

THE JEWISH CONCEPT OF LOVE

Love captivates most people throughout their lives. Love drives people to fly across the world, move cities, and perform “hand-stands” for their significant other. Love stories are among the main themes in literature, songs, and movies and a popular topic in even the most upstanding magazines and newspapers. Love causes people to fluctuate from the greatest heights of joy to the depths of depression or worse. With a divorce rate of fifty percent, and people struggling through one unfulfilled relationship to another, the need to love and be loved is one of those things we can’t seem to live with – nor live without. Why is creating and maintaining love so difficult?

Just as there are critical misconceptions about marriage that are challenging the ability of couples to build long-lasting relationships, equally misunderstood is the concept of love. As the glue which holds together marriage, the family, and society, it is worthwhile to clarify our understanding of love, what it really is and how it can be developed. In this class we will examine what love is, what the preconditions are for creating it, and how it can be strengthened within the context of being married to one’s *ezer knegdo* (soul mate)..

We will be addressing the following questions:

- ☞ How does the Jewish concept of love differ from its popular conception?
- ☞ What are the necessary preconditions for love to thrive?
- ☞ How do we explain the expression of love by soul mates for each other?
- ☞ How can we actively work on fostering love?

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INTRODUCTION. DO YOU LOVE FISH?

We expect to create our marriages in the following order: first we fall in love and then marry that person we fell in love with. But marriage is not just a product of love – it actually creates it. Indeed, one of the primary functions of marriage is to provide an arena for the fostering of love and happiness. How are these lofty goals achieved? In this section we shall explore three of the foundation stones for everlasting love that can be achieved through marriage. They are: giving to each other, appreciating each other's virtues, and the sharing of meaningful common goals.

This is how many people approach a relationship: Consciously or unconsciously, they believe love is a sensation (based on physical and emotional attraction) that magically, spontaneously generates when Mr. or Ms. Right appears. And just as easily, it can spontaneously degenerate when the magic "just isn't there" anymore. You fall in love, and you can fall out of it.

So what is love – real, lasting love? (Gila Manelson, Head to Heart, pg. 73)

Some people confuse the selfish fulfillment of their own wish list as real love. Listen to the modern description of love given by a prominent psychologist:

The sense of falling in love develops usually only with regard to such human commodities as are within reach of one's own possibilities for exchange. I am out for a bargain; the object should be desirable from the standpoint of its social value, and at the same time should want me, considering my overt and hidden assets and potentialities. Two persons thus fall in love when they feel they have found the best object available on the market, considering the limitations of their own exchange values. (Eric Fromm, The Art of Loving, pg. 3)

Fromm describes love like a good business deal. Each person loves him or herself, and therefore is willing to

give up some independence in order to increase assets by joining up with the other person. A Jewish story captures the sentiment of Fromm's description of love:

Rabbi Leib Chasman, spiritual supervisor of Chevron Yeshivah, once saw a student eating fish with great relish. "Tell me, young man," he asked him, "do you love fish?" The student answered in the affirmative. "If you love fish," replied Rabbi Chasman, "then you should have cared for the one on your plate. You should have fed it and tried to make it happy. Instead you are devouring it." As the student groped for a proper response, the rabbi explained: "Obviously, you don't love fish. You love yourself!" (from Rabbi Aharon Feldman, The River, the Kettle, and the Bird)

SECTION I. LOVE AND ONENESS

If you ask people: "How much love are you willing to invest in a relationship with someone who is clearly not your soul mate?" most people would begin to feel uncomfortable. They sense that even the smallest investment is not worth their while, since their real dream is to devote their love to the right person, their true soul mate. How can we describe and define the love we aim to achieve?

PART A. LOVE IS BLIND (TO THE SELF)

We can follow a very simple rule to clarify for ourselves what love is and what love is not. The rule is: Will the love invested lead to long-term unity or eventual separation?

The first litmus test is to figure out your motivations. Within this relationship, are you looking at what to get for yourself or looking for what you can give to the other person?

1. **Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Made in Heaven, p. 8 – Differentiating between love and lust – selfishness vs. selflessness.**

Love and lust should not be confused. While love wants to give, lust only wants to take. Love is a reciprocal sentiment, where one identifies with the wants and the needs of the beloved.

When the Torah provides a paradigm of love, it says, "You shall love your neighbor like yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). Love means feeling about another person exactly the same as one feels about oneself. When you love a person, the person's happiness is as important to you as your own happiness...

The desire to give rather than take is the litmus test for love.

2. **Michtav Me'Eliyahu, Vol. 1, pg. 38 – The commitment and constant giving that exists between a man and woman fosters a permanent love.**

The love between man and woman is a fascinating phenomenon... The source of this love is the fact that they complement one another. For God has created men and women incomplete on their own, as the Sages say, "Any man who is not married is not a complete human being." Thus, on his own, man is incomplete and cannot function properly. The completion they bring each other creates love, since as we have seen previously, giving to another fosters love. The love that exists between them makes them want

אהבת איש ואשה – אהבה זאת היא דבר פלא בכחות הנפש... אהבה זו באה ע"י השלימים זה את זה. הן שם השי"ת ככה בטבעם כאמרם ז"ל כל שאין לו אשה אינו אדם שלם, ובהיות האדם לבדו הנהו חסר, כי לא יוכל למלא את תפקידו. ע"כ בהיותם נותנים השלמה זה לזה יאהבו זה את זה כאשר נתבאר כי הנותן יאהב. וזהו אשר באהבתם כל שאיפתם היא להשפיע וליתן נחת ועונג זה לזה... וכך אני אומר לזוג בשעת שמחת כלולותם: הזהרו שתמיד תשאפו להשביע נחת זה לזה, כאשר תרגישו בכם בשעה זו; ודעו אשר מרגע

to give happiness and satisfaction to each other...I always say to couples at their wedding, as follows: "Take care to always wish to bring joy and pleasure to each other as you do now. And be aware that the moment that you begin making demands on each other, happiness will escape you."

