: *love* through the opinions taught by the Law, which include the apprehension of His being as He, may He be exalted, is in truth; while *fear* is achieved by means of all actions prescribed by the Law, as we have explained.⁶⁶

Norman Lamm defines the opinions of which Maimonides speaks as the “theological propositions taught by the Torah.”⁶⁷ Through the study of God's being and unity, as contained in the Torah, one can reach proper love of God. The Guide is very similar in this respect to the *Mishneh Torah*.

Returning to his argument in the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides begins to explain the specifics of this knowledge. What are the “*kellalim gedolim*” – the important principles – that one must grasp in order to know God? One such set of principles he

⁶⁵ Shubert Spero, “Maimonides and Our Love for God,” *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal* 32, no. 3 (Summer 1983): 322-323.

⁶⁶ Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 2: 630. Italics in the original.

⁶⁷ Norman Lamm, “Maimonides on the Love of God,” *Maimonidean Studies*. Ed. Arthur Hyman. Volume 3 (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1992), 139.

categorizes as the *Ma'aseh Merkavah*.⁶⁸ This term literally means “the work of the chariot” and derives from Ezekiel’s vision of God’s throne in chapter one. Yet, in the words of Maimonides in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, he refers to *Ma'aseh Merakavah* as “*hochmat elohut*.” Shlomo Pines translates this as “divine science”⁶⁹ while Friedlander translates this as “Metaphysics.”⁷⁰ Throughout chapters one and two of *Yesodei Hatorah*, the Rambam explains fundamentals such as God’s unity and oneness and His incorporeality. Influenced by Aristotelian philosophy, Maimonides argues that God is the “Primary Being” of the universe who causes all else to exist. Understanding these principles enables one to come to know and love God.

However, attaining this level of knowledge is not available to everyone. One must already be wise, for this material is difficult but also inaccessible to those who have not acquired the relevant learning and level of piety. He writes in chapter two of *Hilchot Yesodei Ha-Torah* 2:12:

צוו חכמים הראשונים שלא לדרוש בדברים אלו אלא לאיש אחד בלבד והוא שיהיה חכם ומבין מדעתו ואחר כך מוסרין לו ראשי הפרקים ומודיעין אותו שמץ מן הדבר והוא מבין מדעתו וידע סוף הדבר ועומקו, ודברים אלו דברים עמוקים הם עד למאד ואין כל דעת ודעת ראויה לסובלן.

2:12 The first Sages commanded that these matters should be explained only to one individual, who is wise and can reach understanding with his own intellect. Important points are transmitted to him and an outline of the concept is made known to him, and he understands from his intellect and he will know the matter to its end and its depth. These matters are extremely deep and not every intellect has the power to understand them.... [literally, “not every intellect is worthy to carry them.”]

⁶⁸ *Hilchot Yesodai Ha-Torah*, 2:11.

⁶⁹ Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, 6.

⁷⁰ Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, Trans. M. Friedlander, 2nd ed. (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1947), 2.

There are intellectual requirements for one to achieve the knowledge of God necessary for love. Only a person with such a developed way of thinking will be able to grasp these difficult matters.

Throughout chapters three and four, the Rambam explains *Ma'aseh Bereishit*, the works of God's creations. These include astronomy, the four states of matter, and questions of the soul. These too are matters one must study in order to reach the understanding of God that will lead to the experience of love of God. However, Maimonides points out a key difference between *Ma'aseh Bereishit* and *Ma'aseh Merkavah*:

ומה בין ענין מעשה מרכבה לענין מעשה בראשית, שענין מעשה מרכבה אפילו לאחד אין דורשים בו אא"כ היה חכם ומבין מדעתו מוסרין לו ראשי הפרקים. וענין מעשה בראשית מלמדין אותו ליחיד אע"פ שאינו מבין אותו מדעתו ומודיעים אותו כל מה שיכול לידע מדברים אלו, ולמה אין מלמדין אותו לרבים, לפי שאין כל אדם יש לו דעת רחבה להשיג פירוש וביאור כל הדברים על בורין.

4:11 What is the difference between *Ma'aseh Merkavah* and *Ma'aseh Bereishit*? Regarding *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, even to one person this shouldn't be explained, unless he is wise and capable of understanding, then he is given the chapter headings [of the constituent subjects]. Regarding *Ma'aseh Bereishit*, we teach it to an individual even though he is not capable of understanding it by himself, and we tell him all those things that he is capable of knowing from these matters. Why do we not teach this publicly? Because not every person has the vast intellect to grasp the interpretation and explanation of these matters in a complete way.

There are distinctions among people, then, concerning the level of knowledge they can achieve. While matters of creation and nature can be taught to just about anyone, matters of the *Merkavah*, of metaphysics, must be reserved for the elite few. The Rambam points out in the next *halakha* how all of this contemplation will lead one to love God even more:

בזמן שאדם מתבונן בדברים האלו ומכיר כל הברואים ממלאך וגלגל ואדם כיוצא בו ויראה חכמתו של הקב"ה בכל היצורים וכל הברואים, מוסיף אהבה למקום ותצמא נפשו ויכמה בשרו לאהוב המקום ברוך הוא.

4:12 When a person thinks about these matters and recognizes all the creations, from an angel to a sphere, a man and the like, and understands the wisdom of the Holy One, blessed be He, in all these forms and creations, he will add to his love for God. His soul will thirst and his flesh will long to love for God, blessed be He....

But does the difference in intellectual apprehension lead to a difference in love for God? Can one who only understands *Ma'aseh Bereishit* attain the same degree of love for God that the one who also understands *Ma'aseh Merkavah* presumably achieves? Maimonides does not answer the question here. We find a response in *Hilchot Teshuvah*. Here Rambam argues that the amount of one's knowledge is directly proportional to the "amount" of one's love. 10:6:

...אינו אוהב הקב"ה אלא בדעת שידעו, ועל פי הדעה תהיה האהבה אם מעט מעט ואם הרבה הרבה.

10:6...One can only love the Holy One, blessed be He, with the knowledge that he knows Him. The nature of one's knowledge will determine the nature of the love. If there is only a small amount of knowledge, there will only be a small amount of love. If there is a great amount of knowledge, there is a great amount of love.

As we read in the Guide (III:6): "Now we have made it clear several times that love is proportionate to apprehension."⁷¹ Rambam claims that a person who did not gain metaphysical knowledge of God was *ipso facto* incapable of attaining the greatest knowledge and love of God. Of course, in the Guide, apprehension of God is gained via the pursuit of both philosophical and scientific principles regarding God's being.

We have established that for the Rambam, love of God can only be achieved through knowledge of God. In his *Mishneh Torah* and in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, he emphasizes the study of God's creations and God's Being. But in his *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*,

⁷¹ Maimonides, *The Guide*, trans. Pines, 2: 621.

he makes an additional claim: the study of God's laws and commandments will also lead to knowledge of God:

והמצוה השלישית היא שצונו לאהבו יתעלה וזה שנתבונן ונשכיל מצותיו ופעולותיו עד שנשיגהו ונתענג בהשגתו תכלית התענוג וזאת היא האהבה המהוייבת. ולשון סיפרי (פ' שמע) לפי שנאמר ואהבת את יי' אלהיך איני יודע כיצד אוהב את המקום תלמוד לומר והיו הדברים האלה אשר אנכי מצוך היום על לבבך שמתוך כך אתה מכיר את מי שאמר והיה העולם. הנה כבר בארו לך כי בהשתכלות התאמת לך ההשגה ויגיע התענוג ותבא האהבה בהכרח.

Positive Commandment # Three:

The third commandment: He has commanded us to love Him, may He be exalted, which means to understand and comprehend His commandments and His deeds, so that we may attain Him, and achieve joy in attaining Him, which is the obligatory love. The *Sifre* states: "since it says 'You shall love Adonai Your God,' I do not know how one loves God." The Torah states: "and these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart," – through this, you will know the One who spoke and the world came into being. We have made it clear to you that through this act of contemplation you will attain a conception of God and joy will arrive and the love of God will necessarily follow.

Here, Maimonides emphasizes knowledge of God through the study of Torah and *mitzvot*. It is the study of Torah that will lead to love of God. The example from *Sifre* only makes the case stronger. By studying the words "which I command you" – the laws and ordinances of the Torah – one's understanding of God will grow.

Although Maimonides takes a hierarchical approach, believing that the knowledge of *Ma'aseh Merkavah* sits on the highest plane, only reachable by an exceptional mind, Torah, nature and metaphysics are not competing sources of knowledge. The knowledge that leads to love of God is not just physics and theology but must also include the Torah. In *Hilchot Talmud Torah 1:11*, he combines these kinds of knowledge together:

והייב לשלש את זמן למידתו, שליש בתורה שבכתב, ושליש בתורה שבעל פה, ושליש יבין וישכיל אחרית דבר מראשיתו ויוציא דבר מדבר וידמה דבר לדבר ויבין במדות שהתורה נדרשת בהן עד שידע היאך הוא עיקר המדות והיאך יוציא האסור והמותר וכיוצא בהן מדברים שלמד מפי השמועה, וענין זה הוא הנקרא גמרא.

A person is obligated to divide his study into thirds: one-third to the Written Torah, one-third to the Oral Torah, and one-third to understanding and conceiving the matter from its

beginning, taking one matter from another, comparing concepts to one another, and understanding the principles of the Torah based on interpretation, until he knows the root of the principles, and how the matters that are prohibited and allowed are derived according to the oral tradition. This matter is called *Gemara*.

In addition, the Rambam writes the following in *Hilchot Yesodei Ha-Torah* 4:13:

...ואני אומר שאין ראוי לטייל בפרדס אלא מי שנתמלא כריסו לחם ובשר, ולחם ובשר הוא לידע האסור והמותר וכיוצא בהם משאר המצות. ואע"פ שדברים אלו דבר קטן קראו אותן חכמים שהרי אמרו חכמים דבר גדול מעשה מרכבה ודבר קטן הוויות דאביי ורבא, אעפ"כ ראויין הן להקדימן. שהן מיישבין דעתו של אדם תחלה.

I say that it is not fitting to stroll in the *Pardes*, unless he has filled his stomach with bread and meat: bread and meat are the knowledge of what is forbidden and permissible, and similar matters from the rest of the commandments. Even though the Sages called these things a "small matter," for the Sages said "a great matter" – that is *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, and a "small matter," that is the debates of Abbaye and Ravah, nevertheless it is fitting that they are placed first, since they settle the mind of man from the beginning.

The Rambam is making an argument that before one can even begin to study the mysteries of God and creation, it is necessary to have the proper knowledge of the commandments and what is in the Torah. The Torah is the "bread and meat" of wisdom; it is the foundation upon which man must rely. Only then can he enter the dangerous and difficult *Pardes*. Maimonides recognizes that not everyone will be able to attain this level. But it is clear that all three forms of knowledge – Torah, science and metaphysics – can lead to love of the Creator.

