

HEBREW WORD STUDY:

Ahava

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In Portuguese it's called "saudade" and means "the feeling of intense longing for a person or place." The Chinese say "yuanfen." And to the Swahili, "upendo" is affection and care. The ancient Hebrew word "ahava" that is often translated as "love" in the Bible has a unique meaning too. Sadly, this amazing Hebrew word is hidden behind the nonchalant English term that everyone uses for everything. If only we would allow the Bible to be a type of dictionary could we really grasp this and other important concepts.

The Scriptures are full of teaching, history and laws. The Bible should also be our dictionary. This means we should allow the Scriptures to help us understand the words that it uses. The Bible should be used to interpret the Bible. And the Bible should be used to define words today. The best way to understand words like faith, hope, and love is through usage in the Scriptures and the original language of the Scripture - Hebrew. It is a living language. Hebrew is a power-filled force that helps us better know the Bible and the Bible's author. Each Hebrew letter is a sign, a symbol, a sound, and a number. By digging into the depths of the original language of the Bible we can best grasp its message.

Love. The English term has many meanings. In modern thought love is an emotion that can be turned on and off like a light switch. The story is told of a young man who told his father at breakfast one morning that he was going to get married.

"How do you know you're ready to get married?" asked the father. "Are you in love?"

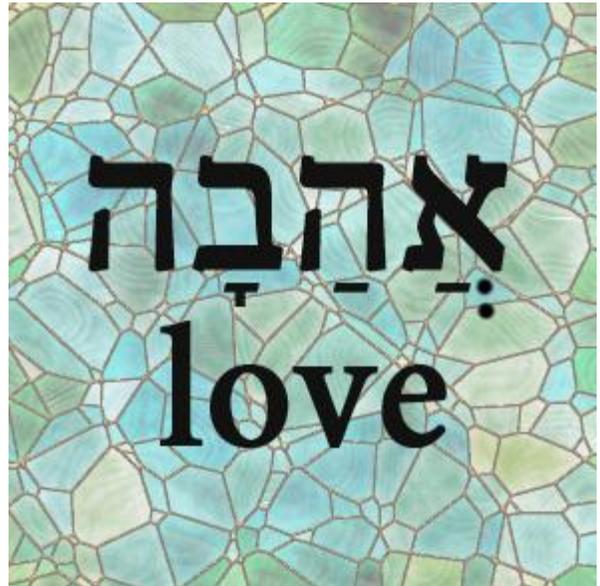
"I sure am," said the son. "How do you know you're in love?" asked the father.

"Last night as I was kissing my girlfriend good-night, her dog bit me and I didn't feel the pain until I got home."

Love or "ahava" in the Hebraic mind is very different in today's culture. In the Hebrew, love is connected directly with action and obedience. Strong's Exhaustive Dictionary defines ahava as "to have affection, sexually or otherwise, love, like, to befriend, to be intimate." It brings to

mind the idea of longing for or breathing for another. Hebraically ahava is a verb and a noun, it is an act of doing. Ahava is not just a feeling. To get a clear understanding of ahava, let's examine the Hebrew word itself and learn how to love Hebraically.

First, most Hebrew words can be broken down to a three-consonant root word that contains the essence of the word's meaning. The root word of ahava is "ahav." The term ahav in Hebrew means, "to give." True ahava, true love, is more concerned about giving than receiving. Being the center of someone's attention isn't love. And love isn't about getting some feeling or fix. Ahava is about giving devotion and time. Giving is the vehicle of love. YHWH so loved the world that He GAVE His only Son. Meaningful relationships have mutual giving. Love may focus on receiving, but ahava is all about giving. There is a difference. Consider that the Hebrew word "ahava" is not an emotion but an action. It is not something that happens "to you" but a condition that you create when you give. You don't "fall" in love – you give love! The Hebrew word "ahava" is spelled "aleph, hei, bet, hei." The root word ahav is spelled "aleph, hei, bet." These Hebrew letters reveal a secret of love hidden for thousands of years. This secret is exposed through the meaning behind each Hebrew letter in "ahav." Hang on for some amazing and alarming Hebrew insights!



