
AM I READY TO FIND MY SOUL MATE?

PART III

THE SEARCH FOR ETERNAL LOVE

In the previous two classes, we discovered the spiritual dimension of our “Self,” the soul that is connected to God. We began to explore how awareness of our soul will influence one of the most important choices we will ever make – whom we will marry. Being more aware of this spiritual dimension of the Self, which previously we may have not thought was central to our identity, impacts how we will experience the most potent of emotions we feel in the marriage relationship – love.

In this class, we will see that there are two types of love, one that unites two individuals, intrinsically expanding their consciousness and identity, and a counterfeit love, which may at first feel as if it is achieving these goals, but ultimately will neither expand nor unify the couple.

We will also strive to understand why we all want love, the soul-root of this drive, and how it can be satisfied within the parameters of a Jewish marriage. As such, we will seek to answer the following questions:

- ☞ In our pursuit of love, are we energized, actualizing our potential, or do we find ourselves running into dead ends?
- ☞ How can we distinguish between love and lust?
- ☞ If we were to follow a spiritual path to love, would this expand us?
- ☞ What deeper “soul need” drives us to get involved in relationships?
- ☞ How does a real relationship based on love satisfy our deeper spiritual needs?
- ☞ What are the parameters of true love?

CLASS OUTLINE:

Section I: **Where Can We Find Eternal Love?**

Part A. Two Types of Love: Eternal Love or Ice-cream Love

Part B. Loving Internal Qualities

Section II: **What Does Love Have to Do with our Identity?**

Part A. What Will Get Me Ahead – Independence or Interdependence?

Part B. Love’s Promise – Together Forever

Part C. How Relationship Brings Us to Completion

Section III: **Ensuring We Find Love**

Part A. Safe Parameters for Love

Part B. Loving Is Giving

SECTION I. WHERE CAN WE FIND ETERNAL LOVE?

INTRODUCTION

Exercise #1: What is love?

- Do you believe in eternal love?
- Does love live on even after a person dies? Or is love at best “till death do we part”?

PART A. TWO TYPES OF LOVE: ETERNAL LOVE OR ICE-CREAM LOVE

The Torah tells us we can find everlasting love, as opposed to a fleeting “love” that leaves us feeling abandoned.

1. Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 5:16 – Everlasting love does not depend on a specific thing.

Any love that depends on a specific thing, when that thing is gone, the love is gone; but love that does not depend on a specific thing will never cease.

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

What, according to the Mishnah above, is the definition of everlasting love?

Exercise #2: What is love?

- Being that we live in a physical world full of things, how is it possible to have love that does not depend on something? What then do we love? If you say love depends on “nothing,” then how does it exist?
- The Mishnah concludes that love that is not dependent on a specific thing “will never cease.” Does this mean love is eternal? Is this a source for everlasting love?
- Each one of us will one day “be gone,” from this world at least, yet the Mishnah implies that our love lives on. If so, how can this be? This implies that there is a part of a person that can love forever and be loved forever. Which part of the person is not dependent on anything – the body or the soul?

Love is essentially spiritual. Perhaps for this reason we have such a hard time defining what love is, even though we are sure it exists and acknowledge love when we feel it. The transcendent feeling of oneness we experience when we feel loved comes from the soul.

I have sifted through roughly 50,000 stories that have crossed my desk. I have noticed people wrestling with...[one] question...above all others. From the young: “How do I find love?” (From Daniel Jones, Editor, Modern Love, www.nytimes.com Jan. 31, 2014)

Why is it so difficult for so many people to find love?

To answer this question, we must examine the concept of “love” carefully. In order to find something, first we need to know what we’re looking for. Let’s take a deeper look at love.

The Mishnah we quoted above describes why what many of us feel is love fizzles out quickly. This may also be the reason why so many people are hesitant to commit to long-term relationships.

Exercise #3: What kind of love dies?

- When does the Mishnah say love will fizzle out?
- What are some examples of things that people depend on in relationships?
- Why does the Mishnah call love of “things” love? Is it love?

Why do we fall into the “love” trap? The Mishnah clarifies: There are two kinds of love; one that fizzles out, and one that is everlasting.