The proper relationship between man and woman is when they both have developed the quality of giving. When they achieve that, their love will continue and their lives will be constantly filled with happiness and satisfaction.

שתתחילו לדרוש דרישות זה מזה, הנה כבר אושרכם מכם והלאה.

הקשר הטוב בין איש לאשתו יהיה כאשר שניהם יגיעו למעלת הנתינה; אז אהבתם לא תיפסק וחייהם ימלאו אושר ונחת כל ימיהם.

Note: That love motivates us to give does not mean that giving is the *only* motivation to enter a relationship. If it was, then the ideal partner would have to be the one most in need of our kindness. That is certainly not the case, at least not for most people. Rather, within a given relationship, the desire to give rather than take is an indication that true love is present.

PART B. IDENTIFYING WITH YOUR SOUL MATE

True love breeds not only a desire to give but a sense of identification with the one we love. When we see each other as two parts of a whole, as soul mates, then there is real love.

1. **Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Made In Heaven, p. 11 – Love of another's essence.**

The most perfect love in the world is between parent and child. When a mother holds an infant in her arms her heart overflows with a most unique love. She has this love not because she expects anything from the child but merely because the child exists. Love between parent and child exists because parent and child feel like one. The bond between a man and woman is a reflection of this.

The Torah teaches that man and woman were originally created as a single, androgynous unit. God then separated the two, making man and woman into independent persons. Thus man and woman began as a single entity, and togetherness is a natural tendency to be one. Adam recognized this as soon as Eve was separated from him. He said, "Now this is a bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh."

Adam was saying that when a man marries, he takes the natural love that he has for his parents and directs it toward his wife.

The Talmud therefore teaches, "One's wife is like one's own body." It also teaches us that in a perfect marriage a man loves his wife like his own body. When love is perfect, man and wife are like a single person. All barriers no matter how insurmountable can be overcome by this love. The Talmud thus relates that one man said of his wife, "When the love between us was intense, we could have lain together on the edge of a sword."

In the first in this series, Marriage – Soul Mates, we explained that unlike the animals, which God created both male and female, man was originally made as one male/female androgynous being. This state was deemed by God to be "not good" and subsequently God split man into two components, one male and one female. Although man's original state of oneness as an androgynous being was "not good," the higher level

of oneness achieved in the unity of husband and wife fulfills the purpose of that original creation. As two separate beings able to function together as one, the deficiencies of each are overcome.

2. **Rabbi David Fohrman, Affairs of the Heart - Teacher's Guide: Class II – Some describe the highest stage of marriage as a sense of oneness called an “us.”**

A final stage of the continuum [of growth in a marriage] is anticipating unspoken desires.

[It is] the difference between empathy and sympathy. In other words, it's not just that I sympathize with what you are going through; it's that I experience it, too. This, really, is what empathy is all about. I share your pain – and I can also share your joy. Luzzatto [describes this as] Chassidut...connecting to someone so deeply that you can anticipate their wants, needs and desires – and responding to these – without their having to even articulate those things to us.

You invest intensely and personally in building an “us.” It is a living entity, a part of my identity, as it were [part of who I am, not only my “me,” but our “us.”] It may be true that, theoretically, I could have begun building a different “us” six years ago, but that's not a reason to dismantle this one. I've invested in this, I've crafted a unique connection with my partner that has taken immense energy on both our parts to develop, and I don't want to destroy it.

3. **Rabbi Reuven Leuchter – True love does not deny individuality but rather challenges us to overcome selfishness.**

True love is to “carry the burden of another.” That is, recognizing that there is another individual here, but I am together with that person.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION I.

- ∞ Love is blind to selfishness. When we love another person, we put their needs and desires before our own. Asking ourselves what motivates us about our relationship will help to clarify whether we are committed to investing love in this person or not.
- ∞ When people are truly in love with each other, they identify themselves with their loved one. This feeling exists naturally between parents and children but can be even deeper between soul mates.

SECTION II. WHERE LOVE THRIVES

Before we discuss how marriage can help love to grow, we must first explore the preconditions necessary for developing the selflessness and unity we discussed above. For love to thrive, some basic requirements must first be satisfied.

PART A. LOVE NEEDS A HOME

Judaism's own answer to the quest for love is that marriage, through providing a medium for giving and mutual respect, fosters true love and real inner happiness. The commitment of marriage creates an atmosphere for both to feel safe investing their hearts.

1. **Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Made In Heaven, p. 8 – Commitment provides emotional security to express love.**

Love usually grows in stages. To say “I love you” is a tremendous commitment leaving a person very vulnerable. If the declaration of Love is not reciprocated, the one making it can feel very hurt and foolish.