Hebrew is read from right to right to left. The first letter of the Hebrew alphabet is also the first letter in "ahav." This is the aleph. The letter aleph is the number one. Aleph symbolizes the one and only Eternal Elohim / God. In Revelation 22:13, Y'shua called Himself the Aleph and the Tav. Aleph is a picture of YHWH and His creation. There is one YHWH. Y'shua said that this is the number one commandment. "The first of all commandments is, Shema O

Yisra'el; the Master YHWH is our Elohim, the Master YHWH is Echad: and you shall love the Master YHWH with all your lev (heart), and with all your being, and with all your mind, and with all your strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like it, namely this; You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There are no other commandments greater than these," Mark 12:29-31. Ahava starts with Aleph. Real ahava starts with loving YHWH first. Then, as a person has a relationship with YHWH, one can love his neighbor



properly.

The next letter of ahav is the “hei.” The letter “hei” is the fifth letter of the aleph-bet. Five is the number of chesed/grace. It is highly symbolic. There are five books of the Torah, five fingers on the hand, and King David gathered five smooth stones to kill Goliath. It is through grace or chesed that YHWH loves us. Mankind loves YHWH back through the fifth letter hei. How? Ahava is shown to YHWH through hei – through the five books of the Torah. “If you love me, obey my mitzvot / commandments. If a man loves Me, he will guard My words, and My Abba will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our stay with Him,” said Y’shua in John 14:15, 23. The hei is the means that a person expresses ahava. You love and give to YHWH by your actions of obedience.



The form of the letter hei, the number five shows how to correctly love YHWH and man. The three lines of hei are a picture of loving YHWH with thought, deed, and words. The top horizontal line is the realm of thought. A person’s thoughts should be focused upward on YHWH and His word. The vertical line to the right is speech. From the abundance of the heart/mind/horizontal line, the mouth speaks. Speech comes directly from thought. The unattached line to the left is deed. Though actions should be connected to our intentions, they often are not.

“There are many plans in a man’s heart; nevertheless the counsel of YHWH shall stand,” Mishlei / Proverbs 19:21. Man is to unite the three lines through devotion and service. Loving YHWH with thoughts, words, and deeds is the goal of the hei.

The Beit is the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It is the third letter in “ahav.” This letter vividly demonstrates the purpose of all creation. How? Beit is a picture of a house. YHWH created the world to be a dwelling place in this world below. The first letter in the Torah is a beit, found in the word “Beresheet.” And the tabernacle was made to create a bayit, or a house, for YHWH. “Know you not that you are the temple of YHWH, and that the Spirit of YHWH dwells in you?” 1 Corinthians 3:16. The objective of loving YHWH is to be conformed to His image and represent Him to the world. The two are to walk together. Beit, is also the number two. YHWH plus His servant equals two. Yet in the beit, the two shall become one. Y’shua said, “For where two, or three will assemble together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them,” Matthew 18:20. Ahava starts with loving YHWH first and foremost through word, deed, and thought. This type of ahava creates a house for YHWH to inhabit. You make a dwelling place or house for YHWH when you show love by giving to others.

In review, the Hebrew root word for love is “ahav,” spelled “aleph, hei, bet.” The aleph reminds us that we are to love YHWH first. Hei shows us to express that love by conforming our thoughts, words, and deeds to the five books of the Torah. When love is directed first to YHWH, then a beit, a house, is built to sustain His presence. Wow! Ahava is the greatest!

Remember that love is giving. It is not receiving. It isn't even offering. It is giving. When you love someone you give time, attention, and all of yourself. To get a small glimpse of the Father's love, just imagine giving up your favorite child to die in the place of a heinous death row inmate. That's what He did for you. While you deserved to die for your sinful Torah breaking the Father gave His only Son to perish in your place. He also gave us His Torah and commandments so that we could love Him and love other people. Ahava is actually the reason for the Torah. “Love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments: Do not commit adultery; do not murder; do not steal, do not covet; and whatever other commandment—all are summed up by this: Love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Love, therefore, is the fulfillment of the law,” Romans 13:8-10.

Ahava is the sum and goal everything in the Bible. True ahava is rooted in deep relationships. You can't intimately love someone unless you intimately know them. We know YHWH through His word. We connect with YHWH through acting out His will. Our love for YHWH is called obedience. Deuteronomy 11:1, “Love YHWH and keep his requirements, his decrees, his laws and his commands always.” When you really love YHWH you give Him every bit of your life. Your submission to the lifestyle of the Scriptures is the world's proof that we love Him and are committed to YHWH. “This is how we are sure that we have come to know Him: by keeping His commands. The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” yet doesn't keep His commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly in him the love of YHWH is perfected. This is how we know we are in Him: the one who says he remains in Him should walk just as He walked,” 1 John 2:3-6.



