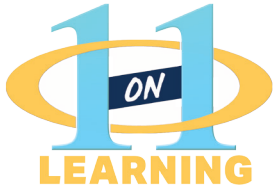


JUDAISM FOR LIVING SERIES



THE LOVE GAME SOURCE SHEET AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PROJECT
INSPIRE.
A PROGRAM OF aish HaTorah

MODULE I

LOVE IS A PUZZLE:

“Most of us have experienced being in love; the starry-eyed feeling where time stands still when we look into each other’s eyes, feeling emotionally bound as one. We know when we are in love, but have little idea how we got there and less regarding how to get back. The common perception is that finding love is a very random occurrence. Even the expression, “falling in love” suggests that love is a kind of cosmic accident one falls victim to; sort of being in the way of Cupid’s capricious arrow when both of you least expect it. Usually accidental shootings hurt, but in the case of love, its mercurial nature just adds to its mystery and power”.

We know what love feels like, but few of us know how to find it? If we had a definition, it might make it a lot easier.

Q: What is the definition of love?

Consider the following attempts to define love:

“The feeling of being cared for knowing that to someone to you mattered” – Oprah

“Love is a space of time measured by the heart.” – Marcel Proust

“Love is life. And if you miss love you miss life” – Leo Buscaglia

“Love is the feeling that you get when you meet the right person” – Anonymous

The Dilemma:

We all recognize the feelings highlighted by these quotes, but they seem to fall short in providing us with a clarity on just what love is and more importantly regarding how to get more of it in our lives.

Love appears to be a vague, ephemeral feeling that is

1. Random and accidental.
2. Happens to us with little or no effort.
3. Very beyond our control.

The Problem:

From a Jewish perspective this lack of clarity is even more troubling because the Torah doesn’t merely suggest that we love other people, it actually **commands us to love others:**

SOURCE 1: Torah Leviticus (Chapter 19:18)

V’Ahavta L’Re’echa K’mocha. Love your friend as yourself. (Vayikra 19:18)

Q: How can the Torah expect us to love others?

1. We don't have a clear definition , and furthermore;
2. Is it really possible to love on demand? It seems like you either have those feelings or you don't.
3. Also, aren't there people who each of us just can't love?

Q: So, what is the definition of love? This is really the key to unravelling this puzzle.

The Torah's Definition:

Our Torah provides us with a definition of love which we can derive from the writings of Maimonides, one of the greatest Rabbis in Jewish history.

SOURCE 2: *Maimonides Mishna Torah, Laws of Repentance (10:6)*

One does not love G-d except with the knowledge one has of Him. The love is commensurate with the knowledge. If there is little of it, there is little love, if there is a lot; there is a lot of love. (laws of teshuva 10:6)

Q: According to Maimonides what seems to be the key to love? And how does knowing how to love G-d help with people?

Let's take a look at how Maimonides describes love of G-d and see if we can take the principle and apply it to others.

Maimonides reveals to us that the key to loving G-d is knowing G-d. The more knowledge the more love. This is almost axiomatic since G-d is "all virtue"; all we have to do is know Him to Love Him – love is automatically generated by recognizing His virtues.

Q: How do you think we can apply this definition to loving other people who are a mixed bag of good and bad qualities?

Let's take a look at the following source which is based upon Maimonides formula for loving G-d:

SOURCE 3: *Rabbi Noach Weinberg Definition of Love based upon source #2 above.*

Love is the emotional pleasure we feel when we **see virtue** in another person and **identify them with that virtue.**

Rabbi Eliyahu Kramer, the "Great One of Vilna", one of the leading Rabbis of the past 500 years echoes this approach of Maimonides regarding love:

SOURCE 4: *The Vilna Goan as quoted in The River, the Kettle and the Bird (p.143)*

We love because we recognize noble qualities in others. (River, Kettle and Bird p. 143)

Q: Think about those you love. Does this definition fit the emotion that you feel and why you feel it?

The power of the definition comes alive when you see it in action for yourself. Do the following exercise. Think about someone that you love.

Q: Why do you love this person? Make a list

Q: What do you notice about this list?

Usually, people write a list of the person's virtues: They are loyal, considerate, sensitive to their feelings, loving, giving etc. If you remark, they sound like an angel, do they have any negative qualities? You answer, of course they do. However, you **associate them** with the **positive qualities** they have and **therefore you love them**.

Seeing virtue and even more importantly, associating them with that virtue generates love!

The Flipside:

Take someone you dislike.

Q: Why do you dislike them? Make a list.

Usually, people write a list of the person's negative qualities; they are arrogant, insensitive, self-centered, rude etc. Yet, somebody must love them, a mother, a wife, a friend. How is that possible? Well, they must see some good in them too. Begrudgingly, they admit I guess that must be true; but his mother, no...she is just stuck with him!

Q: Do you see that if you would focus on the good qualities of those you dislike, you would come to like them more?

Startling Conclusion:

Q: At this point, what conclusions can we draw about love? Is it possible to love on demand, and change our feelings towards those we dislike? If so, how is it possible?

What is now brought into sharp focus is that while all people are a mixed bag of good and bad characteristics, we feel love for those whom we primarily associate with virtue. The negative qualities can be compared to some shmutz on their clothing that is not really damaging their essence. Those we dislike we view primarily through the prism of their negative qualities.

Love is not a stroke of fate, a passing mood you accidentally fall in and out of. It is a choice that we all can make to focus on the virtues of others. Since it is in our hands, it can be expected of us.

The key to proactively generating love for all people is to make a choice to focus on the "virtue not the vice". Guaranteed this formula will keep you in love with those you have chosen to love (i.e., spouses, relatives, and children) and help you see another side to those you really can't stand!

LET'S GET PRACTICAL:

1. For 5 minutes each day focus on all of your family members virtues, kids, spouse etc.
2. Make a list of your spouse's virtues and review it 5 minutes before you or they come home from work each day.
3. Once a week, think about a person whom you have difficulty liking and for a few minutes try to focus on their virtues.