The process of falling in love therefore usually proceeds step by step. Even when the inside feeling of love is very strong, its communication must follow a slower course. First there are tentative statements. If the answers are right, the statements become stronger: “You are very nice” leads to “I like you” and finally to “I love you.” If the words are sincere, the sentiments will also be real.

New levels of safety and security are needed for us to open our hearts. Love needs to feel safe. As we mentioned in the previous class, one’s soul mate must be one’s sole mate. Without such commitment, the relationship just won’t accomplish what it’s supposed to. It is worthwhile, therefore, to review the following source:

2. **Rabbi Menachem Schlanger, Al Ptacheinu, p. 33 – Don’t fall for cheap imitations.**

A relationship wherein each partner complements the other can exist only within the framework of marriage. Within marriage, the unique qualities of a woman can assist and benefit her husband, since they are directed toward one particular man. Similarly, the man is then able to truly give to his wife. When they are each faithful to each other in their eternal commitment, any investment in their relationship develops their perfection...

The very basis of any constructive relationship between spouses is the everlasting exclusivity, based on the understanding that through marriage man has found the lost part of himself, and that they are predestined for each other from their very creation.

יחס של השלמה בין איש לאשה, יכולה להינתן רק במסגרת הנישואין, אז סגולותיה של האשה מועילות ותומכות באיש, מכיון שהם מכוונות רק כלפי אדם יחיד, וכן השפעתו של האיש מיוחדת לביתו הקבוע. וכאשר שניהם נאמנים זה לזה בברית עולם של הנישואין, אז כל השקעה בקשר שביניהם בונה את שלימותם...

נקודת המוצא של קשר מועיל בין בני הזוג, היא הבלעדיות הנצחית, המעוגנת באמונה שהאיש מצא את אבידתו (קידושין ב:), המיועדת לו מתחילת בריאתו (סוטה ב.).

Jewish law goes so far as to forbid physical intimacy even within marriage when the wife feels less than secure about her husband’s commitment to her.

3. **Rambam (Maimonides), Hilchot Ishut 10:7 – The Ketubah (marriage contract) adds security to the marriage.**

One must draft a prenuptial agreement for his wife before they actually marry, and only then are they permitted to live together as man and wife... The Sages instituted the marriage document for the woman’s sake, so that it would not be so easy for him to divorce her.

וצריך לכתוב כתובה קודם כניסה לחופה, ואחר כך יהיה מותר באשתו... וחכמים הם שתיקנו כתובה לאשה, כדי שלא תהיה קלה בעיניו להוציאה.

So long as the wife does not feel secure in the knowledge that there is permanence to the marriage bond (as

is expressed by the marriage document), they cannot be together. In short, the first, most basic parameter for building oneness is commitment.

We mentioned in the previous class that when two soul mates yearn to be like one, the feeling of oneness they are yearning for is actually the desire to bring God's unifying presence between them. The simple act of commitment, of a man giving his wife a Ketubah document, increases God's presence in their relationship.

4. **Bereshit/Genesis 25:6, Rabbi Zev Wolf Visovsky quoted in Chumash Perush HaG'ra on Rashi (paraphrased) – The greater the commitment, the greater the manifestation of God's unity between man and wife.**

Why do we call the marriage document a "Ketubah"? It should be simply called "*ktav*" (lit. a written document)?

The answer is that as we know when the man (or *Ish*) and the woman (or *Isha*) marry they unite the letters of *Yud* and *Hey* of God's name. We add the other two letters (of God's name) *Vav* and *Hey* to the word *ktav* to spell "*Ketubah*" so as to complete the name of God through their marriage. Thus the relationship created when a Ketubah is given brings together the full four letter name of God.

The opposite is also true. The lesser the level the commitment, the more we end up feeling separate and alone, casting ourselves into a world of self-estrangement.

PART B. INFATUATION

To be ignored is painful. To be in a physical relationship with someone who doesn't really see me is even more painful. This often happens either because we've put up a front, since we don't want someone to see who we really are, or because the other person is projecting upon us a fantasy of what he'd like us to be. In such scenarios any true sparks of love that are felt have no way to build into real connection. This leaves us feeling even less able or willing to share in the future, inevitably making it even more challenging to recognize our true soul mates and invest our selves at the right time.

1. **Chana Levitan, "The Infatuation Trap" from www.aish.com – Infatuation can ignite a relationship, but only real love can keep it going.**

The relationship between love and infatuation is like making a campfire. You need a couple of logs, some twigs, paper, and matches. Try kindling the logs directly – you'll be waiting all night. But if you just light the twigs and paper without the logs, the fire will burn bright, but only for a short time. You need both the twigs and the logs.

Infatuation is the twigs that play an important role in igniting the logs of love. Make sure infatuation isn't the foundation of your relationship. When you get carried away with the chemistry and forget about the substance of the relationship (the logs), chances are you'll end up brokenhearted. It's only a short matter of time before the fire will burn out.

2. **Rabbi Pinchas Stolper, Love, Dating & Romance from www.innernet.org – Infatuation disregards the real person.**

Romantic love is not always related to real love, especially when it ignores the true personalities and mutual interest of those involved. To be ruled by one's emotions and feelings, uncontrolled and undirected by logic, values and clear thinking, with no clear sense of goals and responsibility, is to ignore the only factors which can establish a firm foundation for a permanent and mature life-long relationship.