The Messiah said that we prove our love to YHWH by obeying His commandments in John 14:15. He also said that we show the world we are His disciples by our ahava for one another. Acting kindly and showing goodness to other people is how unbelievers should be able to tell if we are righteous or not. James 2:8 says, “If you really keep the royal law found in the

Scriptures then love your neighbor as you love yourself.” You are actually fulfilling the Law of YHWH when you carry someone’s burdens. The Hebrew word for commandment is “mitzvah.” This term literally means “good deed.” When you obey the mitzvot you are doing good deeds towards other people. When you are acting in love, just one simple small act of kindness is equal to all the sacrifices in the Temple. Read that again... When you are acting in love, just one simple small act of kindness is equal to all the sacrifices in the Temple. Your gentleness to that special person in your family who drives you crazy is equal to perfectly observing the Sabbath, if love is your motivation.

Keeping the commandments is how we walk in YHWH’s love in this dark world. “If you keep my mitzvot, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love,” said Y’shua in John 15:10. If you want to have the same oneness with YHWH as the Messiah had then you must love YHWH by submitting to Him. This is where love gets messy though. There are literally thousands of mitzvot / commandments in the Bible. The sages of Judaism have counted 613 commands just in the first five books of the Scriptures! A survey of the Newer Testament finds over 1,000 different and distinct directives. With so much to do, where is a person to start?

An answer to this important question can be found in Matthew 19. Here in this chapter a man comes to Messiah and asks how he can inherit eternal life. The Savior tells him to “keep the commandments” and then specifically discusses the 10 Commandments with him. It seems that the big 10 are good starting place until you read a little further. The young man said that he was blameless in his observance. Y’shua said he lacked something. What could be wrong with a person who had not broken YHWH’s divine law? Well, Y’shua tested the man by telling him to sell all he had, show his love to the poor, and then become a disciple. The man went away sad. Even though he had perfect Torah observance, he lacked love. We never read of him again in the Scriptures.

Love must be our motivation for any Torah keeping. Our submission to the 10 Commandments has to start with ahava. Obedience without love is lifeless religion that only leads to more death. Rules without relationship leads to rebellion. “Indeed, if you keep the royal law prescribed in the Scripture, Love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing well. But if you show favoritism, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the entire law, yet fails in one point, is guilty of breaking it all. For He who said, Do not commit adultery, also said, Do not murder. So if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you are a lawbreaker. Speak and act as those who will be judged by the law of

freedom. For judgment is without mercy to the one who hasn't shown mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment," James 2:8-13. How often do you look for opportunities to share the love of YHWH with other people? Get this major point - when you love your neighbor you are most like Y'shua.

The Jewish Talmud tells of a man who came to a rabbi and said he would convert if the rabbi could teach him the whole Torah while he stood on one foot. The Rabbi replied, "do to others what you want done unto you for this is the whole of Torah." The man quickly converted as he learned Torah from that one passage and that one foot.

The letter of the law says "do not murder" but the Spirit of the Torah says to not create any circumstances where another person could be harmed. This is loving your neighbor as you love yourself.

We show our love to YHWH through obedience to His commandments. YHWH shows His love towards us through His grace. When a person is born again they receive the Father's love through unmerited favor and mercy. Grace, or "chesed" in Hebrew, is YHWH's gift of love to us. We don't deserve it and we can't earn it. Like the love a mother shows to a newborn baby, YHWH loves us though we have done nothing but cause Him pain. It is an unending love. "The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when Israel sought for rest, YHWH appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you," Jeremiah 31:2-3. YHWH's chesed should empower us to be faithful during the stress of life. He has said, "my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Again, YHWH loves us by showering his grace upon us on good and bad days.

The Hebrew people were chosen by YHWH from the entire world to be a royal priesthood and a peculiar people through His Torah. YHWH chose them and chose you because of His grace. Now you chose to love Him daily by following His commandments. Deuteronomy 7:7-9 tells us, "YHWH did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because YHWH loved you and kept the oath He swore to your forefathers that He brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh King of Egypt.