Although Maimonides does argue against some forms of asceticism,⁷² in both the *Mishneh Torah* and *Guide* he comes very close to advocating a monastic type of existence in pursuit of love of God. In *Hilchot Teshuva* 10:6, Maimonides argues one must be in seclusion in order to comprehend God's wisdom:

צריך האדם ליחד עצמו להבין ולהשכיל בחכמות ותבונות המודיעים לו את קונו כפי כח שיש באדם להבין ולהשיג כמו שבארנו בהלכות יסודי התורה.

⁷² See *Hilchot Deot* 3:1.

10:6 ...a person must seclude himself in order to understand and comprehend the sciences which cause his Creator to be known to him, according to the strength that a person has to understand and comprehend, like we explained in *Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah*.

His recipe for achieving a greater degree of knowledge is for a person to **ליהד עצמו** -- to seclude himself in order to study and contemplate. Seclusion implies removing one's thoughts from daily affairs. It will only be through directed energy and focus that these difficult matters will be understood. Intense study and devotion are needed. The Rambam gives us greater understanding of what he means in his *Hilchot Deot*:

צריך האדם שיכוון לבו וכל מעשיו כולם לידע את השם ברוך הוא בלבד, ויהיה שבתו וקומו ודבורו הכל לעומת זה הדבר.

3:2 A person should direct his heart and all his behavior to knowing God alone, blessed be He. His sitting, his standing, and his speaking should be directed towards this matter.

An extended passage in the Guide, Part III:51, reveals Maimonides' monastic inclinations in pursuit of loving and serving God:

If, however, you have apprehended God and His acts in accordance with what is required by the intellect, you should afterwards engage in totally devoting yourself to Him, endeavor to come closer to Him, and strengthen the bond between you and Him – that is, the intellect....

After apprehension, total devotion to Him and the employment of intellectual thought in constantly loving Him should be aimed at. Mostly this is achieved in solitude and isolation. Hence every excellent man stays frequently in solitude and does not meet anyone unless it is necessary....

Know that even if you were the man who knew most the true reality of the divine science, you would cut that bond existing between you and God if you would empty your thought of God and busy yourself totally in eating the necessary or in occupying yourselves with the necessary. You would not be with Him, then, nor He will you. For that relation between you and Him is actually broken off at that time.⁷³

The Rambam appears to support total isolation as the precondition for knowing God. It is only when one is removed from thinking about daily affairs and concerns that

⁷³ Maimonides, *The Guide*, trans. Pines, 2: 620-621.

the mind is free to pursue the wisdom of God. See also how fragile the connection is. Even if you have achieved the “true reality of the divine science,” if you should take a moment to think of other things, the bond that exists between you and God is severed. Love of God requires an exclusive devotion and meditation of His being. Constancy is its quality.

Love of God requires an ardent attachment to the divine. Everything a man can do – from eating, to sleeping, to walking – should lead to the goal of serving God. But how does sleep lead to a greater level of devotion to God? It is not that the act of sleep itself will lead to greater concern for God. Rather, if one does not take care to sleep an appropriate amount each night, and gets sick in the process, one will be unable to serve God appropriately. Here are his words, taken from *Hilchot Deot* in 3:3

ואפילו בשעה שהוא ישן אם ישן לדעת כדי שתנוה דעתו עליו וינוה גופו כדי שלא יחלה ולא יוכל לעבוד את ה' והוא חולה, נמצאת שינה שלו עבודה למקום ברוך הוא.

3:3 ...Even when he sleeps – if he sleeps with the intention of resting his mind and resting his body, in order that he not get sick, and so be unable to serve God, then his sleep is service to God, blessed is He.

When we engage in the acts of daily life, our intention should always be focused on God.

Hilchot Teshuva is equally important in understanding Maimonides' arguments concerning love of God. He writes the following in chapter 10:2:

העובד מאהבה עוסק בתורה ובמצות והולך בנתיבות החכמה לא מפני דבר בעולם ולא מפני יראת הרעה ולא כדי לירש הטובה אלא עושה האמת מפני שהוא אמת וסוף הטובה לבא בגללה, ומעלה זו היא מעלה גדולה מאד ואין כל חכם זוכה לה, והיא מעלת אברהם אבינו שקראו הקב"ה אוהבו לפי שלא עבד אלא מאהבה והיא המעלה שצונו בה הקב"ה על ידי משה שנאמר ואהבת את ה' אלהיך, ובזמן שיאהוב אדם את ה' אהבה הראויה מיד יעשה כל המצות מאהבה.

10:2 One who serves God out of love busies himself with Torah and *mitzvot* and walks in the paths of wisdom, not for any worldly reason, and not out of fear of something bad, and not to acquire advantage. Rather, he does what is true because it is true, and

ultimately good will come because of it. This is a very high level and not every wise person merits it, and it is the level of Abraham our father, whom the Holy One, Blessed be He, called "he who loved me," for he served him only out of love. This is the level that the Holy one, blessed be He, commanded of us by the hands of Moses, as it says: "You shall love Adonai your God." When a man will love God in the proper way, immediately he will do all of the commandments out of love.

Maimonides makes three important points in this *halakha*. The first is that the love of God should have no ulterior motive other than the love itself. Love is not something to engage in out of fear nor is it acceptable to pursue in hope of a reward. One must only serve God out of love, like the example set by Abraham.

Second, fulfilling the *mitzvot* is a consequence of loving God. We demonstrate our love of God by obeying the laws and ordinances given in the Torah. This reading is reminiscent of what we saw in the biblical text in chapter one. Love of *Adonai* requires of us to fulfill the terms of the covenant established by the Israelites in the desert.

The last point is implicit to Maimonides' case. Before, he argued that love of God is a positive commandment that one must fulfill. In other words, it causes us to act in a particular way. Yet, here it appears that love is an emotion or attitude that motivates one to fulfill the commandments. It is love that propels one to serve God. It is love that arouses the desire to perform the *mitzvot*. Additional material in this chapter only supports this notion. He continues in 10:3:

וכיצד היא האהבה הראויה הוא שיאהב את ה' אהבה גדולה יתירה עזה מאוד עד שתהא נפשו קשורה באהבת ה' ונמצא שוגה בה תמיד כאלו חולה חולי האהבה שאין דעתו פנויה מאהבת אותה אשה והוא שוגה בה תמיד בין בשבתו בין בקומו בין בשעה שהוא אוכל ושותה, יתר מזה תהיה אהבת ה' בלב אוהביו שוגים בה תמיד כמו שצונו בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך, והוא ששלמה אמר דרך משל כי חולת אהבה אני, וכל שיר השירים משל הוא לענין זה.

10:3 What is the proper form of love? That a person should love God with a great, abounding, extremely strong love, until his soul is bound up with love of God and he is found to be obsessed with love always as if he is lovesick. A lovesick person's thoughts are never turned from the love of the woman and he is obsessed with her always – whether he is sitting, standing, eating or drinking. With an even greater love, the love for

God should be implanted in the hearts of those who love Him and are obsessed with him always, like we have been commanded: “with all your hearts and with all your soul.” It is like Solomon said in a parable: “For I am lovesick.” The whole Song of Songs is an analogy to all of this.

As this paragraph demonstrates, the love one is meant to feel for God is similar to being lovesick for a woman. The love is meant to be overpowering, as if you could not think of anything else. The word the Rambam uses is *shogeh* – translatable as either “obsessed” or “crazy.” One’s soul is to be consumed with this love of God. This only strengthens the argument that love is viewed here as an emotion and not as an act.

In addition, the phrase *nafsho keshura* has its roots in a scene from Genesis 44:30, where Judah begs his brother Joseph not imprison Benjamin as it will cause their father to die “since his own life is bound up with his” – *nafsho keshura v'nafsho*. The reference to Genesis implicitly makes the point that this sort of love is one without which a person simply cannot continue to live.

The notion that love is a motivating factor in fulfilling the commandments becomes increasingly important:

כשמלמדין את הקטנים ואת הנשים וכלל עמי הארץ אין מלמדין אותן אלא לעבוד מיראה וכדי לקבל שכר, עד שתרבה דעתן ויתחכמו חכמה יתירה מגלים להם רז זה מעט מעט ומרגילין אותן לענין זה בנחת עד ששיגוהו וידעוהו ויעבדוהו מאהבה.

10:5 When one teaches minors, women, and the common people, only teach them to serve God out of fear and in order to receive a reward. As their knowledge grows and their wisdom increases, reveal to them the secret little by little. They should become accustomed to this matter gently, until they grasp it and know it and serve God out of love.

This passage compares the emotions of fear and love. At first, we teach women, children and the simple masses to serve God out of fear. Only when they have gained enough wisdom will they be able to walk in God’s ways out of love. Once again, love is

portrayed as an emotion that leads to proper devotion of God, and not merely a commandment one must observe.

Love of God is an important concept in Maimonides' thinking. While he argued it was one of the positive commandments all Jews must obey, he argues that love is the proper impulse with which to serve God. According to Simon Rawidowicz, "*Amor Dei* was to Maimonides not only a theoretical-philosophical idea, but one of great practical-halakhic importance."⁷⁴ In the Rambam's thinking, knowledge of God through an apprehension of God's divine reality, His creations, deeds, and *mitzvot*, was the proper path to love of God, termed by Rawidowicz a "philosophical love."

But this is no cold love like that of Aristotle. "Maimonides teaches that the permanent contemplation of God leads man not only to love, but much more, to a *permanent desire* for God, to a never interrupted *passion* for Him."⁷⁵ It is the constancy of the effort that turns the first inklings of feelings into a permanent passion. In the words of Lawrence Kaplan:

For Maimonides, the love of God is the intellectual love of God, that is, one *begins* with the intellectual *knowledge* of God, but *then* imbues that intellectual knowledge with drive, passion, and desire – drive, passion and desire that are themselves cognitive in nature – thereby transforming intellectual *knowledge* of God into intellectual *love* of God."⁷⁶

It is a love filled with passion and fervor, obsession and reckless abandon. In Maimonides' own words from *Hilchot Teshuva*:

דבר ידוע וברור שאין אהבת הקב"ה נקשרת בלבו של אדם עד שישגה בה תמיד כראוי ויעזוב כל מה שבעולם חוץ ממנה, כמו שצוה ואמר בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך.

⁷⁴ Simon Rawidowicz, *Studies in Jewish Thought*, ed. Nahum E. Glatzer, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1974), 291.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 29. Emphasis is in the original.

⁷⁶ Lawrence Kaplan, "The Love of God in Maimonides and Rav Kook," *Judaism: Journal of Jewish Life and Thought* 43, no. 3(1994), 29.