Most people would look askance at a parent who negligently hands his daughter over to a man to fill his base desires, without commitment or a deep relationship. We can learn to look at ourselves the way a loving parent would at his beloved daughter and ask: “Would I give my beautiful girl over to this man for his primitive amusement?” (See also Vayikra 19:29 and Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 76a)

KEY THEMES OF SECTION II.

- ∞ For love to thrive, it needs the comfort and security that only commitment can provide.
- ∞ Love is founded on an appreciation for and identification with another. Infatuation blinds us from truly seeing the other person, and as such, it forms an obstacle to developing genuine love.

SECTION III. SINCERE LOVE IS A SPIRITUAL EXPRESSION

If it is true that marriage is primarily a spiritual connection between two halves called man and woman, it should follow that we have to re-think the nature of love and desire. Physical longing is also rooted in a much deeper place than our current culture indicates. If indeed love and desire are based in the spiritual, then there must be spiritual rules about how to use these tremendous powers.

PART A. CHERISHED CHERUBS

The force of desire between man and woman has caused wars, helped sell billions of products, and inspired poetry and music. Yet, it has for millennia been a source of ambivalence among non-Jewish cultures, which have swayed from monastery to orgy, struggling to establish a medium of happiness and gratification. Jewish sources recognize the tremendous power of desire as a spiritual force which, when used correctly, leads to tremendous holiness.

1. Talmud Bavli, Yoma 54a – The metaphor for Jewish holiness, our attachment to God’s universal Oneness, is the love attachment between man and woman.

At the time that that Israelites would go up [to the Temple in Jerusalem for their festivals, the Kohanim] would roll back the curtain [of the Holy of Holies] and show them the Cherubim, who were clinging to each other. And they would say to them: “Look, your love before God is like the love of a man and a woman.”

בשעה שהיו ישראל עולין לרגל מגללין להם את הפרוכת, ומראין להם את הכרובים שהיו מעורים זה בזה, ואומרים להן: ראו חבתכם לפני המקום כחבת זכר ונקבה.

One may think we are speaking about the attachment of two adults in their most intimate moment, but that is not the case. The Cherubs had the faces of young children.

2. Shemot (Exodus) 25:18, with Rashi – The Cherubs were young children, made from one substance.

And you shall make two cherubim – hammered out [of one piece] shall you make them – from both ends of the [ark’s] cover.

ועשית שנים כרבים זהב מקשה תעשה אתם משני קצות הכפרת:

Cherubim – they had faces of young children.

Hammered out shall you make them – do not make them by themselves [separately] and attach them to the ark's cover after you make them.

כרובים - דמוות פרצוף תינוק להם:

מקשה תעשה אותם - שלא תעשים בפני עצמם ותחברם בראשי הכפרת לאחר עשייתם.

Nonetheless, the Cherubs were made male and female, to represent the ultimate bond of love that brings together a man and wife. Yet, this love was absent of the lust and sensuality that generally accompanies the bond.

3. **Shemot 25:18, Rabbeinu Bachya – The pure spiritual desire for oneness is best represented by the love between man and woman, without any connotation of lust.**

“Two cherubim” – they were male and female, to demonstrate how dear Israel is before the Holy One, Blessed be His Name, like the endearment between a man and a woman...this metaphor testifies to the clinging between God and Israel without any intermediary...

Theoretically one cherub could have looked like an adult and the other like a small child [appearing as a father and son], and this would have demonstrated that His love for Israel is like the intense love a father has for his son. But He wanted to give a metaphor of a physical attachment that none can surpass, insofar that it is impossible for anything to come between it. It [this attachment] is stronger in the youthful years...All this is in order that we should know and understand that God's attachment with us is great and strong without any intermediary.

שנים כרובים זכר ונקבה היו להודיע כמה ישראל חביבין לפני הקב"ה כחבת זכר ונקבה ... כי היו הכרובים כצורה הזו למשל נמרחן להעיד על הפלגת הדבקות שבין הקב"ה לישראל בלא שום אמצעי ...

והיה אפשר שהיו הכרובים האחד כצורת אדם גדול והשני כצורת ילד קטן ... ויהיה זה להעיד על אהבתו לישראל כאהבת האב לבנו שהיא אהבה חזקה, אבל רצה לעשות משל בדבקות גופני שאין למעלה ממנו שאי אפשר באמצעי והוא יותר חזק כשהוא מנעורים ... וכל זה כדי שנדע ונשכיל שדבקותו יתעלה עמו בדבקות גדול וחזק בלא שום אמצעי:

Reminiscent of today, the pervading world culture back then confused love with lust. This confusion distorts the very essence of love, as is expressed in the continuation of the section of Talmud about the cherubim:

4. **Talmud Bavli, Yoma 54b – The non-Jews mistook holy connection with pornography.**

When non-Jews entered the sanctuary [during the destruction of the Temple] they saw the cherubim clinging to one another. They took it out to the market place and said, “These Israelites...were involved in such things!?” Immediately they degraded them.

בשעה שנכנסו נכרים להיכל ראו כרובים המעורין זה בזה, הוציאו ל'שוק ואמרו: ישראל הללו...יעסקו בדברים הללו?! מיד הזילום.

The destroyers of the Temple understood the physical connection between man and woman to be like the coupling of animals, purely physical. They could not fathom how the intimacy between the male and female cherubs could be a symbol of pure love and unity – a symbol of the connection between God and the Jewish people – without any licentious overtones.

