



A Foundational Article on the intricacies of life, which we were privileged to hear from The Spinka Rebbe Shlita.

FORGET IT, IT'S ALL ABOUT SELF-INTEREST

1. Who needs friends? ❧

The ego doesn't like friends.

Friends are too expensive, too burdensome. **When you have a friend, you have to listen to him, keep quiet and let him finish a sentence; you have to encourage him, and compliment him on his successes or his good qualities.**

And the ego isn't interested in that.

From its perspective, it is the only one in the world. It is the only one who deserves a compliment, the only one who should be listened to, the only one who should be smiled at. **As for everyone else? Who are they, anyway?!**

2. I need friends! ❧

We all have an ego.

And we all have friends.

How does that work?

How is it possible that the ego gives in so quickly?

Don't worry, it hasn't given up on anything. If it chose a friend for you, it's only because it recognized that this person could enlarge and enhance it.

There are many types of friendships, but they all share one common denominator:

Self-interest.

There are people the ego agreed for you to befriend **because they are very nice and generous.**

There are people it is willing for you to compliment **because they will compliment you much more in return.**

There are people who, if you are their friend, will bring you **honor, protekzia (influence), or even financial gain.**

There are those who know how to give you a **good feeling.** There are people **whose presence is pleasant.** There are people who have a **tzimmer (guest house) in Meron** five minutes away from the *Tziyun*. There are those who know how to **listen and be impressed by you.**

And the ego loves people like that! Because they contribute to it!

It is willing to suffer, to pay the price, to go out of its way to compliment, to be nice, kind, and good-hearted—because the profit here is worth much more than the effort.

This is what a high-yield investment looks like.

3. There is no love! ❧

We swallow the "stories" the ego feeds us.

And so does the friend.

We both walk through this world with a sublime feeling that we have a friend, that we share a good and special bond. We tell ourselves how steadfast our love is, and how much we can rely on one another.

Yet, we forget the simple, sad truth: there are no friends here—only two pieces of ego trying to extract as much profit as possible from each other.

Neither I nor he truly love one another. **There is only an ego here trying to empower itself through the friend.**

The meaning of this is clear:

The moment the ego identifies that the interest has ended, that it no longer has anything to gain from this relationship, that this friendship is becoming too costly, or that it gives and gives without receiving the expected return—it loses interest in this friendship.

And all at once, that friend becomes, in my eyes, a nuisance, impudent, a liar, an enemy—and even an "opportunist"...

In this very spot, the vast majority of friendships and relationships in the world are buried.

When the other person becomes a burden, when the self-interest fades—the friendship ends.

When the motive is gone, the love is gone (*batel davar, batela ahavah*), and in its place comes much heartache and disappointment, a sense of hurt and emptiness.

4. Is There Such a Thing as Love? ❧

And the Torah HaKedosha commands us—"And you shall love your fellow as yourself" (*v'ahavta l'rei'acha kamocha*).

Is this even possible?

How can one love someone who is not "me"? **How can one desire his well-being—when the ego feels it comes at my own expense?**

Does the *mitzvah* of *v'ahavta l'rei'acha* have an expiration date? Is it only applicable as long as I feel good in the friend's presence? Clearly not.

If so, what is the truth?

How does one sustain love when the self-interest ends? And is there even such a thing as "loving"—or is it all just a smokescreen of interests?

5. Why Not Disconnect? ❧

Why do we even need friends?

Wouldn't it be better to be alone here in this world? **To have all the money and honor for yourself, without needing anyone else to help you, applaud you, or admire you?**

Let's say that isn't possible because there are, in fact, other people in this world and one must know how to live with them. Still, we can all agree that far too high a percentage of friendships end in great heartache and disillusionment. **Is it not time to give up on the concept of "friends"?**

If there are no true friends, and everything is driven by self-interest—if everyone surrounding me at this very moment only wants to take and take from me—**wouldn't it be better to detach emotionally and stop investing in friends?**

True, this would come at a price. I wouldn't have many people wishing me *Mazel Tov* at my *simchos*, but on the other hand, it would save me so much heartache and disappointment!