10:6 It is a known and clear thing that love for the Holy One, blessed be He, will not become bound in the heart of a person until he becomes obsessed with it always, as is fitting, and will leave behind everything else in the world except for this, as it is commanded and says: "with all your heart and with all your soul." (Deut 6:5)

"With all your heart and with all your soul" implies a love that overwhelms and overcomes the adherent. It is a devotion that requires single-mindedness of heart and of thought.

This last passage is a fitting segue to the next, in which we will examine the writings of the *hasidei Ashkenaz*, a group of Jewish ascetics of the 13th century. One would assume that they would have little in common with Maimonides. His love of God was the result of deep intellectual rigor. He was a philosopher who argued for deep intellectual introspection based upon rational principles derived from Greek metaphysics. Yet, the swooning love he depicts in *Hilchot Teshuva* could have come right out of the pages of *Sefer Hasidim*, the pietists' most famous work. While their differences are many, they both advocated a love for God that required intense intellectual labor. In Maimonides' work, the effort was theological and philosophical; for the *hasidei Ashkenaz*, meditation and great spiritual examination were needed to reach the greatest heights. We will also examine the ways in which Bahya Ibn Pakuda's work, *Hovot Ha-Levavot*, contains similar thinking to the *hasidei Ashkenaz* regarding love of God, in spite of the fact that Bahya lived in a very different world, that of 11th century Spain.

Chapter Five: Love of God in the Thought of Bahya Ibn Pakuda and the *Hasidei Ashkenaz*

This chapter will examine love of God in the thought of both Bahya Ibn Pakuda and the writings of the *hasidei Ashkenaz*, German-Jewish pietists living in the Rhineland in the 12th and 13th centuries. Although writing at least 200 years apart, and living in different Jewish communities, the former in Sepharad (generally understood to be those Jewish communities living in what is now known as Spain and Portugal) and the latter in Ashkenaz (generally understood to be those Jewish communities in central and eastern Europe) there are striking similarities in their ideas and beliefs. Common to both of them is an ascetic tendency although it is much stronger in the works of the German-Jewish pietists. Each constructs love of God in contradistinction to love of the world and argues for a single-minded approach to love of the Creator. We begin with the work of Bahya Ibn Pakuda.

Bahya Ibn Pakuda

Bahya Ibn Pakuda was a philosopher and poet, living in the second half of the 11th century in Spain. In his most famous work, *Hovot Ha-Levavot – Duties of the Heart*, originally written in Arabic and translated into Hebrew by Judah ibn Tibbon in 1161,⁷⁷ he examines ten essential principles of faith, presented as “ten gates.” The ten gates are steps on a ladder, intended to help the believer develop a rich inner relationship with God.

⁷⁷ Georges Vadja, “Bahya (Bahye) ben Joseph Ibn Pakuda,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 3: 66.

The final gate in the series is called *Sha'ar Ahavat Adonai* – the Gate of Love of God. The first half of this chapter will examine Pakuda's understanding of love of God. I will compare his ideas to Maimonides' arguments as well as to the beliefs held by the rabbis of the Talmudic period. I will focus on the most critical of Pakuda's arguments.

Chapter two of the Gate of Love, entitled "How many ways can love of God be manifested?" appears to be drawn from material found in the *Bavli*. For example, Pakuda quotes the same *baraita* of Rabbi Eliezer we examined earlier from *Sanhedrin* 74a, which also appears in numerous *sugyot*:

וכמ"ש חז"ל: אם נאמר בכל נפשך למה נאמר בכל מאדך, אם יש לך אדם שגופו חביב עליו מממונו, לכך נאמר ובכל נפשך ואם יש לך אדם שממונו חביב עליו מגופו לכך נאמר ובכל מאדך.

Like the sages said: "if it says 'with all your soul' why does it say 'with all your might'? For if there is a man whose body is more beloved to him than his money, then it says 'with all your soul' and if there is a man whose money is more beloved to him than his body, then it says 'with all your might.'"

Later in the chapter, Pakuda appears to be quoting from *Mishnah Brachot* 9:5:

ובכל נפשך ואפילו נוטל את נפשך ובכל מאדך ובכל ממונך

"With all your soul" – even if He takes your soul: "with all your might" – with all your money.

Pakuda draws from the early Jewish texts, continuing the thread begun by the rabbis that loving God includes offering up one's possessions and life. However, dying for God does not become the leading theme of Pakuda's work, as we saw earlier in the material on martyrdom from the Talmud, the Crusader period, or the *halakhic* code of Rabbi Isaac

of Corbeille.⁷⁸ Pakuda develops a philosophy of love of God focused around self-denial and deep introspection into God's being.

In chapter two, we saw that love of God came to be interpreted in three texts -- *Seder Eliyahu Rabbah*, chapter 26, *Talmud Bavli Yoma* 86a, and *Sifre Devarim*, piska 32 -- as turning others into lovers of God. As *Sifre Devarim* pointed out, Abraham was the biblical model of this love because in Haran, he had converted pagans into Jews. Pakuda makes a similar claim. In chapter six -- "Signs of Love of God in the one who Loves Him" -- he writes the following:

ומהם שיאשר ויורה לעבודת האלהים בין ברכה בין בקשה, כפי שצריך לזמן ולמקום ולכתות בני אדם ולמעלותם מהגדולים ועד אנשי השוק, כמ"ש החכם: ישמע חכם ויוסף לקח וגו' לתת לפתאים ערמה וגו'. וראוי לך, אחי, לדעת, כי זכויות המאמין, אפילו אם יהיה מגיע אל התכלית הרחוקה בתקון נפשו לאלהים ית', ואלו היה קרוב לנביאים במדותם הטובות ומנהגיהם המשובחים והשתדלותם בעבודת הבורא ואהבתם הזכה בו, אינם כזכויות מי שמורה בני אדם אל הדרך הטובה ומישר הרשעים אל עבודת הבורא.

Another [characteristic in the lover of God] is that he leads and instructs [his fellow-man] in the service of God, gently or severely, in accordance with time and place, and in accordance also with different classes and their varied degrees, from kings to ordinary folk, as it is said "That the wise man may hear and increase in learning (Proverbs 1:5): "to give prudence to the simple" (Proverbs 1:4). And it is proper, my brother, that you should know that the merits of a believer, even if he attained the utmost limit in the improvement of his soul in its devotion to God, and came near the prophets in their good qualities, laudable customs, zeal in the service of God and pure love for Him, his merits are not like those of one who leads men to the good path and turns the wicked to the right way to serve God.⁷⁹

What is most striking about this passage is that guiding and teaching others to walk in the path of *Adonai* is more important than achieving a level of perfection equal to the

⁷⁸ See previously cited material from Eidelberg, *The Jews and the Crusaders*, and the material in *Brachot* and *Sanhedrin*.

⁷⁹ Bahya Ibn Pakuda, *Duties of the Heart*, trans. by Moses Hyamson. (Jerusalem: Boys Town, 1962), 365-367.

prophets. One earns a higher merit for leading others in devotion to God than for leading a perfect life.

Pakuda argues in chapter three – “What is the Path to Love of God?” – that there are eight prerequisites to achieving love of God:

וההקדמות, אשר ראוי למאמין להקדים לה בנפשו, הם שני יחודי הלבבות ושתי כניעות ושני חשבונות ושתי בחינות. אבל שני יחודי הלבבות אחד מהם ליהד הלב ביהוד הבורא והשני ליהד המעשה לשמו ולעבדו לכבודו בלבד. אבל שתי הכניעות אחת מהן, הכניעה לאלהים יתעלה והשנית, הכניעה ליראי האלהים ובהוריו. אבל שני החשבונות אחד מהם, חשבוננו עם נפשו על מה שחייב לאלהים להתמדת טובותיו, והשני, חשבוננו עם נפשו על הסתירו עונותיו והאריכו לו ומחילתו. אבל שתי הבחינות, אחת מהם, הבחינה במה שעבר לראשונים, בעמדו על ספרי הנביאים ודברי הקדמונים ע"ה, כמ"ש זכרתי ימים מקדם וגו'. והשנית, הבחינה בעולם במה שהוא רואה מפלאי הבורא ית' בבריאותיו.

The prerequisites that it is appropriate for the believer to realize first in his own soul are the following: two kinds of devotion of the heart, two kinds of surrender, two kinds of introspection and two kinds of examination. Of the two devotions of the heart, one is wholehearted acknowledgment of the Creator's unity and the other is whole-hearted devotion in service to His name, so as to serve Him for His honor's sake alone. Of the two kinds of surrender, one is surrendering yourself to God and the other is surrendering yourself to those who fear God and His chosen ones. Of the two kinds of introspection, one is being introspective about your obligations to God in light of His goodness to you and the second is being introspective about the fact that God hides your sins and is patient. Of the two kinds of examination, one of them is studying the past of previous generations, by studying the books of the prophets, and the words of the ancients, peace be upon them, as its says 'I remember the days of old.' And the second is an examination of the world with what one can see of God's wonders in His creation.⁸⁰

In his last two requirements for love of God, Pakuda claims one needs to examine the ancient books and prophets in addition to studying the world and God's creations.

Let us compare this to what Maimonides argued in *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 1:11. There, Maimonides claimed that study must be devoted to three subjects: the written law, the oral law and the third to developing the roots and principles of concepts, which he labeled

⁸⁰ In translating this section of the book, I relied on two translations, one previously cited by Moses Haymason and the other, *Duties of the Heart*, trans. by Yaakov Feldman, (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1996).

Gemara. In *halakha* 12, he writes that the *Pardes* is part of the *Gemara*; the *Pardes* is a reference to *Ma'aseh Bereshit* and *Ma'aseh Merkavah*. While both Maimonides and Ibn Pakuda claim that study of the Torah and God's creation are important to love of God, Pakuda does not address the Rambam's central point – the study of metaphysics and theology.

This passage highlights two important themes that are developed in detail by Pakuda. One is the notion of surrendering oneself to God. The other is that love of God leads to the desire to fulfill God's will. Maimonides made a similar claim. We will now see how Bahya develops these themes.

In the very first chapter of the Gate of Love of God – “What is Love of God?” – Pakuda defines love in the following way:

אבל מה ענין האהבה באלהים? הוא כלות הנפש ונטותה בעצמה אל הבורא, כדי שתדבק באורו העליון. והוא שהנפש עצם פשוט רוחני, נוטה אל הדומה לה מהאישים הרוחניים ומתרחקת בטבעה מאשר הוא כנגדה מן הגופות העבות.

What is love of God? It is the soul's yearning for the Creator, turning to Him of its own accord, in order to cleave to His supernal light. For the soul is a simple, spiritual entity that is drawn to similar spiritual entities and naturally distances itself from her opposite, from coarse bodies.

Bahya's definition of love is bound up in notions of the soul. The soul of a human yearns for God because God is a similar spiritual entity. Our souls are similar in kind to God's being. Perhaps he means that our souls are created by a part of God. Therefore, our soul desires to cling to God.

