

ATTRIBUTE UNDERSTANDINGS

Understanding AHAVAHS HASHEM: The Path to Loving Ein Sof

The Essence of AHAVAH (אהבה)

AHAVAH (אהבה) - love - represents one of the most profound spiritual forces in Jewish mysticism. More than just an emotion, ahavah is a cosmic power that binds creation to its source and serves as the ultimate connection between humanity and Ein Sof (the Infinite Divine). In Kabbalah, the Hebrew letters of אהבה (aleph-hei-bet-hei) reveal its essence:

- א (Aleph) represents Ein Sof's transcendent unity
- ה (Hei) represents revelation and manifestation
- ב (Bet) represents connection and relationship
- ה (Hei) represents the second manifestation - bringing divine love into the world

Numerically, אהבה equals 13, the same as אחד (echad, "one"), revealing that true love is the experience of unity with the beloved. This is why the Zohar states that "Love and unity are one" - authentic love dissolves the barriers between lover and beloved.

How to Best Love Ein Sof

Loving Ein Sof (God's infinite essence) represents the highest spiritual achievement. The Baal Shem Tov taught that while fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, love of God is its fulfillment. Here are the deepest approaches to cultivating this love:

1. THROUGH CONTEMPLATIVE UNDERSTANDING (HITBONENUT)

The Alter Rebbe explains in Tanya that the highest form of love emerges from deep contemplation of Ein Sof's nature. This involves:

- Meditating on how all existence is continuously created by and utterly dependent on Ein Sof
- Contemplating how Ein Sof transcends all limitation yet chooses to contract itself to relate to us
- Recognizing that what appears as separate reality is actually divine energy in disguise

This contemplation leads to what Chassidut calls "intellectual love" (ahavah she'b'da'at) - not merely emotional but rooted in profound understanding of reality's true nature.

2. THROUGH RECOGNIZING DIVINE PROVIDENCE (HASHGACHA PRATIT)

The Baal Shem Tov taught that Ein Sof orchestrates every detail of our lives with precise intention. By training ourselves to recognize divine providence in everyday experiences:

- Notice "coincidences" as divine communication
- See challenges as opportunities for spiritual growth
- Recognize that even painful experiences contain hidden love

This awareness transforms our relationship with reality itself, revealing Ein Sof's constant presence and care within every circumstance.

3. THROUGH TORAH STUDY AS COMMUNION

The Zohar describes Torah study as the ultimate love affair between humanity and Ein Sof. When approached properly:

- Each word becomes a meeting point with divine wisdom
- The intellectual struggle itself becomes an embrace with divine mind
- The joy of insight becomes a taste of divine delight

As Rabbi Schneur Zalman teaches, "Torah and the Holy One, blessed be He, are entirely one." Through immersive Torah study, we don't just learn about Ein Sof - we experience direct communion.

4. THROUGH SELFLESS ACTION (AVODAH)

Perhaps the most powerful expression of love for Ein Sof comes through actions that transcend self-interest:

- Performing mitzvot with the intention of creating a "dwelling place" for divinity
- Helping others without expectation of recognition or reward
- Making sacrifices that prioritize divine will over personal comfort

The Maggid of Mezritch taught that when we act selflessly, we create a "transparent vessel" through which Ein Sof's love can flow unobstructed into the world.

5. THROUGH EMBRACING PARADOX

The highest love of Ein Sof embraces the fundamental paradox at reality's core:

- Ein Sof is simultaneously utterly transcendent and intimately immanent
- We are both utterly distinct from and essentially one with our divine source
- The physical world both conceals and reveals divine reality

By embracing these paradoxes rather than trying to resolve them, we open ourselves to a love that transcends logical categories - what Chassidut calls "love beyond reason" (ahavah she'lemaalah min hada'at).

The Ultimate Expression of Love for Ein Sof

The Lubavitcher Rebbe taught that the ultimate expression of love for Ein Sof in our generation involves bringing divine consciousness into the lowest realms:

- Finding divine purpose in seemingly mundane activities
- Transforming materiality itself into a vehicle for spiritual expression
- Creating a "dwelling place for God in the lower worlds"

This represents love in its most complete form - not escaping the world to connect with Ein Sof, but bringing Ein Sof's presence fully into the world. The Baal Shem Tov summarized this ultimate love in a simple teaching: "The entire purpose of our existence in this world is to transform the 'I' that separates into the 'I' that connects." When our sense of self becomes a vehicle for divine expression rather than a barrier to it, we achieve the perfect love of Ein Sof. In this highest state, we don't just love Ein Sof - we become the embodiment of Ein Sof's love flowing into creation. As the Zohar states: "Israel, Torah, and the Holy One, blessed be He, are all One." This ultimate unity is the fulfillment of ahavah in its most perfect form.