

Fill Your Own Cup 5786 – Omer Series – Interpersonal Relationships
Session One – Loving your Fellow

1) Babylonian Talmud Yevamot 62b

They said: R. Akiva had 12,000 pairs of students from the area of Gevas until Antiparis, and they all died during one period, because they did not treat each other with respect. And the world was left barren. Until R. Akiva came to our Rabbis in the south and taught them. R. Meir, R. Yehudah, R. Yossi, R. Shimon, and R. Elazar ben Shamuah, and they upheld the Torah at that time.

It was taught that all of them died in the period from Passover until Shavuot.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת יבמות דף סב:

אמרו: שנים עשר אלף זוגים תלמידים היו לו לרבי עקיבא, מגבת עד אנטיוכוס, וכולן מתו בפרק אחד מפני שלא נהגו כבוד זה לזה, והיה העולם שם, עד שבא ר"ע אצל רבותינו שבדרום, ושנאה להם ר"מ ור' יהודה ור' יוסי ורבי שמעון ורבי אלעזר בן שמוע, והם הם העמידו תורה אותה שעה.
תנא: כולם מתו מפסח ועד עצרת.

2) bell hooks, All About Love: New Visions

Taught to believe that the mind, not the heart, is the seat of learning, many of us believe that to speak of love with any emotional intensity means we will be perceived as weak and irrational. And it is especially hard to speak of love when what we have to say calls attention to the fact that lovelessness is more common than love, that many of us are not sure what we mean when we talk of love or how to express love.

Everyone wants to know more about love. We want to know what it means to love, what we can do in our everyday lives to love and be loved. We want to know how to seduce those among us who remain wedded to lovelessness and open the door to their hearts to let love enter. The strength of our desire does not change the power of our cultural uncertainty.

Everywhere we learn that love is important, and yet we are bombarded by its failure. In the realm of the political, among the religious, in our families, and in our romantic lives, we see little indication that love informs decisions, strengthens our understanding of community, or keeps us together. This bleak picture in no way alters the nature of our longing. We still hope that love will prevail. We still believe in love's promise.

... Individuals who choose to love can and do alter our lives in ways that honor the primacy of a love ethic. We do this by choosing to work with individuals we admire and respect; by committing to give our all to relationships; by embracing a global vision wherein we see our lives and our fate as intimately connected to those of everyone else on the planet. Commitment to a love ethic transforms our lives by offering us a different set of values to live by. In large and small ways, we make choices based on a belief that honesty, openness, and personal integrity need to be expressed in public and private decisions.

3) Leviticus 19:17-18

(17) You shall not hate your kinsfolk in your heart. Reprove your kinsfolk but incur no guilt because of them. (18) You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen. Love your fellow as yourself: I am the LORD. .

ויקרא יט:יז-יח

(יז) לֹא־תִשְׁנֵא אֶת־אָחִיךָ בְּלִבְבְּךָ הוֹכַח תּוֹכַח אֶת־עַמִּיתְךָ וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא עָלָיו חֲטָא: (יח) לֹא־תִקֹּם וְלֹא־תִטַּר אֶת־בְּנֵי עַמֶּךָ וְאֶהְבֵּת לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹד אָנֹכִי יְיָ:

<p>4) Midrash Sifra on Leviticus 19:18 (4:12) “You shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge against the children of your people”: You may take revenge of and bear a grudge against others (non-Jews). “And you shall love your neighbor as yourself”: R. Akiva says: This is an all-embracing principle in the Torah. Ben Azzai says: (Genesis 5:1) “This is the numeration of the generations of Adam” – This is an even greater principle.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">ספרא יט:יח “לא תקם ולא תטר את בני עמך” -- נוקם אתה ונוטר לעכו"ם. “וואהבת לרעך כמוך” -- רבי עקיבא אומר זה כלל גדול בתורה. בן עזאי אומר “זה ספר תולדות אדם” -- זה כלל גדול מזה.</p>
---	--

<p>5) Genesis 5:1-2 (1) This is the book of the generations of ADAM. In the day that God created ADAM, in the likeness of God made God made him; (2) male through female God created them, and blessed them, and called their name ADAM, in the day when they were created.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">בראשית ה:א-ב (א) זֶה סֵפֶר תּוֹלְדֹת אָדָם בְּיוֹם בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים אָדָם בְּדַמּוֹת אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֹתוֹ : (ב) זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בְרָאם וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שֵׁמָם אָדָם בְּיוֹם הַבְּרָאָם :</p>
--	---

