

Ahavah – Another Kind of Love

by Lois Tverberg

But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. – Luke 6:27-28



Hebrew has very few words that are abstract and do not have a physical component. As a result, verbs that we consider mental activities usually also describe a physical outcome as well. The word for listen, *shema*, also means to obey — the result of listening. Likewise, the verb for see, *ra'ah*, can mean to respond to a need.

It is helpful to know that this is also true for the word for love, *ahavah* (a-hah-VAH). Besides our conventional meaning, *ahavah* also can mean “to act lovingly toward,” or “to be loyal to.” In ancient treaties, an enemy king who signed a covenant of peace with another king would pledge to “love” the king — meaning to act loyally, not necessarily to have warm thoughts about him. When the Israelites were commanded to love God with all of their hearts as part of their covenant, it isn’t so much a demand for passionate feelings as much as to utterly commit their lives to him as their only God.

Understanding this aspect of love can give us some wisdom about Jesus’ words. For instance, when he says, “Love your enemies,” he may have been thinking of our actions toward them more than having affection toward them within ourselves. His words to “love our enemies” seem to be synonymous with the next phrase, “do good towards those who hate you” — treat them fairly, don’t act in revenge, be kind no matter how unkind they are to you. When someone acts cruelly towards us, we don’t need to lie to ourselves about what they are like. But if we do our best to show love, our feelings are bound to change over time.

This Hebraic definition of the word “love” also teaches us that loving a person must include action, not just mental feelings. We cannot fully obey God’s command to “love our neighbor”

by just thinking nice things about them. To love them encompasses getting up off our chair and showing them God's love by helping them in any way that we can.