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INSTITUTE

A project of Priority-1

THE ELUL PROJECT

Ten Ways to Develop and Strengthen Our Loving Relationship with Our Creator

1. Know with certainty, as hinted in the name אלול לי, אני לדודי ודודי לי, I am to my Beloved and my Beloved is to me, as Shlomo Hamelech prophesied, that there will always be a mutual loving relationship between us and our Creator (*Shir Hashirim*).
2. Internalize the definition of love: rejoicing in the qualities of the one we love and in the fulfillment of his desires. Also remember that the root of the word אהבה, love, is ה, to give. Love is engendered through giving and giving expresses love (*Seforno, Introduction to Shir Hashirim*).
3. Chazal tell us that the rejoicing in a loving relationship with Hashem, is based on three things: rejoicing in His saving us, in His Torah and in fear of Him (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah 1:4*). We should pay attention to Hashem's involvement in every aspect of our lives and to His intervention and help in difficult situations and recognize it as a powerful expression of His love for us and an opportunity to deepen our relationship with Him.
4. Pay careful attention to the meaning of אדון עולם at the beginning of Shacharis and notice the contrast between the grandeur of Hashem and His involvement in all aspects of our lives and our total reliance on Him. This serves as another indication of His love for us and our getting the message. Knowing that such a magnificent Being pays so much attention to our individual needs and we feel so confident relying on Him, we can recognize the special relationship that exists between us.
5. When you recite the words: ברוך אתה ד' אלוקינו מלך העולם, pay close attention to their meaning. Hashem is the source of all blessings, I have a personal relationship with Him (which is hinted by referring to Him as "You") and I am addressing Him directly, He is the Master of all, He is our G-d and tempers all of His judgements of us with mercy and He is the King of the entire universe, yet He finds the time, because of His care and love for us, to attend to each and every need and desire that we have.
6. We can rejoice in our loving relationship with Hashem through the study of His Torah. We see His painstaking concern with providing us endless opportunities to perfect ourselves and thereby earn the great reward and ultimate pleasure that He wants to bestow on us. Additionally, we gain insights into His essence and can better rejoice in His unique qualities. We can more deeply appreciate His love for us when we recognize that the Torah is the blueprint and the purpose for creation, and yet He turned it over to us and relinquished His right to decide matters of Halacha. Rashi, in the beginning of Shir Hashirim, tells us that when we delight in the Torah, we can re-experience, on some level, the mutual loving relationship that we felt at Sinai, when we trusted Him blindly and He expressed the ultimate love by giving us His Torah.
7. We can rejoice in our mutual loving relationship with Hashem, with the fear of losing that relationship, by knowing that if we keep the Mitzvos, the relationship will remain strong. Our fear of Hashem, which helps to strengthen our love for Him, is the fear of losing the loving relationship. (*Orchos Tzadikim, at the end of Shaar Haahava*). He makes it easier by allowing us to feel that we are doing Him a favor when we perform Mitzvos (*Rashi Shir Hashirim 2:16*).
8. Trust is the most significant ingredient in any relationship. If we work on our Bitachon and learn to increase our trust in Hashem, we will come to feel His trustworthiness and forge what the משך חכמה refers to as the ultimate connection to Hashem (דבקות).
9. Shlomo Hamelech taught us in Shir Hashirim, that the loving relationship between a husband and wife can serve as a model for a loving relationship between the Jew and His Creator. We must work hard to strengthen our marriage relationships and they will help us to develop and strengthen our loving relationship with Hashem.
10. Rashi (*Maseches Shabbos 31*) explains that when Hillel said, "That which to you is hateful do not do to your friend," the Friend is referring to Hashem, and Rashi explains that you know the pain of a friend that lets you down, so don't do that to Hashem. That is to say, keep all of His Mitzvos, which He desires for our own good, and don't disappoint Him. Strengthening all of our human relationships can be a positive example of the dynamic of a relationship with Hashem.

Visit the Priority-1 website: www.priority-1.org for more in depth sources on this topic and to receive a weekly Shir Hashirim email with Chizuk about the love between us and our Creator and an email from the Eliezer Institute, for Chizuk in Bitachon.

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Organize a lecture in your shul that will guide you in enhancing your relationship with Hashem.

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