Bahya claims that the soul is not at peace when it senses the body's suffering; therefore, the soul attempts to fulfill the needs of our bodies. This takes energy and focus away from what the soul truly loves. But eventually something happens that allows the soul to dedicate itself to love to God:

וכאשר יבקע לה אור השכל, ויגלה לה גנות מה שנטתה אליו באהבתה ונמשכה עדיו ברעיוניה, עם התעלמותה מאשר בו הצלתה בשני המעונים, תשוב מזה ותניה כל עניניה אל הבורא החונן ותטה במחשבתה לבקש אופני הצלתה מעוצם מה שנוקשה בו וגודל מה שנוסחה בו.

But when the light of reason radiates upon it and reveals how repulsive the things are that it was inclined to lovingly and drawn to it in its fantasies, instead of the things that could save it in both dwelling places, the soul turns round, relinquishes everything to the merciful Creator, and directs its attention to being rescued from the things that trap and test it so.⁸¹

It is the אור השכל that helps the soul turn towards God. This is the only time Bahya mentions such a phrase. Although he does not explain how the אור השכל comes to rest upon the soul, by his chapter three of this Gate, it is clear that the eight requirements necessary to achieve love of God, which include examination and introspection, are part of the method by which the soul achieves such clarity. The soul turns towards God as a result of this mental examination and contemplation.

Once the soul accepts such a revelation, it is able to engage in complete surrender to God:

ואז תפרש מן העולם ומכל תענוגיו ותבזה הגופות וכל תאותם... וכאשר תבין גודל יכלתו ועוצם גדולתו, תכרע ותשתחוה לו ביראה ופחד ואימה מעצמתו וגדולתו... לא יהיה לה עסק בלתי עסק עבודתו ולא יעבר על רעיוניה זולתו ולא יעלה במחשבתה בלעדיו, ולא תשלה אבר מאברי גופה אלא במה שתמשך בו רצונו, ולא תתיר לשונה כי אם בזכרו ושבחיו והודאתו ותהלתו, מאהבה בו ומכסף לרצונו יתברך.

It then withdraws from the world and its pleasures, and scorns physicality, all its desires and the like....It begins to perceive God's abilities and His utter supremacy, and surrenders itself and prostrates before Him in fear, dread, and terror in the face of His Essence and greatness....It occupies itself with nothing but the service of God, nothing but thoughts of Him cross its mind, and it thinks of nothing else. It does not move a limb other than to fulfill a wish of His, and does not move its tongue other than to mention, praise, acknowledge, and laud Him in love, and in the hope of pleasing Him.⁸²

⁸¹ Pakuda, *Duties of the Heart*, trans. Feldman, 442.

⁸² Ibid.

Surrendering to God requires thinking of nothing else but God. Both body and mind must be devoted in complete service to God. One's limbs should only be used out of dedication to *Adonai*; one's words must be consumed with praising Him; one's thoughts should only be focused upon the Almighty. There is a single-mindedness to the adept's devotion to God. In many ways, this is similar to Maimonides' depiction of the one who is *shogeh* – obsessed – with loving God.

In chapter three, Pakuda picks up again on this notion of devotedness to God, arguing that a room full of people will seem empty given one's limitless preoccupation with God:

ולא תפקדו מרעיוניך, ולא יסור מנגד עיניך, ויהיה צוותך בכדידות וישב עמך במדברות, ויהיה מקום מלא בני אדם בעיניך כלא מלא. והריק מהם כלא ריק. לא תשומם בהפקדם ולא תדאג בהעדרם, ותהיה תמיד שמח באלהיך, שש בבוראך, עלז ברצונו וכוסף לפגיעתו.

You will never leave God out of your thoughts; He will never depart from before your eyes. He will be in your company when you are alone; He will dwell with you in the deserts. A place full of people will be in your sight as though it were not full, and a place that is empty will appear as if it were not empty. You will not be depressed when people are absent; you will not grieve when they are missing. You will always be rejoicing with your God, glad to be with your Creator, exulting in His favor, longing for His visitation.⁸³

Pakuda depicts God as the constant companion, a being that exists always by your side.

When one arrives at love of God, God will be the constant presence in one's mind.

Observe the emphasis placed on the eyes and seeing. Bahya states that God will always be before one's eyes; a room full of people will appear in one's eyes as empty. Whether Bahya is implying the physical act of seeing is unclear. Yet, a theme evident in both medieval Jewish and non-Jewish sources is that the eyes are the entry point for love. In his article, "The Concept of Love in *Sefer Hassidim*," Monford Harris compares the work of *Sefer Hasidim* with non-Jewish plays and poetry from the twelfth to thirteenth

⁸³ Pakuda, *Duties of the Heart*, Hyamson, 353.

centuries Europe. Quoting S.F. Barrow who studied French and English romances, he writes, "Normal access to the heart is through the eyes, whether the incentive force enters as a spark to kindle an extinguishable fire or as an arrow to inflict an incurable wound."⁸⁴ Harris makes the same argument about *Sefer Hasidim*. Pointing to various excerpts, he argues that "love usually enters one's soul through the eyes."⁸⁵ This is why the men were encouraged not to look at women. Although Pakuda is discussing love of God and not the love between men and women, these scholars (in Maimonides, Pakuda, and as we shall soon see, the *hasidei Ashkenaz*) demonstrate a similarity between the love of God and the love of women. The lovesick obsession one feels for a woman is meant to serve as an example of the devotion one should offer to God. Although Pakuda is not explicit in this regard, the unceasing love he prescribes for God's faithful is very similar to both the love described by Maimonides and the *hasidei Ashkenaz*.

One of the most critical ideas in Pakuda's writing is that love of God requires relinquishing one's attachment to the corporeal world. Tied to his notion of surrender, one cannot truly love God unless one no longer cleaves to the world of the flesh. He explains in the introduction to the Gate of Love:

ועל כן הקדמנו שער הפרישות לשער הזה, כי מן הנמנע ממנו שתתישב אהבת הבורא בלבנו עם התישב אהבת העולם בנו. וכאשר יהיה לב המאמין ריק מאהבת העולם ופנוי מתאוותיו מצד הכרה ובינה, תתישב אהבת הבורא בלבו ותהיה תקועה בנפשו כפי הכספו לו והכרתו אותו.

So we placed the Gate of Abstinence before this one because one of the greatest deterrents to having the love of God fix itself in your heart is the love of the world that is fixed there. But empty your heart of the love of the world, and free it from its desires

⁸⁴ Monford Harris, "The Concept of Love in *Sepher Hassidim*," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 40, no. 1 (July 1959) 19.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

through awareness and understanding, and the love of God will fix itself in your heart and establish itself in your soul as much as you want it to and are aware of it.⁸⁶

Love of the world – אהבת העולם -- must be overcome in order to achieve a complete love of God. Awareness and understanding – הכרה ובינה – are the tools by which desire and yearning for earthly matters are renounced. Pakuda develops his doctrine of abstinence in the ninth gate.

In the ninth gate, the Gate of Abstinence, Pakuda argues that abstinence is a form of discipline and control, a way to master one's desires. It helps to develop the soul. He divides abstinence into two categories: 1) exceptional abstinence (Gate nine: chapter four);⁸⁷ 2) appropriate abstinence according to the Torah (Gate nine: chapter five). His later chapter is more important for our discussion.

After breaking the issue into three divisions – dealings with others, our bodies, and personal thoughts and traits – he explains his doctrine of abstinence:

וראוי לך, שתשתדל לאסר חושך ותנועות אברך הנראים... והוא שתתחיל בראשונה לאסר לשונך ולבלם שפתיך ותפרש מן הדברים הבטלים... ואל תתיר לו מן הדבור אלא מה שלא תוכל לעמד בלעדיו לצורך התורה או לצורך העולם, וקצר מותר לישונך בכל יכלתך.... והשתדל אחר כך לעצם עיניך וחוש ראותך מהביט אל מה שאיננו צריך לך או מה שיטריד לך מחשב במה שיועילך.... והשתדך אח"כ לאטם אזניך משמעך מה שאינם צריך לו... ממיני הזמר והנגון והשחוק והרנה, הטורדים אותך מן המצוות והמעשים הטובים.... והשתדל אחר כך לאסר חוש הטעם, שתקח די מזונך מן המאכל והמשתה ותפרש ממה שהוא יותר מזה. והתחבולה לענין הזה, שתמעיט במיני הלפתן ותסמך על לפתן אחד בעוד שתוכל, ויהיה די במעט ממנו כפי שתוכל, והתכוין בו, כדי להגיע הלחם אל בטןך לא לתענוג.... ואח"כ תתנהג בתענית, אם יהיה גופך חזק, אפילו יום א' בשבוע. וכל אשר תוכל להטביע נפשך, שלא להרגיש על ענין המאכל והמשתה, כדי ליסרה, עשה. ושים כוונתך בו לרפואה יותר מלמזון... ואח"כ השתדל למנע ידיך מגעת במה שאינו שלך מהו.

⁸⁶ Pakuda, *Duties of the Heart*, trans. Feldman, 440.

⁸⁷ Exceptional abstinence is required when people begin to favor this world too much, where their desire for material things has a stronghold on them. A more austere form of abstinence is needed in order to steer people back to the path of Torah.

It is important to try to curb your senses and the movement of your limbs...Start by curbing your tongue and lips by avoiding unnecessary words....Allow it to speak about what is essential to your Torah and worldly concerns alone. Minimize needless conversations as much as possible....Try to shut your eyes to not see what you do not need to see, or which distract you from thinking about important things....Then try to stop your ears from hearing what you do not need to hear...like certain songs or tunes, games, and exultations that distract you from fulfilling the commandments and doing other good things....Then try to curb your appetite. Only take as much food and drink as you need, and no more. The way to do that is to reduce the number of side dishes you eat and make do with just one of them, if you can. Then be satisfied with just a little of it, which you should eat in order to digest your bread, not because you like it....Then practice fasting as much as once a week, if you are strong enough. And do as much as you can to train yourself not to taste what you eat or drink, as a discipline. Look at it as medicine rather than food....Then try to keep your hands from touching things that do not belong to you from among the world's riches....⁸⁸

Everything from our mouths, tongue, eyes, ears and hands must be controlled in order to practice an appropriate level of abstinence. This discipline will free oneself to devote all of one's activities and thoughts to God. But Pakuda is not calling for a complete separation from the world. He still argues that earning a livelihood is a necessary component of life. He explains:

כמו שזכרו רבותינו ז"ל על הרבה מהם, שהיו טורחים בענין עולמם עם הפרישות ממנו, כמו אבא חלקיה, שהיה משתכר לחפר באדמה ושמאי במלאכת הבנין והלל שהיה חוטב ומתפרנס מן העצים. ואל תמנעך פרישותך בלבך מהתעסק בזה, מפני שאתה מכין בו לעבודת האלהים.