Know therefore that YHWH is elohim; He is faithful, keeping His covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commands." Accept the Torah as YHWH's loving instructions for your life. Decide to love Him by loving people and making ahava your motivation. Do the mitzvot to help others.

An amazing ahava story is found in Genesis 29 when Jacob worked for Rachel for many years. The years seemed to him but a few days, for the love he had for her. The Torah is not a burden when it is motivated by ahava. Walking in faithful obedience should simply be the overflow of our love to YHWH. In his book Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis wrote, "Do not waste your time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor act as if you did. As soon as we do this, we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less."

Love isn't about getting some feeling or fix, it is about giving devotion and time. It is better to give than receive. And when true love is found a person is never the same. However, do you consider YHWH as your true love? "And now Israel, what does YHWH your Elohim require of you, but to fear YHWH your Elohim, to have your walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve YHWH your Elohim with all your lev and all your being. To guard the mitzvot of YHWH, and His rulings, which I commanded you this day for your good," Deuteronomy 10:12, 13. Moshe is saying that all YHWH wants from Israel is love! He wants Israel to be devoted to Him alone. He wants you!



It is simply amazing that what Y'shua called the "greatest commandment" in all of the Torah is usually ignored by most teachers, preachers, and even rabbis. Think about it. Just how many sermons have you heard on the subject of "loving YHWH?" How many Messianic Bible studies have you attended when you discussed how to properly love the Creator? People will talk about tithing or church attendance but very little is studied on the issue of loving YHWH. Ahava is the commandment that is most important in YHWH's eyes. YHWH wants His children to love Him properly. "And you shall ahava the Master YHWH with all your

heart, and with all your being, and with all your mind, and with all your strength: this is the first commandment," said Messiah Y'shua in Mark 12:29-31.

How do you love YHWH? How exactly can you love someone you can't see or touch? What does it mean to love Him with all of your heart, being, and resources? To answer these questions let's return again to the word "love" and better understand what YHWH desires.

First, take to mind that Y'shua never told us to "love YHWH." This is because He never spoke English. The Jewish Messiah spoke Hebrew and said to "ahavta YHWH." The puppy love of today's English is much different than the devotion Y'shua called for when He spoke in Hebrew. In modern thought love is an emotion. The Hebrew concept of love is very different. "Therefore ahavta YHWH your Elohim and guard His charge," Deuteronomy 11:1. In the Hebrew, love is connected directly with action and obedience.

Again, the primitive root word "ahav" means to "have affection, sexually or otherwise, love, like, to befriend, to be intimate." It brings to mind the idea of longing for or breathing for the Creator. Hebraically ahava is a verb; it is an act of doing something. It is not just a feeling. Ahava is also connected to appetite. To ahava YHWH is to crave Him and His Word. All throughout the Bible ahava is related directly to Torah. Obedience to what the Torah commands is the way mankind loves YHWH. "If you love me, obey my mitzvot. If a man loves Me, he will guard My words, and My Abba will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our stay with Him," said Messiah Y'shua in John 14:15, 23. To ahavta YHWH, you must walk in submission to YHWH's will and crave that your life is pleasing unto Him.

When you love YHWH then your deepest desire is to connect with Him. "Torah study is the way to discover this path of meaning. Torah Chayim - literally the book "instructions for living" is YHWH's communication to the world. It's the ultimate repository for wisdom on how to succeed at marriage, parenting, and community building, and fixing the world. That's because Torah is the mind of Elohim. The sign of successful Torah study is when it becomes an insatiable addiction. If something doesn't make sense, you will rack your brains to figure it out. And every time you succeed in working it out, the pleasure makes you want more and more. This level is called 'Ahavat torah' - true love of Torah. You become so overwhelmed that Torah study becomes your very essence and you want to absorb as much as you can. Torah study ingrains in us the idea that Elohim is the infinite source of all wisdom and defines the ultimate in "meaning." Therefore personal goals and desires cannot compare, and you'll drop anything which is not consistent with the will of YHWH," wrote one teacher.



Our Torah says, "You shall love YHWH your Elohim with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your possessions." When you love YHWH with all of your heart or "lev," you are basically losing self to Torah. This is when your will is totally compliant to Divine will in all areas of life. "To love Elohim is not an emotional feeling. To love Elohim the way He desires us to love Him, means to totally give ourselves over to Him - to surrender, to relinquish and to abandon ourselves to Him, regardless of how we feel, what we think or what we desire. It means to set aside our life, so that His Life can come forth from our hearts. A perfect Scripture that sums up what it means to ahava YHWH is Matthew 16:24, "If any man will come after Me,

let him deny himself, and take up his execution stake and follow me," wrote Chuck Missler in his book "The Way of Agape."

