

JUDAISM FOR LIVING SERIES



LEARNING TO LOVE AGAIN SOURCE SHEET AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PROJECT
INSPIRE.
A PROGRAM OF aish HaTorah

Love Revisited:

Everyone is looking for love, but often “in all the wrong places”. Love is an amazing pleasure and is available to everyone if we would just accustom ourselves to adopt the following guaranteed formula:

Look for the good in others and associate them with that good.

You will immediately feel warmth towards them and connection. Most of us instead, are habituated to see the negative and that blocks us from loving others.

Let's take a lesson from how we view our kids. Most of us are hardwired to see the good in them, even though we are intimately familiar with the not so good. This G-d given commitment to seeing their good, is supposed to teach us how to love everybody else, by looking for their good!

Parents Don't Divorce Their Kids! - What We Need to Learn about Spouses:

Isn't it funny that most normal people don't divorce their kids, no matter how much aggravation their kids might cause them? Yet, they often divorce their spouses. This is hard to believe, because their spouses they chose freely, while their children were sort of chosen for them by G-d.

Q: Why do you think this is so?

Husbands and wives need to know that just because they chose to see the virtues in one another at one point in their marriage, doesn't mean this commitment will last forever. **The commitment to seeing the virtue in our spouses must be constantly renewed.** If we are steadfast in that commitment, our love should actually grow over time, as our knowledge of who they really are expands through shared life experiences. **This is one of the key ingredients to staying in love with our spouses. Focus on the virtue, nurture the virtue.**

EXERCISE:

Consider the following Exercise to help you focus on the commitment to seeing your spouse (or others) positively. Since life happens, and we often habitually focus on the negative, nurturing a commitment to see virtue in others takes proactive measures.

A good idea is to write out on an index card (in old days) or maybe a message on your phone, the key virtues of your spouse. Review them a couple of times a day, but particularly before you see each other (after being apart for a while) or when you anticipate a difficult upcoming interaction.

Seeing the virtue, and “identifying them with that virtue”, helps prevent reflexively turning to the negative, and provides a more supportive emotional framework for positive relationship outcomes.

EXPANDING YOUR GREAT RELATIONSHIPS:

Even if we take love for spouses and children off the table, how does one generate “love on demand” for relatives, co-workers, friends and humanity?

And what about those relationships that are somewhat negative, yet can’t be avoided because they are a constant in your life?

The first step is to apply the same principle of **looking for the good in others** as we naturally do with our children and should do with our spouses. The difference with others outside of the family unit is that we are **less motivated** in seeing their good side.

Let’s take a look at the Torah source for loving others and maybe we’ll gain some insight about how to get motivated.

SOURCE 1: Chumash Vayikra (Leviticus) 19:18 - The Golden Rule

Love your friend like yourself. (Vayikra 19:18)

The directive is to love your friend.

Q: What do you think the phrase “like yourself” ,in this commandment, comes to teach?

There are many answers to this important question. Let’s take a look at two of them:

1. View Others as you want Them to View You.

The popular statement “Don’t do to others as you wouldn’t want done to you”, is derived from the verse , “Love your friend like yourself”. Realize that since you would want other people to view you in a favorable light, so too you should make an effort to see them in the same way. Get into his/her shoes by realizing that you walk in basically the same pair.

Q: How would viewing people in this way change our interactions with them?

It certainly would keep us more neutral, with less judgment and more room for creating positive outcomes.

2. The Need to See Ourselves as Good.

Many of us are habituated to see the negative in others which blocks us from developing warmth and connection with them. **One reason for this is an unwitting negative psychological projection of how we are feeling about ourselves.** If we see the negative in ourselves, we more naturally see the same things in others. However, if we are in touch with our souls (the good in us) we become more open to connecting to the souls (good in them) of others.

Q: Does this resonate with you? What does this suggest about our need to identify more with our souls?

Who do I want to be?

We've stumbled onto a very important point about life; If we are not proactive, it's really easy to revert to negative learned habits – many of which we are not even so conscious of!

Take a look at the seminal source for choice – free will- in the Torah:

SOURCE 2: *Chumash Devarim (Deuteronomy) 30:19 – Choice in the Torah*

I have placed before you life and death, blessing and curse, and you shall choose life, so that you will live... (Devarim 30:19)

There is a tremendous amount to say and learn about this important passage in the Torah, which we will save for a later and more thorough analysis, however one point should jump out at us given the discussion we have been having.

Surprisingly, the Torah defines free will as a choice between life and death, and seems to point out that unless you “choose life” the default is death.

Q: Would you have thought that in order to live, you had to choose life? Or would you have said, just avoid choosing death? What does this tell us about real life?

Take a look how Stephen Covey beautifully describes this dynamic:

SOURCE 3: *7 Habits of Highly Effective People Stephen R. Covey.*

“Our behavior is a function of our decisions not our conditions. Highly proactive people’s behavior is a product of conscious choice, based on values rather than a product of conditions based on feelings..If we let things control us we are reactive. Proactive people can carry their own weather with them..”

Choosing proactively is “life”, while letting the “conditions of our lives” that render us merely reactive is “death”.

The choice is ours: We can act from habituated “self-interest”, ego, and the insecurity of the body and carry storm clouds of hate around with us. Or we can be proactive, touch our souls and thereby connect to the souls of others, “carrying love around with us”.

EXERCISE:

1. Take an inventory of your life and see what areas, particularly our relationships have we put on auto-pilot in a reactive mode. The first step is awareness and acknowledgment. Spend a week just noticing how much of our lives are lived from this place.
2. Take one area, and introduce a small proactive step that you feel will make a positive difference. Don't shoot too high or attack all areas at once. Living life reactively was a learned behavior, living proactively needs to be habituated as well.