



LOVE IN RELATIONSHIPS

Va'ad #2 Outline for the TMI Mussar Kallah 2023
by Julie Dean and Helaine Sheias

Introduction

We recognize the many varied and valid teachings and practices that may be shared on the subject of *Ahavah* in our Relationships. We have chosen to narrow the field for our focus in this *va'ad* to interpreting and enacting the commandment to “Love your neighbor as yourself” from Leviticus 19:18. Using Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler’s *Mussar* text *Kuntrus HaChessed Michtav M’Eliyahu*, volume 1 “The Source of Love,” we will explore how actions of ‘giving’ create an opportunity to “love our neighbors as ourselves.”

- I. **Welcoming**
- II. **Centering:** *Epitaph* - By Merrit Malloy

When I die
 Give what’s left of me away
 To children
 And old men that wait to die.
 And if you need to cry,
 Cry for your brother
 Walking the street beside you.
 And when you need me,
 Put your arms
 Around anyone
 And give them
 What you need to give to me.
 I want to leave you something,
 Something better
 Than words
 Or sounds.

Look for me
 In the people I’ve known
 Or loved,
 And if you cannot give me away,
 At least let me live on in your eyes
 And not your mind.
 You can love me most
 By letting hands touch hands
 By letting bodies touch bodies,
 and by letting go
 Of children
 That need to be free.
 So, when all that’s left of me
 Is love,
 Give me away.



Alan Morinis writes: “That which a person gives to another is never lost. It is an extension of one’s own being. One can see a part of oneself in the person to whom one has given. This is the attachment between one person and the other to which we give the name “love.” From: With Heart in Mind

Journaling:

- How do you understand the connection between love and giving?

The intention of this journaling is to prepare ourselves for our *va’ad* discussion on *ahavah*. It is intended to help us become aligned with concepts and feelings about Love in Relationships and the power of *ahavah* and giving.

Discussion:

- How do you understand ‘an extension of one’s own being’? What would that look like or feel like for you?
- Reflect on a current relationship in which you can see yourself giving to another. How does this exchange deepen your bond?

III. Receiving the Commandment:

לֹא־תִקֶּם וְלֹא־תִטּוֹר אֶת־בְּנֵי עַמְּךָ וְאֶהְבֵּת לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמִוֶּךְ אֲנִי יְהוָה

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against members of your people. Love your fellow

[Israelite] as yourself: I am יהוה (Leviticus 19:18).

This verse presents the act of “loving others” as a commandment, mitzvah and obligation. As we perform acts of love, we have an opportunity to notice the quality of our heart moving from *timtum halev* (closed heart) to *shivron halev* (opened, softened/broken heart). As our inner experience of *ahavah* aligns with our outer actions, we experience an increasing spiritual connection with ourselves, other people and God.



Discussion:

- In your *Mussar* practice, what motivates or inspires you to engage in intentional acts of *ahavah*?
- In what ways do you understand acts of love as *kedusha*/holiness?

IV. **Integrating *Ahavah* and Giving** - A symbiotic relationship.

The following is an excerpt from Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler's *Mussar* text: *Kuntrus HaChesed Michtav M'Eliyahu*, volume 1 "The Source of Love."

**Note: 'Vestigial' means forming a very small remnant of something that was once much larger.*

Reading One: *"But since most people's power of giving remains at this *vestigial level, they tend to restrict their giving and their love to a narrow circle of relatives and friends. They look on everyone else as strangers and deal with them in ways dominated by the power of taking; envy, exploitation, grasping and greed rule the day."*

Journaling:

- In what ways does this text resonate with you?
- How do you differentiate between the love you feel for your familiar circle of relatives and friends and how you may approach strangers?

Reading Two: *"If one were only to reflect that a person comes to love the one to whom one gives, one would realize that the only reason the other person seems a stranger to them is because they have not yet given to that person; they have not taken the trouble to show the other friendly concern. If I give to someone, I feel close to them; I have a share in their being. It follows that if I were to start bestowing good upon everyone I come into contact with, I would soon feel that they are all my relatives, all my loved ones. I now have a share in them all; my being has extended into all of them."*



Journaling:

- Think about your experiences of giving to a stranger or someone you do not know well. How does 'giving' draw you closer to that person?
- How have you experienced *ahavah* as an authentic/genuine act of giving?
- How do you understand/perceive "I now have a share in them all; my being has extended into all of them?"

