

JUDAISM FOR LIVING SERIES



THE LOVE GAME

SOURCE SHEET AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PROJECT
INSPIRE.
A PROGRAM OF aish HaTorah

MODULE II

In Module I we described love as the warmth one feels towards another when they see virtue in that person and “Identify them” with the virtue. Though that person certainly possesses some less than sterling qualities as well, we don’t “identify them” with those. Since we are all made up of good qualities and bad, love is a product of the choice that we are free to make to focus on another’s virtues, rather than their negative qualities.

Let’s drill down a little deeper on what is required in making the proper choice to love others. There is one relationship in the world that offers the paradigm for love; and that’s a parent and a child.

SOURCE 1: *Pirkei Avos (Ethics of the Fathers) ch.3, Mishna 18 based on Devarim 14:1 in Torah*

Beloved is man that he was created in the “image of G-d”; it is indicative of an even greater love that it was made known to man the he was created in His image, as it is said: “For in the image of **G-d, He made man**”.(Bereishis 9:6)

Beloved are the people of Israel, for they are called, **children of G-d**; it is indicative of an even greater love that it was made known to them (Israel) that they are described as “**children of G-d.**”, as it is said in the Torah, “You are children to Hashem your G-d.” (Dueteronomy 14:1)

Q: Why do you think the relationship between G-d and the Jewish People is described as the relationship between a parent and a child?

There are many different things to learn from the description of the relationship with our Creator as one of parent to child. Certainly, “how to love others” is chief amongst them. G-d gave us the human relationship of parent to child to teach us about His love for us, and to show us the proper approach to loving others.

Let’s start with a question:

Q: Whom do people love most in the world? (Can be more than 1)

Most would answer their children and their spouses.

Q: What is one fundamental difference between these relationships?

A spouse is chosen by us, yet a baby is chosen for us by G-d.

If you were to ask an expectant mother or father to be, whether they were going to love their child, they would look at you as if you fell on your head. Of course, we will love him; what a silly question.

Is it really, you answer? We just learned that love is a product of seeing virtue in others. How do you know the kid will be cute and wonderful like the Goldberg kids down the block or a terror like the Stein kids? Maybe you should wait, get to know your kid a little before jumping into such a hasty long-term commitment. Yet, no parent takes this prudent advice.

Q: Why do you suppose parents do such a foolish thing?

It must be that they know they will love them. Yet, how can they be so sure? You see G-d gave every parent and “inborn commitment” to seeing the good in their child and identifying them with that good. It’s a freebie, given to all parents to teach them how to love.

This would account for the following puzzling reality; Parents hardly ever “divorce” their kids, yet they divorce each other, more than half the time. But it’s really quite strange because each of us chose our spouse, while our kids were chosen for us by G-d. Really the numbers should be reversed!?

Q: How do you explain this?

I guess one answer is that G-d makes better choices than we do. And there is certainly some truth to that. However, there is another answer which gets us to the essence of what it means to love. When we fell in love with our spouses the first time, we naturally saw all that was good in them. But in order for that view to be sustained and even enhanced over time, we need to be committed to seeing the good in our spouses on a daily basis. Unlike with our children, this commitment isn’t hardwired when it comes to our spouses. It’s a choice which we all need to make in order to keep our love alive.

It would probably be good advice for all of us as well, to work on being better people, to make it easier for others to love us!

The Price Tag For Love Is Commitment To Seeing Virtue In Others. It’s that simple!

Q: how could you apply this in your own life to strengthen your relationships?

There are a lot of benefits to having love for more people in our lives. It’s pleasurable. It can take the place of a lot of needless negativity, and it can even help transform the people that we show love towards. How is that possible, you may ask?

SOURCE 2: *Proverbs (Mishlei) chapter 27, verse 19*

K’maim Hapanim L’Panim, k’ayn lev HaAdam. (27:19)

Just like a person’s face is reflected back to him in water, so too is a person’s behavior – reflected back at him by another.

Q: Why do you think this is so?

Well, let’s go back to why we dislike people in the first place. Isn’t it because we focus on their negative traits? It must be that by showing them kindness and warmth, which is a product of focusing on their virtues, it frees them up to focus on our virtues. It sort of has them drop their natural guard, and instead of returning negativity (focusing on our negative qualities), it allows a space for them to see us in a similar positive light to how we are viewing them.

Not only is love a deep pleasure we can get more of in life, it can upgrade our relationships, transform our important social environments, and can actually inspire others to “live into” their more aspirational selves.

Let’s take it one step further:

Q: What do you think is the underlying power that we are tapping into in the experience love?

SOURCE 3: *Love Your Neighbor as Yourself* Leviticus (Vayikra) chapter 19:18

You shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge against the members of your people; **you shall love your friend as yourself – I am Hashem. (19:18)**

There are a lot of questions one can ask on this verse, but for now, let’s focus on the end of the line in bold, **“you shall love your friend as yourself. I am Hashem?”**

Q: What questions do you have on this verse?

You might say what’s love? How do we define it? Why does the verse use the word friend and who is that referring to? All good questions, that have lots of answers.

I want to focus on a couple of other questions:

Q: What does loving oneself have to do with loving others? Couldn’t the verse have left this idea out? Also, why does the verse end with “I am Hashem”.

Many intuitively answer, that if a person doesn’t love themselves, they are incapable of truly feeling love for other people. This may be true but why?

Let’s take another look at source #1, at the beginning verse which we skipped the first time we looked at it.

SOURCE 4: *Pirke Avos (Ethics of the Fathers) ch.3, Mishna 18 based on Devarim 14:1 in Torah*

Beloved is man that he was created in the “image of G-d”; it is indicative of an even greater love that it was made known to man the he was created in His image, as it is said: “For in the image of **G-d, He made man”.**(Bereishis 9:6)

Beloved are the people of Israel, for they are called, children of G-d; it is indicative of an even greater love that it was made known to them (Israel) that they are described as “children of G-d”, as it is said in the Torah, **“You are children to Hashem your G-d.” (Dueteronomy 14:1)**

Q: Based upon the first part of this source, can you come up with an explanation for why I am Hashem directly follows, love your friend, as yourself?

One of the most important and powerful statements of all time is made in the first line of this Mishna. Man is beloved because he is created, “In the image of G-d”. Love your friend as yourself and I am Hashem are connected, to link our essence to G-d Himself. Every person has a “piece of G-d inside of them” that defines their essence – the neshama or soul. Love your friend as yourself, directs us to see our own G-dly soul, and then from that place we are able to connect to the soul in others and love them.

The neshama is the "place where all virtues reside". If you see the virtues in your own neshama (needed to love yourself) you will be able to see the virtues in others (their neshamos) and love them as well. When you drill down real deep, love turns upon us identifying more with our own souls which then allows us to connect and to love others from that same space.

Homework:

Question: At what times and in what activities do you feel most like a soul?

1. Make regular opportunities to engage in these activities.
2. Tell yourself during these times, this is who I really am.
3. Perhaps make a slogan and keep it visible during your day, when you are engaged in things which take you away from this feeling.
4. Perhaps, insert a couple of moments in other times of your day, to stop, close your eyes and recall that you are a soul and identify with that feeling.