2. Maharal of Prague on Ethics of Our Fathers, Ch. 5:16, Rabbi Yehoshua Hartman note 1790, pg. 414 – Love that is not dependent on a thing leads to unity.

Love dependent on a thing is only love of the self and does not cause a person to be unified with the one he loves. This is not so concerning love which is not dependent on a thing. Such love leads to total unification with the one he loves.

אהבה התלויה בדבר היא רק אהבת עצמו, ואין בה התאחדות עם הנאהב. מה שאין כן אהבה שאינה תלויה בדבר, היא “האחדות לגמרי”, שיש בה התאחדות שלימה עם הנאהב.

In other words, the type of love which *unifies* two individuals intrinsically expands their consciousness and identity. What were previously two fully separate, independent beings become one. The other type of love may at first feel as if it is expanding their consciousness and identity, but ultimately they are left no bigger. How then do we learn to tell the difference?

The Mishnah answers: “Love that depends on a thing” will never satisfy or expand us. We’ll call this kind of love “ice-cream love.” Why is it that “ice-cream love” will never satisfy us?

3. Rabbi Itamar Schwartz, Getting to Know Your Home, pg. 90 – Ice-cream love is love of oneself.

The love existing nowadays is the kind we refer to when we say that we love [ice cream]. If we love [ice cream] why do we eat [it]? We should let [it be]. Rather we love ourselves and not the [ice cream]...

Whatever we choose to love is what we will be connected to. If I choose to love ice cream, I am attached to it, for as long as it lasts. When I finish it, however, I am stuck with myself, plus the extra calories. My love has now disappointed me. Some “ice cream-like” relationships with people are set up on conditions so casual and open that nothing permanent can result from them. When the ice cream in the relationship finishes, we discover that even though we thought we had bonded with someone, somehow we are alone – unexpanded.

If from the outset we fail to follow the path to build a love that is “not dependent on anything,” but rather freely use “feelings of love” to connect, we can end up feeling unfulfilled, and possibly even hateful or angry.

The Mishnah gives a paradigm of this quick-fix love.

4. Pirkei Avot 5:16 – Destructive love.

What is an example of love that is dependent on a specific thing? The love of Amnon for Tamar.

איזו היא אהבה שהיא תלויה בדבר? זו אהבת אמנון ותמר.

Amnon and Tamar were half siblings, both children of King David from different mothers (although in Jewish law they were not related at all because Tamar had the status of a convert, who legally has no relatives). In order to satisfy his desire for Tamar, Amnon tricked her and ultimately violated her. He wanted the quick-fix type of love rather than expanding himself in love through the commitment of marriage. After he had satisfied his lust, he despised Tamar and sent her away, since now there was no basis for his “love.”

5. Shmuel (Samuel) II 13:15 – Lust turns to hatred.

Then Amnon hated her exceedingly, so that his hatred for her was greater than his love for her had been.

וישנאה אמנון שנאה גדולה מאד כי גדולה השנאה אשר שנאה מאהבה אשר אהבה...

6. Magen Avot, Commentary to Pirkei Avot 5:16 – Once the external factor disappears, we can see the “love” for what it really is.

Any love that depends on a specific cause: For example, when people get married for power or money, or the love a man has for a woman because of her beauty and he wants to be with her – since it is dependent upon something that will not last, the love will not last either. This was the case with Amnon who loved Tamar for her beauty, as the verse says, “I love Tamar, my sister.” But when he had satisfied his lust for her

וישנאה אמנון שנאה גדולה מאד כי גדולה השנאה אשר שנאה מאהבה אשר אהבה... כל אהבה שהיא תלויה בדבר: כאנשים המתחברים מפני שררה או שותפות ממון או אהבת איש לאשה מפני יופי ורוצה לבא עליה כיון שהיא תלויה בדבר שאינו מתקיים גם האהבה תתבטל בהתבטל הדבר ההוא כמו שאירע לאמנון שהיה אוהב לתמר מפני יופיה כמו שנאמר את תמר אחותי אני אוהב וכשנתמלא רצונו ממנה ובעל אותה בטלה אותה אהבה ולא עוד אלא ששנא

by having relations with her, the love dissipated. Not only that, he hated her.