5. **Maharsha, Chidushei Agadot to Yoma 54b – The non-Jewish world could not comprehend the holy nature of Jewish love.**

They degraded it because they saw its nakedness, i.e. they thought it was a matter of sexual immorality and idol worship.

הזילות כי ראו ערותה דהיינו שחשבו שהם דבר ערוה ועבודת כוכבים.

The present day confusion causes us to see marriage and love as based on physical factors. Therefore, in the non-Jewish model, when the woman ages, many men enter a “mid-life crisis.” Romance dries up, eyes look elsewhere, and children are left in split homes even before the parents are divorced. This principal is taught in the Mishnah.

6. **Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers), Ch. 5, Mishnah 16 – Conditional love will disappear in contrast to eternal love which is not based on specific causes.**

All love that is dependent on a specific cause will disappear once that factor is no longer present, but the love that is not dependent on a specific cause will never disappear.

כל אהבה שהיא תלויה בדבר בטל דבר בטלה אהבה ושאינה תלויה בדבר אינה בטלה לעולם...

What are those factors that do not sustain love, and those which establish love?

As we will discuss further in the next section, a person’s ethics and moral values also help establish deep-rooted love.

7. **Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Chapters of the Fathers, Feldheim Publishers, p.89 – Love based on spiritual and moral values has continuity in proportion to those values.**

Wherever love is rooted in the spiritual and moral worth of the beloved individual, there the love will be as abiding as the values on which it was founded. But a love based on physical attraction will not outlast those fleeting charms.

According to the Rambam, there is something still deeper in a love relationship. True love is a “Divine matter” that bonds the two together, creating a permanent love that cannot be broken.

8. **Commentary of the Rambam, Pirkei Avot 5:16 – Love engendered by material causes will dissolve; eternal love is rooted in a “Divine matter.”**

You know that all these physical factors will dissolve and disband, and the outcome must vanish when its cause ceases.

Therefore, if the basis of the love is a Divine matter, which is true (spiritual) knowledge, then this bond of love will never be undone, for its cause is eternal.

ואתה יודע שאלו הסיבות הגשמיות כולן - יבטלו ויסורו, ויתחייב סור המתחדש בסור סיבתו.

ולפיכך אם היתה סיבת האהבה ענין אלהי, והוא המדע האמיתי - הרי אותה האהבה אי אפשר שתסור לעולם, הואיל וסיבתה מתמדת המציאות.

Elsewhere (Moreh Nevuchim/Guide for the Perplexed Part III, Ch. 54), the Rambam explains that “true knowledge” refers to knowledge of God. The more permanent the value at its foundation, the more solid is the relationship. If the relationship is based on material causes, it is doomed to fail; if it is founded on “true

knowledge,” it will be as eternal as its cause.

It is up to us to raise the level of our relationship. As Rabbi Hirsch writes, if the relationship is based on the moral values we find in the other, it will be as strong as those values. If it is founded on Divine knowledge, transcending any worldly matter – which the Sages refer to as marriage “for the sake of Heaven” (Derech Eretz Ch. 10) – it will be eternal.

The more we can disassociate a relationship from a worldly cause – “love that is contingent on a specific cause” – the stronger its foundation (see also the Maharal, Derech Chaim, Pirkei Avot 5:16, for a fuller discussion of this Mishnah).

In the Jewish model, since love and desire are rooted in spiritual values, it is possible for love to grow and strengthen even as physical beauty fades. Spiritual goals and a sense of shared destiny (“for the sake of Heaven”) bind man and wife even as physical desires wane, leaving them with a love as pure as the cherubs embracing in oneness.

9. Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, Parsha Insights Acharei Mot, p. 8 – Since Adam and Chava were created from the same being, they were able to achieve a high state of unity.

The culminating act of a spiritual, intellectual and emotional unity between husband and wife is sexual intimacy. This act recreates Adam prior to the split of the first man and woman – they again become one being. They have finally resolved the tension generated by their original separation. Hence the intensity of passion with which it is endowed and the sense of wholeness and peace it brings in its wake. Because of its significance, marital relations are considered an act of the greatest holiness, and it brings down God’s *Shechina* (Presence) into the home and through it into the world. (Based on Mishkan Yisroel p. 9, Ramban Iggeret HaKodesh, Ketubot 62b)

PART B. FOR THE LOVE OF GOD

In a greater sense, the love built by man and wife teach us about our relationship with God.

1. Rabbi Moshe Wolfson, Wellsprings of Faith, pp. 80-81 – Jewish marriage helps us understand our spiritual connection to God.

Every Jewish marriage is a metaphor, a tiny model of an immensely great and holy reality. A Jewish marriage is an echo of the heavenly marriage by which the Jewish people are connected to God. In the writings of the prophets, God is often described as a bridegroom and the Jewish people as His bride. The entire book of Shir HaShirim [the Song of Songs] is based on this metaphor.

We are inspired by “love” and “love stories,” because they touch a deep place in our souls. In Jewish thought, the entire Jewish people are really one. As one people we are meant to cling to God, experiencing and expressing His unity, just as two lovers feel like one. Every husband and wife who unify, are simultaneously helping to unify the whole of Israel as one in order to cling with God.

2. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Made in Heaven, pp. 12-13 – Only when man and woman unite can man emulate God’s role as Creator.