Ahava means to "give." When you love you give to others. YHWH so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son. This type of ahava changed the world. When you love in the same way your world can change too.

When you love YHWH with all of your soul you are reconnecting to the original intention of Torah. YHWH created man to be in direct communication and following the mitzvot restores this fellowship. To love YHWH is to obey Torah and therefore bridge the gap between man and the Almighty. When your actions line up with YHWH's word it is like your soul is returning to the Gan Eden. Compliance with the commandments or "mitzvot" creates an attachment to the eternal. In fact, according to Strong's Exhaustive Dictionary the root word to the term "mitzvot" or "commandments" is "tsavah" which literally means to "constitute or enjoin." The mitzvot of Torah enjoin Israel back to YHWH.



But, if this is true, then the opposite is also true. Sin, or Torah breaking, separates humanity from the holy. Torahlessness reveals a lack of love for YHWH! Don't miss this... "torahlessness reveals a lack of love for YHWH." Sin is really an expression of love of self-more than love for YHWH. Loving YHWH with all of your soul is returning to the ancient paths and living the Word. It is becoming like Y'shua and being the "word made flesh." This also means coming to grips with the issue of satisfaction.

Remember that the word "ahava" suggests craving. People have an inward craving and desire to love but they fill this void with love of stuff, or people, or self. When your soul is devoted to YHWH, you accept the emet that YHWH has not cheated us. The world only has an appearance of satisfaction - having money, "fitting in," eating anything, and carefree living will never satiate your inner craving to love YHWH and receive His love.

Finally, to love YHWH with all of your resources or possessions is to serve Him with all that you have and all that you are. This type of ahava is deep. Y'shua once came in contact with a rich man who kept many of the mitzvot but did not fully devote himself to YHWH. "And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Tov Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal chayim? And Y'shua said unto him, why do you call me tov? No one is tov, except one, that is YHWH. You know the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your abba and your mother. And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up. Now when Y'shua heard these things, he said to him, yet you lack one thing: sell all that you have, and distribute unit to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich," Luke 18:18-23. The

man had to do something, to sell all he had and follow Y'shua, to prove his love for YHWH. The proof is the actions, not just the words.

Let's look again to a quote from Deuteronomy - "Therefore ahavta YHWH your Elohim and guard His charge, and His commandments always," Deuteronomy/Devarim 11:1. Here the emet, the truth is very clear. To ahavta YHWH you will obey His commandments / mitzvot always. No matter what it cost. If you really love YHWH you will obey Him.

Have you accepted a counterfeit in place of loving YHWH? Are there areas in your life that you need to fully turn over to YHWH? Do you wish to really love Him, to really obey Him? Paul wrote that "these three remain: emunah (faith), hope (tikvah), and love (ahava) and the greatest of these is ahava." The main point of life is ahava. You have been granted breath to love others and to love YHWH. The word "ahava" helps us to finally understand YHWH's true plan of love. And though we've learned much, there is so much more in the Bible about ahava. Do a word study on "love" from the Older AND the Newer Testament and find the real truth regarding this issue. Your life may never be the same...

- For YHWH so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. - John 3:16
- I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of YHWH, who loved me and gave himself for me. - Galatians 2:20
- Know therefore that YHWH your Elohim is Elohim; he is the faithful Elohim, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands. - Deuteronomy 7:9
- For YHWH loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones. - Psalm 37:28
- I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me. - Proverbs 8:17
- This is how YHWH showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since YHWH so loved us, we also ought to love one another. - 1 John 4:9-11
- And so we know and rely on the love YHWH has for us. YHWH is love. Whoever lives in love lives in YHWH, and Elohim in him. - 1 John 4:16
- We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love YHWH," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love YHWH, whom he has not seen. - 1 John 4:19-20
- This is how we know who the children of YHWH are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of YHWH; nor is anyone who does not love his brother. - 1 John 3:10
- So be very careful to love YHWH your Elohim. - Joshua 23:11

- The Savior replied: "'Love the YHWH your Elohim with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' - Matthew 22:37-39

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