אותה שנאה.

Even though our hearts pulsate with a desire to love and connect to another, many of us may have lost faith in love, because it has failed to expand us. And often, we have become embittered, and therefore hesitant to commit. We sense that we already know what's in store for us.

7. **Dan Savage, “How Should a Person Handle a Heartbreak?” www.nytimes.com, February 13, 2015 – Wallow for two weeks after a breakup, then move on.**

Every relationship you're ever going to be in is going to fail – until one doesn't.

So while it stinks to be single on Valentine's Day, and while it stinks worse to have been dumped right before Valentine's Day, try to look on the bright side: Your most recent failed relationship was obviously doomed – even if it wasn't obvious to you – but now you're free to enter into a new relationship. And that relationship, your next relationship, could be the one that doesn't fail.

But what should you do in the meantime? While you're still reeling from the pain of your recent breakup?

...Pour your heart out to a few patient, indulgent friends who are under orders to nod sympathetically no matter how unhinged you sound.

Wallow in your misery – lean into it, even – for two weeks.

Then knock it off.

Get out of your apartment. Go places, do things, see stuff. Go to the gym, take a walk in the park and go see movies, plays and concerts. Hang out with the same friends who are now under orders not to listen to you talk about your breakup – it's their turn to talk about their lives, it's your turn to listen.

And if you're still reeling from the pain of the breakup? Pretend to be happy. Fake it. Because acting like you've got it together can actually help you get it together.

Should we discover that until now we were pursuing the wrong type of love, do we allow ourselves new hope? Is it worth finding out where to look for lasting love and how to experience it properly?

PART B. LOVING INTERNAL QUALITIES

To love another person means to love the “part” of that person which will not disappear. This means loving the internal qualities that come from that person's soul – such as kindheartedness, fairness, patience, etc.

1. **Rabbi S.R. Hirsh, Ethics of the Fathers: Ch. 5 Mishnah 16 – Eternal love is built by loving the qualities of another.**

But if love does not depend on a specific cause, it will never cease – Wherever love is rooted in the spiritual and moral worth of the beloved person, there the love will be as abiding as the values upon which it is founded.

2. **Rambam (Maimonides), Commentary to Pirkei Avot 5:16 – Love must be based on eternal qualities for it to last.**

Any love that depends on something that dissipates, when that thing dissipates the love ceases. But if the love is based on something that does not dissipate, then it will never cease. And you should know that any love dependent on any physical basis, once the basis disappears, so too will the love. Therefore, if the basis of the love is a spiritual one, which is true knowledge, then that love will never dissipate, since its basis compels it to exist.

כל אהבה שהיא תלויה בדבר בטל - בטל דבר
ובטלה אהבה, ושאינה תלויה בדבר בטל -
אינה בטלה לעולם. 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 סורה לעולם, הואיל
וסיבתה מחוייבת המציאות.

By focusing on the internal qualities of our beloved we can love their pure essence. If a person only loves another because of a nice figure, great hair, fantastic sense of style, confidence in a skill set, or occupation, this person will feel limited in his ability to give and receive true love. The reason for this is that the deeper self, the soul, which deserves love and wants to reciprocate love, is barely participating and is therefore detached from feelings of love.

Love is the power to bond, to become attached to something outside of ourselves and, thus, to become bigger. We also said that genuine love unifies – makes two into one. Therefore, the one that we love, we become one with. This means we must bond with the other person's deeper internal qualities, which come from the soul. Without this, love cannot grow.

Nevertheless, should a person's moral and spiritual values change and are no longer in sync with those of the spouse, this could also undermine the marriage bond, since these factors are important components that form the base of the marriage.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION I

- ☞ We distinguished between true, everlasting love and “ice-cream love.”
- ☞ Everlasting love expands us, because it requires us to connect with something lasting, the person's internal qualities, his essence or soul.