So why not?

Why is "*V'ahavta l'rei'acha kamocha*" (love your fellow as yourself) such a fundamental and critical principle in the life of a *Yid*?

6. No, do not detach! ❧

The truth is, there is no natural way to reach *ahava she'eino teluya b'davar* (love that is not dependent on anything). The ego is simply too large—why should I agree to waive it for the sake of someone else?

Love that is not dependent on anything is a gift from Heaven. Only the Creator can grant it to you. It is like Torah *lishma* (for its own sake); there is no human recipe to achieve it, and only the Creator can open within you the capacity for "*lishma*."

However, just as with the Torah, this fact should not prevent you from continuing to learn. On the contrary, "a person should always engage in Torah *shelo lishma*" — but out of an awareness that he is currently in a state of "*shelo lishma*," and with a *tefillah* and hope that the Creator will merit him to ascend to the higher level.

The same applies to one's conduct with friends:

A person should always be a friend even *shelo lishmah*! You must maintain the connection, even if it is based solely on self-interest — but do not allow yourself to forget what this friendship is built upon! Do not tell yourself stories that you truly love and appreciate him; rather, acknowledge the reality that you are driven by interests, and the moment those interests end, the friendship is liable to fall apart.

But why?

Why maintain a fake friendship?

7. The Sophisticated Engine Against the Ego ❧

The One who created my ego knows that this ego is certain of its own perfection.

And if the ego is perfect — why should I give it up?

If it gives me a good feeling — that I am strong, a hero, a person of good *middos*, a *tzaddik*, and someone who manages perfectly — why shouldn't I continue to lean on it? Why should I choose to lean on a spiritual Creator Whom I do not know and cannot perceive?

This is the reason I continue to live my life within the trap of the ego. **The ego drags me along with it, enslaving me to provide it with more and more needs and gratifications, stealing every drop of serenity and inner connection — and simultaneously continues to convince me that it is my hope, it is my strength, and that only it can truly be relied upon.**

It is Stockholm Syndrome at its finest.

And the only one who can save me from the ego is the One who created it.

Therefore, He commanded me to be a friend. To step out of my ego. To think a bit more about the other person. To compliment. To yield. To listen. To contribute.

But wait, didn't we say the ego is unwilling to do all that? Correct.

Therefore, in His abundant mercy, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created "interest."

Interest — this is Hashem's engine that pushes the blind ego to enter into a relationship of friendship.

He is convinced that he is doing this because he decided to, because he stands to gain something from this whole story — and he does not realize that there is a Great *Elokim* here who took pity on my soul that is trapped within him, and that there is a strategic plan here to redeem me from his terrible chains.

The ego is eager for the self-interest, and suddenly all my good *middos* emerge — the compliments, the encouragement, the patience for the other. I begin to discover the taste of giving; the muscles of love begin to work.

But all of this is merely a preparation for the great and true moments, in which I will finally merit, hopefully, to truly be liberated from the ego.

If Hashem created the connection between me and someone else — it is a sign that He wants me to be his friend!

The self-interest, the honor, the *tzimmer* in Meron, the money — it is the engine, the "*siba*" (reason) that will convince my ego to agree to the move.

8. When The Engine Turns Off

A wonderful period passes over us.

My friend and I are captive within the conception; the "love" between us increases like a spring, people around us begin to envy us, and we promise one another that this friendship will last forever...

But then comes the moment of truth.

The moment arrives when *Kadosh Baruch Hu* wants to move us to a place of truth, to a true connection, to the immense level of *ahava she'eina teluya b'davar* (love that is not dependent on anything).

And then, one of two things happens:

**Either the self-interest begins to melt away—
Or a "blowup" occurs between us.**

Either way, we suddenly find ourselves without the "thing" upon which the love depended.

We are left without the glue, without the self-interest.

And this moment is a painful and unique moment.

Painful—there is no need to explain why.