<p>6) Babylonian Talmud Tractate Yomah 86a Abaye said: As it was taught in a baraita that it is stated: “And you shall love the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 6:5), which means that you shall make the name of Heaven beloved. How should one do so? One should do so in that he should read Torah, and learn Mishna, and serve Torah scholars, and he should be pleasant with people in his business transactions. What do people say about such a person? Fortunate is his father who taught him Torah, fortunate is his teacher who taught him Torah, woe to the people who have not studied Torah. So-and-so, who taught him Torah, see how pleasant are his ways, how proper are his deeds. The verse states about him and others like him: “You are My servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified” (Isaiah 49:3). But one who reads Torah, and learns Mishna, and serves Torah scholars, but his business practices are not done faithfully, and he does not speak pleasantly with other people, what do people say about him? Woe to so-and-so who studied Torah, woe to his father who taught him Torah, woe to his teacher who taught him Torah. So-and-so who studied Torah, see how destructive are his deeds, and how ugly are his ways. About him and others like him the verse states that the gentiles will say: “Men said of them: These are the people of the Lord, yet they had to leave His land” (Ezekiel 36:20)</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">תלמוד בבלי מסכת יומא פו. אבַיִי אָמַר, כְּדַתְנִינְא : “וְאֶהְבֵּת אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ”, שְׂיֵהָא שָׁם שְׂמִימִם מְתַאֲהֵב עַל יָדֶךָ. שְׂיֵהָא קוֹרָא וְשׁוֹנֵה וּמְשַׁמֵּשׁ תַּלְמִידֵי חֻכְמִים, וִיְהָא מְשָׂאוּ וּמְתַנְּנוּ בְּנַחַת עִם הַבְּרִיּוֹת, מַה הַבְּרִיּוֹת אוֹמְרוֹת עָלָיו — אֲשֶׁרֵי אָבִיו שְׁלַמְדוּ תוֹרָה, אֲשֶׁרֵי רַבּוּ שְׁלַמְדוּ תוֹרָה. אוֹי לָהֶם לְבְרִיּוֹת שְׁלֹא לָמְדוּ תוֹרָה, פְּלוֹנִי שְׁלַמְדוּ תוֹרָה — רָאוּ כְּמַה נְאִים דְּרַכְּיוֹ, כְּמַה מְתוּקָנִים מַעֲשָׂיו. עָלָיו הִכְתוּב אוֹמַר : “וַיֵּאמֶר לִי עַבְדִּי אֲתָה יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר בָּדָד אֶתְפָּאֲרִי”. אֲבָל מִי שְׁקוֹרָא וְשׁוֹנֵה וּמְשַׁמֵּשׁ תַּלְמִידֵי חֻכְמִים, וְאִין מְשָׂאוּ וּמְתַנְּנוּ בְּאֻמוּנָה, וְאִין דְּבוּרוֹ בְּנַחַת עִם הַבְּרִיּוֹת, מַה הַבְּרִיּוֹת אוֹמְרוֹת עָלָיו — אוֹי לוֹ לְפְלוֹנִי שְׁלַמְדוּ תוֹרָה. אוֹי לוֹ לְאָבִיו שְׁלַמְדוּ תוֹרָה, אוֹי לוֹ לְרַבּוֹ שְׁלַמְדוּ תוֹרָה. פְּלוֹנִי שְׁלַמְדוּ תוֹרָה — רָאוּ כְּמַה מְקוּלְקָלִין מַעֲשָׂיו וְכְמַה מְכוּעְרִין דְּרַכְּיוֹ, וְעָלָיו הִכְתוּב אוֹמַר : “בְּאֵמֹר לָהֶם עִם ה' אֱלֹהֵי וּמְאַרְצוֹ יִצְאוּ”.</p>
---	--

7) Rabbi Shai Held, Loving Our Neighbor

<https://www.hadar.org/torah-tefillah/resources/loving-our-neighbor>

No words in the Torah are better known than “love your neighbor as yourself” ([Leviticus 19:18](#)), and no words are generally seen as more significant. Indeed, no lesser a figure than R. Akiva goes so far as to declare that “love your neighbor as yourself” is the great principle of the Torah (*k’lal gadol ba-torah*; PT, Nedarim 9:4). And yet for all its manifest centrality in Jewish spirituality and ethics, the precise meaning of the verse is actually quite elusive.

What is the Torah asking for when it commands us to love? Can we really be commanded to love—or to feel anything at all, for that matter? Many people think that, since emotions cannot be controlled, they cannot be commanded. But both of these claims seem to me to be manifestly false. Understanding just how and why they are false can help us grasp the meaning of this all-important verse.

Many commentators have noticed something anomalous about our verse: The Hebrew does not say *ve-ahavta et rei’akha*, as we might expect, but rather *ve-ahavta le-rei’akha*. *Ahav* here surprisingly takes an indirect object rather than the usual accusative. We might capture this—crudely—in English as follows: The text seems to say not “love your neighbor” but “love to your neighbor.” This *le* (to) is strange, and biblical scholars have speculated about its meaning. Noting other instances where *ahav le* suggests rendering practical assistance to someone, Bible scholar Abraham Malamat argues that “love your neighbor as yourself” ought more accurately be rendered as “be useful to your neighbor as to yourself.” It would thus have a “concrete and pragmatic sense” rather than what Malamat labels an “abstract” one.¹ Our verse, Malamat insists, doesn’t deal with emotions at all; it’s about a general posture of helpfulness towards others. In an extremely stark formulation, Malamat writes: “The Bible is not commanding us to feel something—love—but to do something—to be useful or beneficial to help your neighbor.”² ...

It seems far more plausible to suggest that the Torah does indeed command emotion. Love for God in the Torah does involve a willingness to obey. But it does not indicate a willingness to obey, *and nothing more*. As Lapsley rightly asks, “Is it not possible that love can mean loyalty and obedience to the law at the same time that it bears an affective connotation, asking and even commanding people to *feel* a particular way about God?”⁸ By extension, does it not seem possible that Leviticus asks us to do good for our neighbor and also to care about her?

In general, the Torah does not drive a wedge between action and emotion; on the contrary, its ideal is to integrate them—to feel passionately about God and to observe God’s commandments, to care about people and to act caringly towards them. The argument that the Torah obligates us to *do* but not to *feel* strikes me as alien to the Torah’s vision of ethics, which asks me both to do *and* to feel. When the Torah asks for love, it is calling for doing *and* feeling, not doing *rather than* feeling...

So, while emotions cannot be simply and directly controlled, they can be cultivated and inculcated—and because of that, they can be commanded. I am not sure precisely what kind of love the Torah wants me to have for my neighbor: Obviously I cannot love everyone I know in the same way as I love my spouse or my children—nor should I want to. But it does seem clear that the Torah wants me both to “be useful” to my neighbor and also to learn to care about him. Judaism is not just about duty; it is also, crucially, about love.