- ∞ This type of love, which *unifies* two individuals, intrinsically expands their consciousness and identity.
- ∞ Our culture urges us to “feel good” and focuses on the immediate gratification of “ice-cream love,” fleeting love that is conditional, depending on certain superficial factors, such as looks or wealth.
- ∞ Once the reason for this “love” disappears, the love dissipates as well.
- ∞ For this reason, many people are dissatisfied and even cynical about love and may have abandoned the hope of ever having a lasting committed relationship.
- ∞ Everlasting love should expand us. We need to discover the path to it.

SECTION II. WHAT DOES LOVE HAVE TO DO WITH OUR IDENTITY?

We just discussed that in our generation many people feel “burnt” by relationships that they thought would connect them to another person but ultimately failed to fill their hopes.

Subconsciously, we may even run away from commitment, because we are afraid of it leading to pain. These feelings may even lead us to think that commitment will limit us, prevent us from being successful, and weigh us down. At the same time, we yearn deeply for true love with one person, who will love us and appreciate us for who we really are.

This brings us to a very important question: Does “interdependence” (i.e. giving up my independence to commit to a relationship of giving) limit us or help us grow as people?

PART A. WHAT WILL GET ME AHEAD - INDEPENDENCE OR INTERDEPENDENCE?

The following two sources reflect contrasting visions of committing to a relationship.

1. [Marguerite Fields, “Want to Be My Boyfriend? Please Define,” from *www.nytimes.com*, May 4, 2008 – Winner of the Sunday Styles national essay contest.](#)

Recently my mother asked me to clarify what I meant when I said I was dating someone, versus when I was hooking up with someone, versus when I was seeing someone. And I had trouble answering her because the many options overlap and blur in my mind. But at one point, four years ago, I had a boyfriend. And I know he was my boyfriend because he said, “I want you to be my girlfriend,” and I said, “O.K.”

He and I dated for over a year, and when we broke up I thought my angsty heart was going to spit itself right up out of my sore throat. Afterward, I moved out of my mother's house in Brooklyn and into an apartment in the East Village, and from there it becomes confusing.

So, a few days after the chat with my mom, when I found myself downtown drinking tea with my friend Steven, I asked him what he thought about dating. He has a long-term girlfriend, and I was curious how he viewed their relationship.

"The main thing," he said, "is I don't mind if she sleeps with other people. I mean, she's not my property, right? I'm just glad I get to hang out with her. Spend time with her. Because that's all we really have, you know? I don't want her to be mine, and I don't want to be anybody's."

I sucked my teeth and looked over at the next table, where two men sat opposite each other. One looked over his shoulder and gave me a closed-mouth grin.

Steven explained that it's not a question of faithfulness but of expectation. He can't be expected not to want to sleep with other people, so he can't expect her to think differently. They are both young and living in New York, and as everyone in New York knows, there's the possibility of meeting anyone, everywhere, all the time.

2. **Rabbi Akiva Tatz, *The Thinking Jewish Teenager's Guide to Life*, pp. 72-4 – A picture of Jewish marriage.**

Marriage should be a relationship between two people in which each one gives entirely to the other. Each one gives of himself, herself entirely, utterly and fearlessly. The result is that something is built which far surpasses what each individual is as an individual, a combination of two souls each fueled and fired by the other, far greater than each alone could have ever dreamed possible...And the remarkable result is that when you give yourself away entirely, you discover yourself most sharply.

The paradox of this deepest of relationships is that to the degree you are willing to give yourself away, exactly to that degree you find yourself. And when you have found yourself this clearly and sharply, you must be willing to put all that you have found, all that you have become, back into the relationship. You must give again and more deeply. And again you will discover a new depth in your own inner being. And again you will give it away. This is the beginning of the relationship we call love.

That is the Jewish idea of marriage: two people giving so intensely that they find themselves each entirely within the essence of the other and yet each discovering a unique identity more sharply and more independent.

Exercise #4 – What assumptions underlie each viewpoint?