So our teachers, peace be unto them, reported that many of them labored in secular affairs and yet in thought and feeling were apart from them. Thus Abba Hilkiah hired himself out as a ditcher; Shammai worked as a builder; Hillel made his living as a wood-chopper. Let not your wholehearted abstinence prevent your engagement in a secular occupation, since your intent therein is, as we have mentioned, to serve God.⁸⁹

As he writes further on:

וכן אתה צריך להשתמש בהם במה שימלא ספקך וימנעך מן השאלה ומקחת ממון אסור... וכבר נאמר: ראש הפרישות תקון הפרנסה...ר"ל שייגע להתעסק בספקו.

You should use your hands in an occupation to supply your requirements in sufficient measure, that you may be saved from borrowing, or taking money that may not lawfully

⁸⁸ Pakuda, *Duties of the Heart*, trans. Feldman 420-421.

⁸⁹ Pakuda, *Duties of the Heart*, trans. Hyamson, 317.

be taken....It has been said: "The first beginning of abstinence is to make proper arrangements for one's livelihood."...This means that one should exert oneself in an occupation which gives one sufficient maintenance.⁹⁰

Earning a living is still a necessary component to life. It is what puts food on the table and clothes on one's back. An occupation prevents one from being a burden on others, borrowing from neighbors, or even worse, stealing what does not belong to you. But as the earlier passage demonstrated, one should not be consumed with the job. One's thoughts should be dedicated to serving the Creator. The emotions one has should be tied to God and not to the physical world

Pakuda's work must be compared with that of Maimonides, who argued a similar position. The Rambam writes in *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 3:10:

כל המשים על לבו שיעסוק בתורה ולא יעשה מלאכה ויתפרנס מן הצדקה הרי זה חלל את השם... וכל תורה שאין עמה מלאכה סופה בטילה וגוררת עון, וסוף אדם זה שיהא מלסטם את הבריות.

Anyone who comes to the conclusion that he should involve himself in Torah study without doing work and derive his livelihood from charity, desecrates God's name....All Torah that is not accompanied by work will eventually be negated and lead to sin. Ultimately, such a person will steal from others.

While Pakuda stressed the importance of abstinence, particularly its key role in arriving at love of God, he also wants to set limits to its implementation:

ואל תצא בה מגבול התורה, שתתענה בשבתות ובמועדים וראשי חדשים ותמנע ממה שחייבך בו הבורא ממצות פריה ורביה.

In this abstinence you must not transgress the limits laid down in the Torah by fasting on Sabbaths, festivals, or on Rosh Hodesh, or by abstaining from fulfilling the duty imposed upon you by the Creator to propagate the human species.⁹¹

Here too, there is a similarity to the Rambam. In *Hilchot Deot* 3:1, he writes:

⁹⁰ Ibid., 323.

⁹¹ Ibid., 325.

שמא יאמר אדם הואיל והקנאה והתאוה והכבוד וכיוצא בהם דרך רעה הן ומוציאין את האדם מן העולם, אפרוש מהן ביותר ואתרחק לצד האחרון. עד שלא יאכל בשר ולא ישתה יין ולא ישא אשה ולא ישב בדירה נאה ולא ילבש מלבוש נאה אלא השק והצמר הקשה וכיוצא בהן.... גם זה דרך רעה היא ואסור לילך בה, המהלך בדרך זו נקרא חוטא... לפיכך צוו חכמים שלא ימנע אדם עצמו אלא מדברים שמנעתו התורה בלבד, ולא יהא אוסר עצמו בנדרים ובשבועות על דברים המותרים.

A person might say, "Since envy, desire, the pursuit of honor, and the like, are a wrong path and drive a person from the world, I shall separate from them to a very great degree and move away from them to the opposite extreme." For example, he will not eat meat, nor drink wine, nor live in a pleasant home, nor wear fine clothing, but, rather wear sackcloth and coarse wool and the like.... This, too, is a bad path and it is forbidden to walk upon it. Whoever follows this path is called a sinner.... Therefore, our Sages directed man to abstain only from those things which the Torah denies him and not to forbid himself permitted things by vows and oaths...

Bahya is trying to find the right balance between engaging with the world and not being consumed by its values. It is certainly a fine line, one that takes constant practice and diligence on the part of its practitioners. While an occupation is a necessary part of life, Bahya argues we should not have feelings of love and attachment to the physical world. Physical possessions may be essential to our existence on earth but we should not derive pleasure from them. The seventh and final chapter in the Gate of Love of God – "The Practices of those who Love God" – emphasizes this point repeatedly:

נמסו התאוות מלבותם ונעקר מהם הכוסף לתענוגים, בעבור מה שנכנס בהם מן הכוסף לעבודת הבורא ומאהבה אותו. וכבתה אש היצר מלבותם... ולא הששו לחסרון.

Sensual lusts have melted away from their hearts; the desire for pleasures has completely been removed from them, because they are permeated by the yearning for the Creator's service and their love of Him. The fire of evil passions in their hearts is quenched.... They do not trouble about their lack [of material things].⁹²

And a little further along in the chapter:

⁹² Ibid., 375.

ואם אתה, אחי, הפך בהברתם ולהכנס בכתותם, עזב מותר עולמך והתעלם מהם והיה מסתפק במזון מהם, והרגל עצמך לעמד בלעדיהם, והקל טורח עסקי העולם מעל נפשך, ופנה לבך מהעמיק מחשבתך בהם, ורוץ בדברים הצריכים לך מהם בגופך, לא בלבבך וברצונך.

If you wish to be affiliates with them, brother, and to be on their level, then forsake and divest yourself of worldly luxuries, be satisfied with the bare minimum, train yourself to do without, and lessen your worldly burdens. Allow your heart to not concentrate on them and hurry to do the physical things you must do, but with your body only, not wholeheartedly or willfully.⁹³

It is the pleasure and desire that Bahya wishes to purge from our souls. Only then can we truly cling to the Creator in love.

The last motif of Bahya's that I should like to examine is the question he raises in chapter four – is man capable of loving God? This is a significant question. None of the other sources we have studied ask this question.

Pakuda argues that there are three kinds of love. The first is the person who is willing to sacrifice money for the sake of love. The person who is willing to sacrifice money and limb for love falls into the second category. The third type of love includes the previous two, in addition to the sacrifice of one's soul. In many respects, this is similar to what we saw in the *Mishnah*, *Tosefta* and early midrashim. Bahya argues that Abraham is the exemplary model of love of God because he sacrifices all three.

This is where I must disagree with Bahya. He argues that Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac is an example of sacrificing life for the love of God. While it was certainly a sacrifice, it was not Abraham's to make. The other two examples, whereby Abraham spends his own money on strangers, so they would come to know God, and submitting his body to circumcision, involve a sacrifice of the personal self. I find it difficult to believe that Abraham's agreement to slaughter his son for God, while

⁹³ Pakuda, *Duties of the Heart*, trans. Feldman, 457-458.

certainly painful, makes him an example of one who loves God “with all one’s soul.”

However, it is clear from our analysis of the Hebrew Crusader narratives that they would have agreed with Pakuda. They killed their children for the sanctification of the God’s name. If it is through our children that we achieve some degree of immortality, then the deliberate slaughter of our offspring is a sacrifice of life.

Pakuda concludes that not everyone could reach the level of love achieved by Abraham. If one does, it is certainly due to the help of God. Instead, Bahya argues, “...the former two kinds of love of God [for which one is ready to sacrifice material possessions and bodily health] are within the capacity of the majority of rational creatures...”⁹⁴ His example for this is Job: “Satan’s assertion to God shows us that these two kinds of love are complete ways of loving God.”⁹⁵ In other words, one’s sacrifice of life is not necessary for proving one’s love to God.

Bahya’s *Hovot Ha-Levavot* presents his beliefs regarding *ahavat ha-shem*. Central to his idea is that while we must engage in the world for the sake of sustenance, our spiritual nourishment is to found in the service and love of God. Work we must do, but from pleasure and luxury we must abstain. We now turn to the work of the *hasidei Ashkenaz* and examine the ways in which they are both similar and different to Pakuda’s argumentation.

*Hasidei Ashkenaz*⁹⁶

Love of God was an important component in the thinking of the *hasidei Ashkenaz*. They primarily pursued love of God through acts of self-abnegation.

⁹⁴ Pakuda, *Duties of the Heart*, trans. Hyamson, 355.

⁹⁵ Pakuda, *Duties of the Heart*, trans. Feldman, 448.

⁹⁶ We will rely heavily on *Sefer Hasidim*, with the additional use of other key texts.

One of the most important passages describing their opinions is contained in the Margaliot edition, *siman* 14. It is quoted in full below. This will be followed by a careful examination of its pertinent themes and claims.