When man was first created, the Torah says, “God created the human in His image, in the image of God He created them, male and female He created them.” Neither male nor female alone is in the “image of God”; only both of them together. When the man and woman are together in perfect harmony, they form the “image of God.”

God is the Creator of all things. Moreover, God's creation of the world is seen as an act of love and altruism. The only time a human being can emulate God as creator is when one comes together with one's spouse. Then, just as God created life, they can also create new life. Indeed, at such a time they are, the Talmud teaches, partners with God.

This is why both man and woman have this desire to unite. When they do so, they manifest this "image of God."

KEY THEMES OF SECTION III.

- ∞ In Judaism, love and physical desire, which the world generally confuses with lust, has a deeper spiritual root. In essence it is totally pure and therefore can elevate us when used properly in building oneness. This is because the proper expression of love and desire in the context of marriage helps to reveal God's oneness, the goal of the Jewish people as a whole.
- ∞ It is up to us to raise the level of our relationship. As Rabbi Hirsch writes, if the relationship is based on the moral values we find in the other, it will be as strong as those values. If it is founded on Divine knowledge, transcending any worldly matter – it will be eternal.
- ∞ Since love and desire are rooted in spiritual values, it is possible for love to grow and strengthen even as physical beauty fades.

SECTION IV. HOW WE BUILD LOVE

Why does the verse "Love your friend as yourself" (Vayikra/Leviticus, 19:18) continue with the words "do not bear a grudge and do not take revenge"? At first a new couple may feel love for each other, but little by little they start holding on to grudges, and counting up all inconsiderate things the other did. They begin to drift apart. After a few years of this, the love is dead and the couple divorces. The verse is telling us that love means becoming like one body. Imagine a person who accidentally cuts his own hand with a knife. Should the other hand hit the hand which is holding the knife, in revenge?

As a parent we know how to control ourselves if a child screams at us. We still love the child. The offense is forgotten in minutes. We don't hold on to it. This is the quality we need to learn and work on in order to love each other.

Sometimes you may not "feel" you love your new wife. Our feelings are not a true barometer for whether we love someone. Our commitment to give to another, even when it is hard, is a much better sign that we love someone. For example, you can have a mother who is having a very difficult time raising her young children. If you say to her: "I'll give you a million dollars to take these bratty children off your hands!" she'll throw pots and pans at you and chase you from her house. Why? Because she loves her kids, even though she may be challenged by them. You love someone you are ready to give to even when it's not easy. Taking pleasure in the ones we love can take time to learn. We can teach this mother how to feel pleasure in the fact that she loves her children. It may take a while, but she won't divorce them in the meantime, because she's committed to loving them even when she doesn't feel it. (Rabbi Noah Weinberg)

How do we build love? In this section we shall explore three of the foundation stones for everlasting love that can be achieved through marriage. They are: giving to each other, appreciating each other's virtues, and sharing meaningful common aspirations. Jewish family purity law is equally foundational, and will be dealt with in the next class in this series.

PART A. BUILDING LOVE BY GIVING

If you have ever fed a baby ice cream you may find your mouth opening together as the baby takes each bite. You are getting pleasure in the baby's pleasure. Previously, we explained that desire has the power to build love when channeled correctly. How do we channel it? When we learn to use "our desire for pleasure" to imagine the pleasure our spouse would want to feel. Then we make it our pleasure to give pleasure to our spouse.

1. **Rabbi Reuven Leuchter, Ner Le'Elef – Love in a couple is built on learning to get a thrill out of seeing the other happy, even if it seems on the surface like "losing out."**

A Jewish home is built on making it your thrill to fulfill the desire of the other [within the boundaries of what Jewish law permits]. If your wife's birthday comes and you say to yourself: "What can I do? [Unfortunately,] I have to spend a hundred dollars on flowers that will die in two days," then it as if you're not really married. When you get to the point that you feel: "My wife's smile is worth a hundred dollars," then you are able to give without feeling like you are losing anything. The excitement in marriage is built on making it your pleasure to give. Working on finding a thrill makes marriage a constant thrill. When you use your desire for pleasure to see her get pleasure, then this elevates the marriage. This concept has applications at all levels of marital interaction. This builds a love and unity that protects a couple from what the outside world calls "exciting."

Becoming a giver is part of the challenge and purpose of marriage in the first place.

2. **Tziporah Heller, Let's Face It, pp. 164-165 – Marriage challenges us to develop love by becoming a giver.**

The purpose of marriage is to present both partners with the maximal opportunity for giving. God created man and woman as inherently different so that each could give to the other what the other lacks...

Men and women have different needs within marriage. Although both want love and respect, in general a woman's need to be loved and understood is primary for her, while a man's need to be respected is primary for him. Of course, their needs vary with their individual natures and with the time of life in which they find themselves.

The greatest obstacle to each partner's giving unconditionally to the other is what Western society views as the Eleventh Commandment: "Thou shalt not let thyself be taken advantage of." Many married people fear that if they give to their partners unconditionally, they themselves will lose out.

We must understand that the economics of giving when seen from a spiritual perspective are very different than when evaluated from a physical standpoint. Physically, the more I give you, the less I have. Spiritually, the more I give you, the more I have. Physically, the act of giving diminishes my stock (of money, time, energy, etc.). Spiritually, the act of giving expands myself. When both partners understand and adopt this spiritual perspective, they will give without fear, and they will be willing to reveal their vulnerability, which will allow their partner to give without fear.