Unique—because now is the time to move to the next stage, of *ahava she'eina teluya b'davar*!

Suddenly, if I am willing to be honest with myself, I discover that this ego—which has constantly spun heroic tales about itself—is not nearly as strong as I once thought...

This pain suddenly reveals all sorts of things about myself:

If the explosion occurred because a friend acted differently than I expected—I discover how dependent I am on things working out exactly as I want.

If the rift in the friendship is the result of a heated argument—I discover how dependent I am on being right, to the point that I am willing to give up a friend just to be right.

If it happened because he was honored and I was left overlooked—I discover how haunted I am by jealousy, and how much I lack self-worth.

If it is because he failed or lost his fortune—I realize how much I was trapped in a fake friendship just because I thought it brought me prestige; I see how much I chase after imaginary honor.

If it is because he told me "no" regarding something I desperately wanted—I understand how much my ego is incapable of containing disappointment.

If it is because he didn't listen to me—I realize how much I cannot survive without absolute empathy and understanding from others.

All of these insights shatter the ego's false luster!

They reveal to me how much it lied when it promised that if I only followed it, I would be the best and most secure person in the world.

9. He brought us together

And here, the *Ribono Shel Olam* comes and commands me: "*V'ahavta l'rei'acha kamocho—Ani Hashem!*" (And you shall love your fellow as yourself—I am Hashem!)

This connection between you is important to Me, because it is the only way for you to reach My eternal purpose!

And I am the One who placed the personal interest between you.

And I am the one who placed this explosion between you.

I brought you into this process so that you would learn the meaning of friendship and so that you would get to know one another closely.

But now, the real work begins!

Now you must begin to love your friend! Not so that your ego will love, but you!

And you, a precious and inner Neshama, a Chelek Eloka MiMa'al, you love not because of self-interest and not because the other is perfect—rather, you love the connection to Me that is created through this friend!

You love him because I brought you together with him, and he is your only way to reach Me!

He is a Neshama you must meet in order to connect to Me!

❖ 10. True Love: Defining Its Characteristics ❖

The world convinces you that love is a feeling. A special, close feeling; a sense of affection and a desire to be together as much as possible.

But the truth is that love is not a feeling!

Love is not just a sense of closeness!

True love that is *eino teluyah b'davar* (not dependent on anything) does not mean hugging and complimenting all day long!

True love means that I do not treat the other with contempt, but rather **respect who he is**—because he is a *Neshama Elokis* just like me, **no matter how much he has fallen or failed**, or how much he fails to serve my interests.

True love means **knowing how to accept proper criticism from him**, and asking for forgiveness if it is required—without letting the ego evade what is incumbent upon me.

True love means **that I do not perceive him as an enemy who must be eliminated**, regardless of what happened between us.

True love means **that I do not sever the connection or behave with coldness**—even when it is very difficult and painful.

True love means that even if for my own good I must reduce direct contact for various reasons—I **do not disconnect my mind from him!** I do not forget him! I continue to *daven* for him!

True love means that even if I must forget about someone, **I do not do so out of animosity or resentment**, but rather because it is what is necessary right now!

❖ 11. Yes, There Is a Limit ❖

There are those who are certain that "*ahavah she'eino teluyah b'davar*" means "turning the other cheek."

There are those who are certain that true love means never rebuking or setting boundaries — allowing the other person to do whatever they please while remaining silent.

This is incorrect!

The will of Hashem is for us to take responsibility in order to lead our lives to the best and highest quality place. Indeed, one cannot ignore the fact that interpersonal relationships can sometimes lead us to negative places, emotional weakness, manipulation, spiritual challenges, financial problems, or educational conflicts.

But none of this means that one must hate or mentally disconnect!

Taking responsibility means placing the practical relationship in its proper context, setting clear and uncompromising boundaries — but doing all of this with *yishuv hadaas* and not out of feelings of vengeance or blame.

It means continuing to love the *nekudah Elokis* that I discovered specifically through this friend!

Gedanken from the Spinka Rebbe Shlita.

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