שורש אהבת ה' ואהבת את ה' אלהיך בכל לבבך (דברים ו' ד') ציוונו בוראינו לעבדו ביראה שתהא אהבת נפשינו קטורה בנפשו בשמחה ובאהבתו ובלב טוב ושמחת האהבה כך היא עזה ומתגברת על לב אוהבי ה' שאפי' ימים רבים שלא בא על אשתו ויש תאוה מרובה כנגדה ובשעה שיורה כחץ אינו נהנה כנגד תגבורת ותוקף יראת ה' ושמחת בוראו וכל חבת שעשוע ילדיו כלא היו כנגד שעשועי לב האוהב את ה' בכל לבו ובכל נפשו ובכל מאודו בכל הרהוריו איך לעשות האוהב הבורא ית' ולזכות את הרבים ולעשות קידוש ה' ולמסור עצמו באהבת הבורא כאשר עשה פנחס הכהן אשר מסר נפשו באהבת יוצרו לקנא לשמו. ושלא לחמוד ממון במקום שיש קדוש ה' במונעו לקחת ממון כמו שמצינו באברהם (בראשית י"ד כ"ג) אם מחוט ועד שרוך נעל. וכן באלישע שלא רצה לקחת ממון מנעמן. ושלא לבטל דברי תורה בשביל תענוגים ושעשוע ילדיו וחיבת נשיו. וכן לעזוב טיולים וראיות נשים ונעימות מזמורים כדי שיהי לבו שלם בשמחת ה' וטורה ועמל בדבר שהוא רצון הבורא. ועליו לקחת משל מבשר ודם אם ה' יודע דבר שהוא רצון המלך לעולם לא יניח ולא ישקוט עד שישלים רצון המלך שהוא רמה ותולעה כמוהו ויהי שמח שמחה גדולה על אשר באו מעשיו לפני המלך מכ"ש לרצון הבורא שהוא חי וקיים על אחת כמה וכמה שיש לו לטרוח ולבקש איך יעשה וישלים רצון מצותיו. העובד מאהבה עוסק בתורה ובמצות הולך בנתיבות החכמה הראוי' ועוסק בתורה ואוהב את ה' אהבה גדולה לא מפני דבר שבעולם ולא מפני יראת הרעה ולא כדי לירש את הטובה אלא עובד באמת מפני שהקב"ה אמת וסוף הטובה לבא בכללה וצריך לאהוב את הבורא אהבה עזה ורבה עד אשר יחלה לאהבתו כאדם החולה לאהבת אשה והוא שוגה תמיד באהבתו בשבתו ובקומו בצאתו ובבואו גם בעת מאכלו ומשתהו לא ינום ולא יישן מפני אהבתה יותר ויותר מזה תהי' אהבת הבורא בלב אוהביו ותמיד ישגו בה כמו שצונו (דברים ו' ד') בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך וגו' וזה שאמר שלמה בחכמתו דרך משל כי חולת אהבה אני (שה"ש ב' ה') וזהו דבר ידוע כיום וכשמש לכל מבין אשר לא תהי' אהבת הבורא קטורה בלב האדם עד אשר ישגה בה תמיד כגון שיעזוב כל אשר בעולם חוץ ממנו כמו שצונו (דברים ו' ד') בכל לבבך ולא יתכן זה אלא בדיעה שידעה לפיכך זה האמת וכללו של דבר כי צריך לו לאדם להבין ולהשכיל בחכמות ותבונות המודיעות לו את קונו כפי כחו שיש לו להבין ולהשכיל ולהשיג. והבורא יתברך שמו ויתעלה זכרו הנכבד והנורא צוה לנו לאהבה וליראה שמו דכתיב (דברים ו' ד') ואהבת את ה' אלהיך ונאמר (שם שם י"ג) את ה' אלהיך תירא והאיך הוא הדרך לאהבתו וליראתו בשעה שיתבונן האדם במעשיו של הקב"ה הגדולים והמופלאים אשר אין להם ערך ולא קץ מיד אוהב ומשבה ומפאר ומתאוה תאוה גדולה לדעת שם הגדול הנכבד והנורא וכן אמר דוד (תהלים מ"ב ג') צמאה נפשי לאלהים לאל חי. וכשהוא מחשב בדברים האלה בעצמו הוא נרתע לאחוריו וירא ויפחד שהוא ברי' קטנה מאד ושפלה עומדת בדעת קלה ומעוטה לפניו. וכן אמר דוד (תהלים ח' ד') כי אראה שמיך מעשי אצבעותיך וגו' מה אנוש כי תזכרנו.

The root of love of God is "You shall love Adonai your God with all your heart," (Deut. 6:5). Our Creator commanded us to serve Him with trembling — so that the love of our

soul be bound up with His soul in joy, in love, with a good heart and the joy of love. It is so strong that it overpowers the heart of those who love God, that even for a man who has not been with his wife for many days and has a great desire for her does not find the moment that he shoots like an arrow [i.e. ejaculates] as enjoyable as the strength and vigor of fearing God and finding joy in the Creator. All the delight one receives from one's beloved children are like nothing compared to the pleasure of the heart of one who loves God with all his heart and with all his soul and all his might, and all his meditations. How does one fulfill love of the Creator? To give merit to the masses, to sanctify God's name, to offer himself in the love of the Creator, like Pinhas the priest who gave his soul in love for his Creator in zealotry for His name. And one should not desire possessions in a place where there is God's Holiness, in his refusal to take money like we found with Abraham "I will not take so much as a thread or a sandal strap of what is yours," (Genesis 14:23), and also with Elisha who did not want to take money from Na'aman. Do not quit from studying Torah for the sake of pleasures and the delight of one's children and the love women. Abandon aimless walking and looking at women and the pleasures of songs in order that his heart will be complete with the love of God and will burden and toil for the thing that is the will of the Creator....

The one who serves out of love is busy with Torah, commandments, walks in the proper paths of wisdom, and is busy with Torah and loves God with a great love, not out of something in the world, and not out of fear of evil and not in order to inherit the good, rather serves in truth because the Holy One, blessed be He, is truth and the end of good. One needs to love the Creator with a great and mighty love until he is sick out of his love, like a man who is sick for a woman, and he is always obsessed with his love, in his sitting, in his getting up, in his comings and goings, when he eats and drinks. He does not rest or sleep out of his love. Even more than this should the love of the Creator be in the hearts of those who love Him always and are crazy for Him, like it is commanded of us (Deut. 6:4) "with all your heart and with all soul." This is like Solomon said in his wisdom by way of a parable "I am faint with love." (Song of Songs 2:5) This thing is known today like the sun to all who understand that the love of the Creator will not be bound up in the heart of man until he is obsessed with it always, for example by abandoning everything that is in the world except for Him like it is commanded (Deut 6:4) "with all your heart." This can only be achieved with knowledge that knows Him. Therefore, this is the truth of the matter for man needs to understand and comprehend the wisdom and concepts that are known according to his ability to understand and comprehend and grasp. The Creator, blessed is His name and exalted is His merit, the honored and revered One, commanded us to love and fear His name, as it is written, (Deut. 6:4) "You shall love Adonai your God," and it says (Deut. 6:13) "Adonai your God, you should fear." How should one love Him and fear Him? At the moment that man contemplates the creations of the Holy One, blessed be He, the great wonders that have no comparable value or end, immediately he loves and praises and glorifies and yearns with a great desire to know the great, honored and revered Name. As David said, (Psalm 42:3) "My soul thirsts for God, the living God." And when he thinks of these things, he will recoil to behind himself and will be afraid that he is a tiny creation, lowly, standing with simple and scanty knowledge before him. As David said, (Psalm 8:4)

“When I behold your heavens, the work of your fingers...what is man that you have been mindful of him.”⁹⁷

Beginning with the same biblical proof text for the love of God that we have seen throughout this thesis – Deuteronomy 6:5 – the passage then demonstrates how love of God is a powerful force or emotion that one must feel or experience. Love of God is meant to be experienced as joy – בשמחה. This word repeats itself many times in this passage. Although we may tremble with fear, it is delight we are supposed to feel.

The joy is overpowering, overwhelming the adherent with its strength: “it is so strong that it overpowers the heart of those who love God.” כך היא עזה ומתגברת על לב אהבי ה'. In fact, it is so powerful that one's love of God is meant to surpass the love one has for one's wife and children: “All the delight one receives from one's beloved children are like nothing compared to the pleasure of the heart of one who loves God with all his heart” -- חבת שעשוע ילדיו כלא היו כנגד שעשועי לב האוהב את ה' בכל לבו.

Not even the power of an orgasm can surpass the love one carries for God:

שאפי' ימים רבים שלא בא על אשתו ויש תאוה מרובה כנגדה ובשעה שיורה כחץ אינו נהנה כנגד תגבורת ותוקף יראת ה' ושמחת בוראו

even for a man who has not been with his wife for many days and has a great desire for her does not find the moment that he shoots like an arrow [i.e. ejaculates] as enjoyable as the strength and vigor of fearing God and finding joy in the Creator.

It truly is no surprise that these men compare the power of love of God to an orgasm.

While a woman may describe the most powerful moment of her life, as experienced by

⁹⁷ Similar material is found in the Wistinetzki edition of *Sefer Hasidim*, *siman* 815. *Siman* 300 in the Margaliot edition is also very similar.

her body, as the moment she gives birth. for men, it is likely that the closest they physically felt to the intensity of love was at the moment of ejaculation.⁹⁸

After describing the intensity of the desire for God, the text asks how one is to fulfill the obligation to love God. Some of the answers we have already looked at in previous chapters, such as sanctifying God's name through death, engaging in the study of Torah, giving up one's material possessions and observing God's commandments. But, then we see the way in which the *hasidei Ashkenaz* encourage ascetic practice in pursuit of the love of God:

ושלא לבטל דברי תורה בשביל תענוגים ושעשוע ילדיו וחיבת נשיו. וכן לעזוב טיולים וראיות נשים ונעימות מזמורים כדי שיהי' לבו שלם בשמחת ה' וטורה ועמל בדבר שהוא רצון הבורא.

Do not quit from studying Torah for the sake of pleasures and the delight of one's children and the love women. Abandon aimless walking and looking at women and the pleasures of songs in order that his heart will be complete with the love of God and will burden and toil for the thing that is the will of the Creator....

The aim of these practices is to remove oneself from any distractions that may prevent one from focusing wholeheartedly on love of God. Women, songs, and aimless activities are such obstacles. Even one's own children and wife stand in the way of complete love in one's heart.

Worldly desires must be abandoned for the purposes of love of God. In the Wistinetzki edition of *Sefer Hasidim*, *siman* 815, we have different language:

He should worship and love the blessed holy One. 'in all your ways know him' (Prov. 3:6), "to love the Lord" (Deut 11:13), for the soul is filled with love, and it is bound in joy, and that joy drives away from his heart the pleasures of the body and the delight of the world....

⁹⁸ These ideas were generated by a class conversation led by Dr. Sharon Koren, Studies in the Zohar, 01/15/2008.

Love of God can only be truly attained once “the pleasures of the body and the delight of the world” – *neimot haguf v'ta-anug ha-olam* – have been driven away. This is a classic example of how the *hasidei Ashkenaz* support an ascetic lifestyle in the pursuit of love of God.

The concluding material in this *siman* is similar to what we studied earlier in Maimonides' texts. The author goes on to compare the love of God with love of a woman, arguing that one's love one must be similar to an illness:

וצריך לאהוב את הבורא אהבה עזה ורבה עד אשר יחלה לאהבתו כאדם החולה לאהבת אשה והוא שוגה תמיד באהבתו בשבתו ובקומו בצאתו ובבואו גם בעת מאכלו ומשתתו לא ינום ולא יישן מפני אהבתה

One needs to love the Creator with a great and mighty love until he is sick out of his love, like a man who is sick for a woman, and he is always obsessed with his love, in his sitting, in his getting up, in his comings and goings, when he eats and drinks. He does not rest or sleep out of his love....

Love of God must consume him, day and night, throughout everything he does.

Not only must it be his constant companion but he also must abandon everything else in the world for its pursuit:

לא תהי' אהבת הבורא קשורה בלב האדם עד אשר ישגה בה תמיד כגון שיעזוב כל אשר בעולם חוץ ממנו...

...the love of the Creator will not be bound up in the heart of man until he is obsessed with it always, for example by abandoning everything that is in the world except for Him...

This is only a further example of their support for a monastic-like existence, removed from the pleasures and beauties of the world they live in.