3. **Rabbi Moshe Bleicher, Shechinah Beineihem, p. 70 – Simple gestures of care and companionship foster love.**

The basis of the relationship between man and wife is the unity that resides within them. Therefore, any expression of unity – any simple action that helps create a positive relationship between the two; any action that brings about closeness, pleasantness and sympathy between them; every smile, every drop of attention paid to the other, every act of giving – each of these exercises the "unity" muscles and actualizes the potential for unity, slowly building, even if it is not easily discernible, a deep sense of oneness.

PART B. APPRECIATING THE GOOD IN ANOTHER

Another way that love is fostered within the context of marriage is taking the opportunity to get to know and appreciate the virtues in another person.

1. Bereishit 24:67 – The Torah tells us that our forefather Yitzchak (Isaac) loved Rivka (Rebecca).

Yitzchak brought her into the tent of his mother Sara and he took her and she was a wife to him and he loved her...

וַיִּבְרָא יִצְחָק הָאֵלֶּלֶה שְׂרָה אִמּוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת-רִבְקָה וַתְּהִי-
לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַיֵּאָהֲבָהּ וַיִּנְחַם יִצְחָק אַחֲרֵי אִמּוֹ.

2. Ramban (Nachmanides) on Bereishit 24:67 – Yitzchak’s love came from an appreciation of Rivka’s righteousness.

The Torah mentions the love of Yitzchak for Rivka in this context for it was because of her righteousness and good deeds that he loved her.

ולכן הזכיר האהבה כי מפני צדקתה וכשרון מעשיה
אהבה...

3. Rabbi Moshe Bleicher, Shechinah Beineihem p. 72 – Love is created through appreciating and nurturing each other’s spiritual essence.

Building the deep relationship that is marriage is facilitated through our ability to see and build the good that exists within our spouse.

בנין הקשר העמוק שבין האיש והאשה יוצא אל הפועל
מתוך היכולת שלנו לראות ולבנות את הטוב שקיים
בבן הזוג.

4. Gila Manelson, Head to Heart, pp. 73-75 – Love comes from appreciating others’ innate goodness.

Love is the attachment that results from deeply appreciating another’s goodness.

The word “goodness” may surprise you. After all, most love stories don’t feature a couple enraptured with each other’s ethics. (“I’m captivated by your values!” he told her passionately. “And I’ve never met a man with such morals!” she cooed.) But in her study of real-life successful marriages (“The Good Marriage: How and Why Love Lasts”), Judith Wallerstein reports that “the value these couples placed on the partner’s moral qualities was an unexpected finding.”

To the Jewish mind, it isn’t unexpected at all. What we value most in ourselves, we value most in others. God created us to see ourselves as good (hence our need to either rationalize or regret our wrongdoings). So, too, we seek goodness in others. Nice looks, an engaging personality, intelligence, and talent (all of which count for something) may attract you, but goodness is what moves you to love.

If love comes from appreciating goodness, it needn’t just happen – you can make it happen. Love is active. You can create it. Just focus on the good in another person (and everyone has some). If you can do this easily, you’ll love easily.

PART C. COMMON VALUES AND ASPIRATIONS

Soul mates join in oneness by sensing a joint sense of mission. As we have pointed out in previous classes,

soul mates help to complete each other by working toward the common goal of fulfilling their spiritual potential. When this deep common goal is recognized and appreciated, love is there.

1. **Commentary of Rambam, Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 1:6 – The highest level of love is that which is based on mutual goals and objectives.**

There are three types of love: Love because of what one stands to benefit from the other; love of pleasure; and love of virtue... Love of virtue is when two people desire the same valuable thing, the essentially good, and each one wishes to collaborate with the other in obtaining that ideal for both of them.

האוהבים שלשה מינים: אוהב תועלת, אוהב מנוחה, ואוהב מעלה... ואוהב מעלה הוא שיהיה תאום שניהם וכונתם לדבר אחד, והוא הטוב, וירצה כל אחד להיעזר בחבירו בהגיע הטוב ההוא לשניהם יחד.

By focusing on each other's goodness and helping bring that goodness to fruition, two spouses become partners with each other in a life-mission, connecting with each other on the deepest level. Ultimately, we are born to emulate God as creators in our own right. As such, helping each other develop our own personal creativity is one of the profound common goals of marriage.

2. **Matisyahu Rosenblum, based on ideas heard from Rav Reuven Leuchter and Rav Aharon Lopiansky – The shared goal is a creative endeavor.**

Our English word "goal" barely hints at the kind of shared project that marriage should be based on. Animals only pursue their survival and pleasure, but that is not enough to satisfy man. Man in his deepest essence was created in the Divine image, and this means he was made to create. Just as an artist has a vision he wants to convey in a painting or a poem, every man should have a story he wants to tell, an ideal he wants to realize in the world. The strongest basis for marriage is such a shared vision towards which the couple together works to realize in the world. That should be their "goal."

The love fostered within the marriage relationship must be dynamic for it to thrive. Having common goals, a shared mission in life for which both partners are working in tandem, deepens love and solidifies a marriage. A marriage geared toward an eternal, transcendent goal provides solidity, permanence, and intensity that cannot be found in a relationship based simply upon the satisfaction of one's own needs and desires.