- Of these two excerpts, which writer seems to have a more confident and powerful sense of identity?
- Based on what each says, why do you think this is true?
- Would you agree that the following points are the underlying assumptions of each piece?
 1. The *New York Times* piece says that independence is necessary to keep one's identity. (Tied into Steven's view of identity is the option for pleasures that he may or may not ever end up experiencing.)
 2. The piece on Jewish marriage says that holding onto independence is a hindrance to discovering one's identity, and to reaching greater independence. (Pleasure comes from the total exclusivity of being able to invest oneself in someone who cherishes what the other is investing.)
- Which assumption resonates with you more, which seems more valid? The first view: I am better off independent, ensuring my identity; or the second view: true independence and a greater sense of identity come when I am able to give myself over to someone who will cherish and safeguard my commitment?

PART B. LOVE'S PROMISE – TOGETHER FOREVER

Why is the desire to feel love such a potent motivator for us? Why are we designed with such a powerful drive? Is it a purely physical, instinctual drive given to us in order to populate the planet, or is it a deeper need?

We want love not just because it feels good. Rather, love “feels good” because it offers us the chance for completion. Built properly, a committed relationship has the power to expand the “Self,” and bring us closer to perfection. Love brings about completeness. For millennia, this awareness has prompted people to seek out a partner for life.

Let us go back to the beginning – the story of Adam and Chava (Eve).

1. **Bereishit (Genesis) 1:27 – The original person was a combination of both male and female. This is termed, “the image of God.”**

God created Adam in His Image – in the image of God did He create him; male and female He created them.

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים
בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אוֹתָם.

Before there was Adam and Chava, there was a single person both male and female, who perceived these two aspects to be one within him. [Note: calling Adam a “him” is only a grammatical structure to describe this androgynous person.]

2. **Ibid., 2:21-22 – God split the original person into two distinct identities, one male and the other female.**

So the Lord, God cast a deep slumber upon Adam, and he slept. He took one of his sides and closed the flesh back in its place. Then the Lord, God built the side that He had taken from Adam into a woman and brought her to Adam.

...ויפל ה' אלהים תרדמה על האדם וישן ויקח אחת מצלעותיו ויסגר בשר תחתנה ויבן ה' אלהים את הצלע אשר לקח מן האדם לאשה ויביאה אל האדם.

The first person was originally created as both male and female. This person was then split into the first distinct male, who retained the name Adam, and the first female, who was taken from the original Adam and formed into the first woman, Chava.

The genesis of the soul mate concept is the splitting of this original person into male and female parts.

3. **Rashi to Bereishit 2:20-1 – The original Adam had two sides, male and female.**

One of his sides – That is why [the Rabbis said (Talmud Bavli, Eruvin 18a) regarding the original Adam], “Two faces [sides] were created.”

זה שאמרנו שני פרצופים נבראו:

The story of Adam and Chava, their creation as soul mates and their marriage, is not a fairy tale, nor is it academic to us. Their story is our story too. There is a common adage that “opposites attract.” The Torah qualifies and gives depth to this observation: Men and women, notoriously opposite, attract not because they are opposite but because they were originally one. This desire to return to the state of oneness is the deeper source of their attraction.

The root of our desire for completeness comes from our original creation as one being.

PART C. HOW RELATIONSHIP BRINGS US TO COMPLETION

Do we associate love with any of the following feelings: a sense of expansion, belonging to something bigger than what I was before, an ecstasy of being connected to something beyond myself, or a feeling of greater oneness?

What is our deeper soul drive to love trying to express?

We sense that love expands us beyond ourselves. As we learned earlier, the love that fizzles out and does not expand us is “love dependent on other things,” rather than on the intrinsic qualities of the person. For example, a guy loves a girl in order to avoid being alone. If he finds someone else he enjoys spending time with more, then she may become obsolete. When the “thing I love” disappears, then what am I left with? Nothing. I am left with myself, and I am not any bigger of a person for it. Why is this dissatisfying?

There is something “existentially” dissatisfying about being alone and without a relationship that expands us. We see this at the root of our history and in our design as human beings.

1. Bereishit 2:18 – A person without a relationship is termed “not good.”

The Lord God said, “It is not good for man to be alone; I will make him a helper opposite to him.”