As we read the very last few lines of *siman* 14, there is a striking similarity with language of the Rambam in *Hilchot Yesodai Ha-Torah*. I compare the two most important passages below:

Sefer Hasidim, Siman 14

והאיך הוא הדרך לאהבתו וליראתו בשעה שיתבונן האדם במעשיו של הקב"ה הגדולים והמופלאים אשר אין להם ערך ולא קץ מיד אוהב ומשבח ומפאר ומתאוה תאוה גדולה לדעת שם הגדול הנכבד והנורא וכן אמר דוד (תהלים מ"ב ג') צמאה נפשי לאלהים לאל חי. וכשהוא מחשב בדברים האלה בעצמו הוא גרוע לאחוריו וירא ויפחד שהוא ברי' קטנה מאד ושפלה עומדת בדעת קלה ומעוטה לפניו. וכן אמר דוד (תהלים ח' ד') כי אראה שמיך מעשי אצבעותיך וגו' מה אנוש כי תזכרנו.

Rambam, Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 2:2

והיאך היא הדרך לאהבתו ויראתו. בשעה שיתבונן האדם במעשיו וברואיו הנפלאים הגדולים ויראה מהן חכמתו שאין לה ערך ולא קץ מיד הוא אוהב ומשבח ומפאר ומתאוה תאוה גדולה לידע השם הגדול, כמו שאמר דוד צמאה נפשי לאלהים לאל חי, וכשמחשב בדברים האלו עצמן מיד הוא גרוע לאחוריו ויפחד ויודע שהוא בריה קטנה שפלה אפלה עומדת בדעת קלה מעוטה לפני תמים דעות, כמו שאמר דוד כי אראה שמיך מעשה אצבעותיך מה אנוש כי תזכרנו.

In these two excerpts, we see not only similar ideas but also the use of the same words and phrasing. It is highly unlikely that the authors of *Sefer Hasidim* were copying from the *Mishneh Torah*. Joseph Dan in his book *Hebrew Ethical and Homiletical Literature* (Hebrew) provides the answer to this puzzle:

But in the Bologna version, two small units were appended to the body of the text, one from the *Mishneh Torah* of the Rambam and the second from the book *Wisdom of the Soul* of Rabbi Eleazar of Worms. Nevertheless, it is clear that these were later additions and in the Parma version there is no trace of them.⁹⁹

The Margalioth edition of *Sefer Hasidim* is based on the Bologna manuscript. Dan does not clarify which section of the *Mishneh Torah* is later appended to the manuscript. Yet the near mirror image of these two texts makes it fairly obvious that the material originated with *Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah* 2:2. This may be one reason why many scholars prefer the Wistinetzki edition of *Sefer Hasidim*, based on the Parma manuscript,

⁹⁹ Joseph Dan, *Sifrut Hamusar V'hadarush. Hebrew Ethical and Homiletical Literature*, (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing, 1975), 126.

since it appears to have fewer corruptions in the text.¹⁰⁰ Since it appears that this material was a later addition, we cannot assume that the authors of *Sefer Hasidim* advocated such an approach to love of God. However, the addition is perhaps evidence that later readers of *Sefer Hasidim* attempted to combine the two.

Eleazar of Worms was a leader in this circle of *hasidei Ashkenaz*. In his *shoresheet* *ha-'ahavah*, appended to his *Sefer Ha-Roqeah*, he explains how love of God is achieved through acts of self-abnegation:

The soul is full of love of God and it is bound with ropes of love in joy and the goodness of the heart....The lover thinks not about the pleasure of this world, and he is not concerned about the excursions of his wife, nor about his sons and daughters, and everything is as nothing for him apart from fulfilling the will of his Creator, to render others meritorious, to sanctify his name, and to give himself in the love of him as Abraham, 'I swear [to the, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth], I will not take so much as a thread or a sandal strap' (Gen. 14:22-23), and as Phineas who gave of himself when he killed Zimri (Num 25:14). They do not elevate themselves, speak trivial words, look at the faces of women, and they listen to their reproach but do not respond, and all of their thoughts are with their Creator, and they sing sweet songs to their Creator, and all the designs of their thoughts burn from the fire of his love.¹⁰¹

In comments to his translation, Wolfson writes:

The devout love of God, therefore, demands an unequivocal turning away from mundane affairs and especially the pursuit of physical pleasure....Pious devotion demands an unwavering commitment to God that renders all concerns with mundane matters trivial.¹⁰²

As we can see, there are many similarities between Eleazar's words and those found in *Sefer Hasidim*. They both point to Pinhas and Abraham as exemplary models of love of God. They both argue that love of God should be fulfilled through such acts as making others meritorious, sanctifying God's name, and offering one's soul to God. Most

¹⁰⁰ Wolfson, "Martyrdom, Eroticism, and Asceticism," 208.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 187-188.

¹⁰² Ibid., 188-189.

crucial to the argument I have been making is that they both support acts of asceticism as part of the practice of love of God. A single-minded devotion to God is called for. Love and care for one's children or wife must not be allowed to impede this holiest of tasks. Eleazar argues that one must remove one's thoughts "from the pleasure of this world." One's mind is to be filled only with thoughts of *Adonai*.

Humility is the quality that stands out in the excerpt from Eleazar of Worms. "They do not elevate themselves" and "they listen to their reproach but do not respond" are all markers of humility. They should not self-aggrandize nor respond to attacks they may receive. These are practices that will keep on the correct path of serving God.

However, there is one key difference. The *Sefer ha-Roqeah* states that "they sing sweet songs to their Creator." Yet, in *siman* 14 from the Margoliot edition, the text equates singing songs with looking at women and taking aimless walk, practices one should abandon in the name of love of God. One possibility is that *Sefer Hasidim* was referring to meaningless melodies that were not offered in service to God, whereas Eleazar is speaking of songs as prayers sung to God. This would fit with what we know of Eleazar. In addition to writing books of theology and *halakha*, he was a noted *paytan*, authoring several *piyutim*. According to Joseph Dan, "his poems express devotion to, and worship of God."¹⁰³ In addition, he wrote commentaries to the siddur.

In the texts studied so far, women have played a foil to man's love of God. While the excerpt from *Sefer Hasidim* compared the crazy love one must feel for God to the lovesick frenzy man feels for woman, love for women is a terrible obstacle that must be defeated. Nothing can stand in the way of the overpowering nature of *ahavat ha-shem*.

¹⁰³ Joseph Dan, "Eleazar ben Judah of Worms," *Encyclopedia Judaica*. Eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillian Reference 2007) 6: 304.

However, as Elliot Wolfson rightfully points us, the *hasidei Ashkenaz* did not promote celibacy.¹⁰⁴ Sex with one's wife was still a necessary component to marriage. Yet, the libido was a force to be constrained and redirected in the interest of love of God. According to Wolfson, "...their understanding of the love of God, which is described in intensely erotic terms, entails the renunciation of carnal passion. One must substitute the searing flames of sensual lust for the purifying blaze of the heavenly fire."¹⁰⁵

In *siman* 59, taken from the Wistinetzki edition of *Sefer Hasidim*, the author discusses how gazing at the physical appearance of a woman could destroy the ability to have a vision of God's glory:

The hair of a woman is a lewd matter, as it says, "your hair is like a flock of goats" (Song of Songs 4:1). [He who looks at the hair of a woman] will not merit [to see] "the hair of His head that is like lamb's wool" (Dan 7:9). If he is careful not to look at a woman he will see the glory, as it says, "When your eyes behold the king in his beauty." (Isa. 33:17).¹⁰⁶

The danger of gazing at a woman, or even just being in her general presence as the next passage indicates, is that it may ignite one's libidinous urges. The following is from Eleazar of Worms' *Sefer Ha-Roqeah*:

This is the instruction for one who repents with all his heart and all his soul, and he comes to cleave to his Creator. Each person should consider in his heart [the verse] "and I am sanctified in the midst of the children of Israel" (Lev. 22:32)...He must say to his heart: I should not restrain my spirit for the sake of my Creator for even a short while, and I should not take pleasure for even a short while in matters of adultery and impurity. I must accustom my eyes not to look at the face of a woman for she is fire.... One must avoid all physical pleasure with women, seeing them, touching them, sitting with them, seeing their lovely garments, hearing their voices in speech or song, speaking with them, whether married or single, with the exception of his wife.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Wolfson, "Martyrdom, Eroticism, and Asceticism," 189.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 189.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 191.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 193.

As this passage demonstrates, nullification of all sexual desire is required in order to properly love of God. Sexual arousal is an obstacle that must be overcome.

Wolfson argues that one of the ways the pietists would weaken their carnal desire was through focusing on the divine name, specifically the Tetragrammaton. The following passage, taken from a medieval manuscript,¹⁰⁸ highlights the use of such a practice:

This is [the meaning of the verse] *shemi le-'olam*, 'This shall be My name forever' (Exod. 3:15), [the word *shemi* signifies] *shem yod* [i.e., the name that begins with *yod*, the Tetragrammaton], it is written *le-'olam*, for [the name is transmitted] to the one who in the world ('*olam*) is pure of all transgression....*Shemi le-'olam*, the unique name (*shem ha-meyuchad*) is only revealed to one who has abrogated the desire for women from his heart.¹⁰⁹

As Wolfson explains,

According to this source, the transmission of the Tetragrammaton, which is the main praxis to bring about the vision of the glory, is linked to the nullification of sexual desire. The name can only be promulgated to one who has extirpated erotic yearning from his heart.¹¹⁰

As this section has demonstrated, the *hasidei Ashkenaz* supported an extreme form of asceticism in support of their goal of love of God. Women in particular served as the main obstacle men had to overcome in order to direct their hearts with the proper intention. Only one source I uncovered dealt with the issue of women and love of God – the *Sefer Hachinuch*, by Rabbi Pinhas Halevi of Barcelona. In his discussion of the commandment to love God, he writes:

ונוהגת בכל מקום ובכל זמן, בזכרים ונקבות.

It [love of God] applies in every place, at every time, for both men and women.

¹⁰⁸ MS Oxford, Bodleian Library 1566, fol. 38a.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 190.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

Love of God is understood as a positive commandment, not time-bound.

Therefore, it is logical to assume that women are commanded to love God, since women are obligated in many positive commandments, such as the observance of Shabbat and the laws of kashrut. However, Halevi does not provide any greater details in his commentary. It is important to note that the Rambam also writes about love of God as a positive commandment; however, he explicitly states that women are not obligated to love God. At the end of his enumeration of the positive commandments in his *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*, he discusses in general terms which commandments women are and are not obligated in; love of God (commandment number 3) is one in which they are not obligated. Perhaps this is because women were not obligated to study Torah,¹¹¹ the necessary path for achieving love of God.

Returning to the *hasidei Ashkenaz*, their source of pleasure was devotion and service to God, not engagement with the world that surrounded them. In this respect, they were similar in their thinking to Ibn Pakuda, although he was not nearly as extreme. While Pakuda supported a complete immersion in thoughts of God, he also recognized the need for economic sustenance. He did not argue that one should forego seeking one's livelihood in the marketplace. However, no such nod to civil society is offered in the works of the *hasidei Ashkenaz*. Aside from abiding by one's God-given commandment to procreate and fulfill the roles of father and husband, it appears that every other element of the world is meant to be forgotten.