3. **Rabbi Yitzchak Adlerstein, "Is marriage destined to go the way of carrier pigeons?" from Cross-currents.com – Common goals keep couples together.**

[A contemporary book on marriage] draws some conclusions from close observation of fifty happily married couples. The authors conclude that four types of marriage make themselves available to us. Different kinds have different rates of success. The Traditional Marriage succeeds "because the man works while the woman runs the home." Today's most common marriage has shifted to the Companionate Marriage. Each spouse has a career, and they share responsibilities. The Romantic Marriage keeps going through a spark of love that somehow lasts. In the Rescue Marriage, each spouse is the savior of the other by providing what the other needs or has lost.

In Torah circles there is a fifth kind of marriage... Let's call it "The Common Goal Marriage." Two young people spend the first two decades of their lives learning that life is more about serving than taking. Whatever other self-serving motivations may coexist, when a Torah couple stand under the *Chuppah* (wedding canopy), they are very much aware of the power of a Jewish household in serving God. They know that bringing children into the world to serve God is both a noble goal and a daunting task. They know that it takes at least two people working in close concert to do the job well. They realize that a Torah home can and does become a beacon of light to others, and a spring of

[kindness] to the world beyond its walls. They look forward to all the benefits that a loving marriage will bestow upon them, but they know that privilege begets responsibility. They will be expected to make their home a haven for God's interests in the community.

Ironically, that responsibility to God and community yields dividends to them personally. Few marriages, if any, are devoid of strains, struggles and conflict. As the problems inevitably arise, the spouses are brought closer together, not more distant, because of what they share. The common goals they share can act as the agent that keeps them together, when others, who might look only at whether the relationship satisfies their individual needs and expectations, would decide to call it quits. They understand that God's Providence brought them together in the first place. While divorce is sometimes necessary, it is a very last resort. They will be less likely than others to see a relationship on the rocks as a mistake, or a new phase in their lives that they must learn to accept and move on to the next relationship. They act as partners in a joint enterprise whose mission statement is clear and agreed upon. They know that the most valuable things they can offer their children cannot be put on To Do lists, but concern values communicated and character molded. The accomplishments and the setbacks along the way are both part of a job they both cherish.

4. **Rabbi Aharon Feldman, *The River, the Kettle and the Bird*, p. 141 – Goals, particularly transcendent goals, foster love and unity.**

Working together towards a common goal induces love... [because] it evokes a sense of harmony and trust between the two working partners – which strengthens the emotional bonds between them. Without goals in life none of this is possible. A married couple must be moving toward some common objective if love is to develop between them...

A marriage whose goal is the marriage itself becomes filled with a sense of emptiness and will wither and die. Marriage is not meant to be a permanent “date.” The purpose of marriage cannot be simply doing fun things together... It must be a vehicle for getting somewhere...

All common goals form the earth in which marriage flourishes. But the more important the goals, the deeper the emotional bonds created by working towards achieving them. A marriage is thus successful in proportion to the meaningfulness of the couple's common activities.

Nothing could be as meaningful or as encompassing as the goal of making one's home a sanctuary to God, a home built on Torah and Mitzvot. Accordingly, nothing has a greater capacity for creating love in a marriage than striving to reach these goals.

KEY POINTS OF SECTION IV.

- ⌘ Although we like to give to those we love, giving in and of itself fosters love between two people. Marriage is the greatest giving opportunity that life presents us with.
- ⌘ Focusing on the good in another and helping the other develop that goodness also contributes greatly to building love.
- ⌘ The Jewish ideal of marriage provides the perfect framework for building a profound connection between husband and wife. More than anything else, shared life-goals and ambitions, especially transcendent ones that are larger than the couple themselves, draw spouses closer to one another.

CLASS SUMMARY:

HOW DOES THE JEWISH CONCEPT OF LOVE DIFFER FROM ITS POPULAR CONCEPTION?

True love is not what you get from satisfying your own desires for social acceptance, or as Fromm put it, maximizing your “exchange value.” On the contrary, love is formed not by taking but by giving. It is the sense of identifying and connecting with another that develops out of acts of giving.

WHAT ARE THE NECESSARY PRECONDITIONS FOR LOVE TO THRIVE?

Love needs the safety net of commitment to allow each partner to feel comfortable in expressing their true selves. Without this the couple simply cannot know each other well enough to develop the selflessness and unity of soul mates.

For love to thrive, the relationship must be grounded in true appreciation and understanding of each other. Therefore if it is fueled by infatuation there will be no place for love to take root, seeing as the couple has not really even met each other's true selves yet.

HOW DO WE EXPLAIN THE EXPRESSION OF LOVE BY SOUL MATES FOR EACH OTHER?

In Judaism, love and physical desire, which the world generally confuses with lust, has a deeper spiritual root. In essence it is totally pure and therefore can elevate us when used properly in building oneness. This is because the proper expression of love and desire in the context of marriage helps to reveal God's oneness, the goal of the Jewish people as a whole.

HOW CAN WE ACTIVELY WORK ON FOSTERING LOVE?

As the identification grows, people that love each other learn to value the virtue they see in each other. They then seek to bring that virtue out in each other in a common mission of shared personal growth.

Marriage is founded upon the common goals of helping each other grow and building a sanctuary within which to have and raise children who will follow along the same path.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED READING

Rabbi Maurice Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Love & Marriage*, Harper and Row

Nachum Braverman and Shimon Apisdorf, *The Death of Cupid*, Leviathan Press