

Rabbi Fried:

In this week's TJP column about love for G-d, you mentioned: "The more we give of ourselves to Him, the more we will feel connected & become as one." Please expound on that idea – how do we give of ourselves to G-d?

Sabrena J.

Dear Sabrena,

The easy answer to your question would simply be to perform the mitzvot of the Torah. Every time you do a mitzvah, you've given something to G-d. This, however, would not truly answer the question. One could theoretically fulfill mitzvot throughout the day and still not feel connected to G-d, and be distant from feelings of love.

The Talmud says "Rachmana Liba Ba'oy", "the Merciful One (G-d) wants the heart". This does not mean, as some would interpret it, that it's sufficient to be a "Jew in the heart". (We rabbis call that a "Jewish heart condition"). What the Talmud clearly means in context, is that when one performs a mitzvah, it should be done with the heart. Although the mechanical fulfillment of a mitzvah is a mitzvah, that's only the letter of the law, but missing the spirit of the law. The connection comes when you put your heart into it.

A deeper understanding of this is that our real "self" is not our physical bodies. Our souls are our real selves. The soul needs to partner with the body to find expression in this world, and to fulfill its mission. To fulfill a mitzvah mechanically would only involve the body. When you do a mitzvah from the heart your involving the soul.

To give "of yourself" to G-d, therefore, is to perform His will with heart and soul, bringing the mechanical action of the mitzvah alive. Each time you give and invest of yourself in this way, you forge a deeper connection with G-d, creating the bonds of love.

A higher level of this connection comes with an ever greater form of giving. This is living a life in which everything you do is a service of G-d. A friend of mine, formerly a secular professor of philosophy, became a Chassidic Jew and one of today's Jewish world's renowned speakers and scholars. Before leaving Boston University for his present position in Israel, he asked many of his colleagues to describe the holiest person they knew. A couple of them mentioned men that had the ability to swindle millions of dollars in business in ways they could have never been caught, but didn't do so because it wasn't right. My friend exclaimed, although that is very praiseworthy, that's the holiest person they could come up with! Could they even imagine his rebbe, the Bostoner Rebbe, who doesn't even move a finger until he's ascertained that it's G-d's will!

The message is, all that we do in life can be a mitzvah. Our jobs, eating, married life, even our vacations and fun can all be a service of G-d. It's a question of attitude and where our hearts are. When we fuse our hearts, souls and giving to G-d in everything we do, then we have a constant, unending love relationship with Him. Every time we move a finger could bring us closer and more loving to G-d.

A Chasid once made a very long and difficult trip to visit his rebbe. When he arrived, the rebbe asked him why he came. He replied that he came to find G-d. The rebbe told him, if so, then you can go back home. He is right in your heart!

Every time you give tzedakah, help another Jew, light Shabbos candles or pray, think about what your doing, who commanded you to do it, and do it from the heart. As time goes on, you will begin to see yourself in those actions, since you've invested yourself in them. Little by little, you'll see the connection growing, leading to a relationship of love. This is the meaning of the Shema, "you should love the Lord, G-d with all your heart, soul and might".