We turn now to a reflection on the previous five chapters, examining their wisdom for the modern age.

¹¹¹ *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 1:1

Chapter Six: Towards a New Understanding of Love of God

Over the course of five chapters, we have examined how Jewish tradition has interpreted the commandment to love God. Beginning with chapter one, we saw how love of God from the perspective of the Bible is understood as a commitment to the commandments. Love of God means obedience to His will. In chapter two, the Talmud *Bavli* and various midrashim demonstrated that love of God is not merely something we feel but something we must do. The early rabbis claimed that love is an act, not an emotion. Through the study of Torah, treatment of our fellow human beings, through our money and material possessions, or through prayer, we fulfill the commandment to love God. Chapter three discussed how love of God “with all one’s soul” has come to mean through death. Maimonides’ argument, that love of God can only be achieved through knowledge of God, was the central thesis of chapter four. In chapter five, we discussed the thinking of both Bahya Ibn Pakuda and the *hasidei Ashkenaz*. Each argued that love of God would only be possible by severing one’s attachment to the physical world.

Love of God appears to have been a rich topic in Jewish sources across the centuries. But that has changed in our own time. Love of God is not a popular theme for Jewish philosophers today. In spite of the fact that we recite our obligation each day to “love God,” “love of God” has become more frequently associated with the Christian faith. William Moran, a Christian scholar writing in the early 1960s, claimed that “probably no subject in the book of Deuteronomy...has been so thoroughly studied as its teachings on love: Yahweh’s love for Israel, and the imperative necessity of Israel’s love for Yahweh in return.”¹¹² He could not have been talking about the Jews. Very little

¹¹² Moran, p. 78.

contemporary Jewish scholarship exists on this topic. Only one major scholarly work from a Jewish perspective exists on this topic– Michael Fishbane’s *The Kiss of God*, published in 1994. The only other book on this subject was an index of all textual sources that mentioned love of God, called *Mitzvat Ahavat Adonai*, by Yosef Ginzburg, published in Israel in 1993. While there were a few scholarly articles within the literature, on Maimonides, or Wolfson’s scholarship on the *hasidei Ashkenaz*, there is no circle in Jewish academia devoted to love of God.

Why choose a thesis topic which appears to be on the fringes of Jewish scholarship? I believe it is an important topic. I wanted to know what it meant to love God from the perspective of the Jewish tradition. The previous five chapters have accomplished this goal. This chapter will provide a more personal response to what I have uncovered. The sources on martyrology I find most difficult. I will explain some of my concerns below. I continue by claiming there is value in some of what the tradition has to teach us. Loving God by how we treat others is the most compelling. I also find helpful the sources that emphasize the need for separation from the physical world. Although I do not advocate an ascetic existence, I do believe our love for material things stands in the way of loving God. I argue that God can be found in the relationships we have with ourselves, each other and the earth. It is in cultivating these three connections that we can truly love God.

I then present a glimpse into the writings of Erich Fromm, bell hooks and Carol Ochs on the meaning of loving God. I claim that more writing needs to be done on love of God from the perspective of the 21st century. These three authors have begun the work; we now need to follow in their steps.

I conclude by quoting Maimonides. I support his contention that love of God can be reached through an exploration of God's creations. I claim that our gratitude for the world and for life is a sign of our love for God. I begin now with an exploration of how I came to realize the importance of love of God to living a meaningful life.

I have always associated God with fear, and not love. Yet, I have been reciting the *v'ahavta* for years. I was not conscious of its meaning until a few years ago. It was only when I found myself working with patients at Beth Israel hospital three summers ago that I began to understand love and how it related to God.

I sat with an old woman, seemingly just days from her death. She spoke to me of her life, and of her husband and sisters who had passed on before her. As I stood up to leave, she looked at me, took my hand and said "I love you." Feeling the need to respond, I looked at her and said "I love you too."

I have struggled with this moment ever since. Did this woman seeing me play the part of God? Was her declaration of love a form of *amor dei*? Was my response a stand-in for the kiss of God she so badly needed? I began to believe it was possible to love God. I began to seek out what Judaism had to say about love of God, and hence, this thesis was born.

Through the previous five chapters, I have explored love of God through Jewish sources as both a scholarly endeavor and as a means to finding an answer to an important question. If I am commanded to love God, how must I act? Do I accept what the tradition has to teach me?

The material on martyrology is the hardest to accept. I do not judge these martyrs. Yet, I cannot imagine giving up my life for the love of God. Although I can't

imagine living my life as anything but a Jew.¹¹³ the notion of dying for my religion is still foreign, almost inconceivable. My love for life is too strong and my fear of death even greater. If love of God truly requires my own death, then I admit I am incapable of fulfilling it.

The negative association with martyrology is due to the fact that we live in a world where people are dying for the sake of God – where suicide bombers kill themselves and others in Pakistan, Iraq, and Israel. Fundamentalists who kill for their God are on our planes and subways, in New York, London, and Madrid. Dying for God has extremely negative associations in our culture.

But dying for God is just one component of the Jewish tradition we have witnessed. The material from the *Sifre* and *Eliyahu Rabbah* teach us that our interaction with others is the best expression of our love of God. Our actions in the public square affect how we are seen, and can reflect on our God, religion, and people. When a Jew murders his wife, it decreases the love for our God in this world. When a Jew steals, or exploits her workers, we become a blighted people. But when a Jew rises to the Supreme Court, or fights for the rights of African-Americans and others' civil rights, or pays her employees a living wage, the love for the Jews, and thereby for God, increases. We can be lovers of God in terms of how we act, by making the name of the Jewish people a blessing, and not a curse.

Although I do not support the ascetic lifestyle of the *hasidei Ashkenaz* nor the hermit-like existence propounded by Pakuda, I do believe there is wisdom that can be garnered from their beliefs. Rather than be consumed by an attachment to material

¹¹³ I would sooner give up my Canadian citizenship than my Jewish birthright.

possessions, both the German-Jewish pietists and Pakuda envisioned a relationship with God based on a single-minded devotedness. They argued that “love and delight in the world” interfered with the sole objective of loving God. Agreeably, consumerism, materialism and the sense of our own importance blinds us to what is most important—our relationship to the earth, to each other, and to ourselves. God lives in each of these places. Each of these relationships needs to be cultivated in time. But given the culture in which we live, where “time is money,” dedicating time to these three life-sustaining relationships is difficult. We must carve out space to do this. By doing so, love for the God that lives in these relationships will grow.

While the texts we examined contain important teachings that resonate with us, they still leave us in need. Pre-modern in origin, we struggle to find ourselves in these texts. We have developed new God language to express how we understand the world. Recently, God has been defined as a force, a power, a spark, no longer just an omniscient being measuring our good deeds and sins. With these reconfigured concepts of God in hand, we need new understandings of love of God and how we make manifest that love in the world. In the past few decades, scholars have begun to address this issue. Erich Fromm, in his book *The Art of Loving*, writes, that “to love God...[is] to long for the attainment of the full capacity to love.”¹¹⁴ In this model, God is the power that gives us the strength to love. By yearning to love others, we embrace God in the process.

In *All About Love*, bell hooks writes that God is love: “My belief that God is love – that love is everything, our true destiny – sustains me. I affirm these beliefs through daily meditation and prayer, through contemplation and service, through worship and

¹¹⁴ Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1963), 38.

loving kindness.”¹¹⁵ Similar to Fromm, she is claiming that God is the power of love.

God is the force of love in the world that propels her to live.¹¹⁶

Still, a slightly different take is offered by Carol Ochs:

The person we love is an aperture through which we perceive God. In all our loving, we are loving God....Love is *never* a generic “to whom it may concern”: we love through knowing the uniqueness of the one we love. We are supposed to love the particular individuals (parents, siblings, lovers, children), but to love them as they are *in* God.¹¹⁷

Ochs, arguing in Buberian terms, claims that we perceive God through other human beings. Every time we love someone in our lives, we love God. God is a great whole to which everyone belongs. In other words, to love God is to love other human beings – *v’ahavata l’reicha kamocha*. This is not so far removed from *Sifre Devarim* and *Eliyahu Rabbah*, which argued that love of God is acted upon through the way we treat our fellow human beings.

In addition to the work of Fromm, hooks, and Ochs, more work still needs to be done on the concept of love of God in the 21st century. If to love God is to love other human beings, what does that look like? If God is the power that makes for love, how do we strengthen it?

In conclusion, I turn to the work of Maimonides. As we discussed, Maimonides claimed that true love of God could only be reached through knowledge of God. I do believe that contemplation of this world, of science, of nature, of creation, could lead one to proclaim love of the Creator. The logic of this world frightens me. It is too beautiful

¹¹⁵ bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions*, (New York: Perennial, 2000), 83.

¹¹⁶ Similar ideas have been argued by Christian theologians dating as far back as the medieval period, if not earlier.

¹¹⁷ Carol Ochs, *Our Lives as Torah: Finding God in our own Stories*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 77.

to even comprehend. My words of thanks, my gratitude for life, are intended for God.

To love God is to say "thank-You, thank-You, thank-You."

*Modah ani I'faneha
Melech Hai V'kayam
Sh'hechezarta bi nishmati b'chemla
Rabbah Emunateha.*

I am grateful before You,
The Eternal One that lives and breathes,
Who has given me my soul.
How great is Your faith in us!

Appendix I: Talmud Yerushalmi, Sotah 5:5, 20c

רבי עקיבה הוה מיתדין קומי טונוסטרופוס הרשע אתת ענתה דקרית שמע שרי קרי וגחך אמר
ליה סבא סבא או הרש או מבעט בייסורין את אמ' ליה תיפח רוחיה דההוא גברא לא הרש
אנא ולא מבעט בייסורין אנא אלא כל ימיי הייתי קורא את הפסוק הזה ואהבת את יי' אלהיך
בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך ובכל מאודך רחמתיא בכל לבי ורחמתיא בכל ממוני ובכל נפשי לא
הוות בדיקה לי וכדון דמטת לי בכל נפשי ואתת ענתה דקרית שמע ולא אפלגית עליה בגין כן
אנא קרי שמע וגחך

Rabbi Akiba was on trial before Tunus Rufus the evil. The time had come for the recitation of the Sh'ma. As he recited it, he began to laugh. He said to him: Old man, old man. Either you are a sorcerer or you rebel against your pain. He said to him: Let despair come upon him. I am neither a sorcerer nor do I rebel against my pain. Rather, all my life I have read this verse: 'You shall love Adonai your God with all your heart, with all you soul, and with all your might.' I loved God with all my heart. I loved God with all my possessions. And with all my soul has not been examined of me. Now that the time has come for me to 'love God with all my soul' and now is the time for the reciting of the Sh'ma and it is not divided, on account of that I recite the Sh'ma and laugh.

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