Reading Three: *"Someone who has been granted the merit to reach this sublime level can understand the command, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" in its literal sense. "As yourself: without distinction; as yourself: in actual fact." By giving to them of yourself you will find in your soul that you and they are indeed one; you will feel in the clearest possible manner that they really are to you "as yourself."*

Journaling:

- How does giving to another create a bond between two people, even if it is a simple exchange?
- Describe your understanding of how another person can be to you "as yourself."

IV. **Developing *Ahavah* in our Relationships**

Many people talk about loving others. Our *Mussar* practice challenges us to walk our talk by creating small, doable practices for us to enact. Together, each of us will first set a personal *kavanah*/intention for creating more *ahavah* in the world and in our hearts. Following this, we will each choose a *kabbalah*/action for the week ahead.

1. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato's classic Mussar text of the 18th century *Path of the Just*:
"External motions stimulate internal ones."
2. *Sefer HaChinuch* (Book of Education) – "the heart follows the deed."



Journaling:

- Set an intention for your practice. Consider these questions: Why practice *ahavah*? What is your *ratzon*/desire for increasing *ahavah* in relationships?

V. Enacting *Ahavah* through *Kabbalat*

As you consider options for walking the wisdom of ‘loving your neighbor as yourself’ you may find another *middah* helpful as a guide for your practice. You may choose from this list of complimentary *middot* or come up with one on your own. Please create or choose a *kabbalah* that you can commit to for the next week of daily *Mussar* practice.

The word for love in Hebrew, “ahavah”, has the same root and connotation as the word for giving in Hebrew.

<i>Middah</i>	<i>Kabbalah</i> examples
<i>Shmirat HaLashon</i> - Mindful Speech	Three times a day, practice giving ‘ <i>divrei chizuk</i> ’ - words of encouragement to three different people.
<i>Kavod</i> - Honor	Each day, create a time for greeting everyone you meet with a smile.
<i>Rachamim</i> - Compassion	Cultivate an <i>Ayin Tov</i> (a good eye) by giving people the benefit of the doubt. Note a positive quality in each person you encounter.
<i>Shtikah</i> -Silence	Commit to two conversations a day for practicing compassionate, active listening.
<i>Nedivut</i> - Generosity	Each day, find two ways to give of your time, money, skills or talents to others.
<i>Chesed</i> - Lovingkindness	Each day, listen and look for what others need. Go out of your way to help someone else
Choose your own	Create your own



VI. **Reflecting:**

Chofetz Chaim: *Lesson a Day*, p. xxvi

The mouth is the intersection of this physical and spiritual essence. It ushers a human's Godly essence into the physical world in the form of the words it speaks. The ability to speak is a bridge between the physical, earth-bound human and the spiritual being. It provides a person with the capacity to activate one's spiritual self. When God took the dust of the earth, formed a human, and breathed into them a Godly soul, God created a unique creature containing within themselves both the spiritual and the physical. It is that duality that endows us with free will.

VII. **Closing:**

1. Rabbi Lawrence Kelemen is the founder and current Rosh Kollel of the Center for Kehillah Development.

During the last 13 years I've had the privilege of studying an essentially "ancient" sect of Jews in Jerusalem who conduct their lives as their ancestors have for thousands of years. These people are single-mindedly committed to the precise preservation of their culture's insights and customs, as were their parents and grandparents. Through their eyes I am gaining a glimpse of how Jewish communities from long ago approached life in general and educational issues in particular. These traditional Jews represent an anthropological gold mine. I will never forget the night when one traditional Jewish scholar spoke about the centrality of love. While his students sat beside him ready to absorb that evening's instruction, their teacher lifted a worn volume of the Torah, opened it, and began to read: "See that I [God] have placed before you life and good, and death and evil; and I am commanding you to love..."

The elderly scholar paused, his eyes closed, deep in thought. Then, with his eyes still closed, he repeated, "I have placed before you life... and I am commanding you to love." He brought the book closer to his eyes, squinted to see the tiny print, and read from the 11th century commentary of the Spanish scholar, Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra: "This verse teaches us that life is for love."



Merging Into One: Loving Self, Others and The Divine



The Talmudic master closed his eyes again. Then he repeated, “Life is for love.”
Every creature has its purpose, and ours is to forge relationships, to create closeness.

2. This is what the Holy One said to Israel: My children, what do I seek from you? I seek no more than that you love one another and honor one another.” (p.177 *Telushkin, Jewish Wisdom*) *Tanna d’Vai Eliyahu*, medieval rabbinic work, most likely dating from the 10th century.