ויאמר יקוק אלהים לא טוב היות האדם לבדו
אעשה לו עזר כנגדו:

This verse arouses some important, glaring questions: Does God make mistakes – why did He create Adam and only later say Adam was “not good”? Everything else that God made in the first six days of creation meets with God’s approval. What was wrong with Adam?

Everything else that God created, He created complete. Why did God make Adam incomplete? Why is it not good for a person to be alone?

To make a human being truly good, God had to create the parameters of an interdependent or “committed relationship.” This was designed to enable us to break the boundaries of Self and become much bigger.

Existentially, we feel the need for a marriage relationship, in which we fully dedicate ourselves to another, because we sense that it’s meant to bring out our true good.

God invented the interdependent relationship of man and wife to expand us – that is, to return us to our perfected state.

2. Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, Parshah Insights Acharei Mot, pg. 6 – Since Adam and Chava were created from the same being, they were able to achieve a high state of unity.

Targum Unkelos translates לא טוב as לא תקין, i.e. this is an...incomplete state...The reason that God first made Adam one and then two was not because he changed His mind. It was rather that each male and female should have the potential of becoming one, of cleaving to each other and becoming one flesh. They become one, because they were once one. And when they become one, they are imitating the unity underlining the whole of creation [God’s oneness]. (Based on Gur Aryeh, Bereishit 2:18)

True love, spiritual love, is all about unity. Love creates unity and is an expression of oneness. A single person senses the soul’s awareness that in its current state it lacks this unity. That awareness manifests itself in our desire for love, companionship, and ultimately a spouse.

That is how the first couple felt about each other.

3. Bereishit 2:23-24 – Adam perceives himself to be at one with the woman.

And Adam said, “This time it is bone from my own bones and flesh of my flesh; she

... ויאמר האדם זאת הפעם עצם מעצמי ובשר מבשרי לזאת יקרא אשה כי מאיש לקחה זאת

shall be called *Isha* (woman), since she was taken from *Ish* (man).” Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife, and they shall be as one flesh.

על כן יעזב איש את אביו ואת אמו ודבק באשתו והיו לבשר אחד.

Love is supposed to produce oneness and unity. By being truly connected to another, through “a love that is not dependent on anything,” we gain a sense of expansion. This is the ideal that we are working toward in Jewish marriage.

4. **Maharal of Prague on Ethics of Our Fathers, Ch. 5:16 – Love is the power of true unification.**

The accepted understanding of [the Mishnah in Avot 5:16] is that it is coming to teach us about unity, which is so strong that when there is unconditional love, it lasts forever. Dissension [discussed in the previous Mishnah] has no permanence, but its opposite, love that creates attachment, has permanence. The reason for this is that unity is itself what gives something permanence. Being complete and without any discord is what makes something last. So too something only comes to an end due to opposition towards it. But when there is connection and no discord, only unity, then there is nothing to oppose it and it will last. To summarize, there can be no nullification of something that is intrinsically one.

הפ"י שאמרנו כי בא להודיע ענין האחדות, שכל כך חזק עד שכל אהבה שאינה תלויה בדבר היא קיימת לעולם. שכשם שהמחלוקת אין קיום לו, כך הוא ההפוך שהוא האהבה שהוא החבור יש קיום לו. ודבר זה כי האחדות הוא הקיום בעצמו, שכאשר הדבר הוא שלם בלי חלוק הוא קיום שלו. ועוד כי בטול הדבר מגיע מצד המתנגד אשר מתנגד אל דבר, וכאשר יש חבור ולא חלוק רק אחדות אין כאן מתנגד כלל והוא קיום הדבר כמו שתבין מן הדברים אשר אמרנו. כלל הדבר אין בטול לדבר שהוא אחד בעצם.

It is not accidental that many draw a couple as two halves of a heart split from top to bottom. In line with what we have learned, it seems more appropriate to say that a couple is like two halves of a whole cup split vertically – the cup may be filled to completion only when it is together. When the cup splits into two halves, even if we would fill it non-stop, it will always be empty.

A Jewish married couple aspiring to integrate the Torah’s spiritual values become like one unit absorbing endless blessing, enjoying emotional security and genuine happiness.

Love allows us to become one with the other and achieve true spiritual oneness, which is everlasting. We are only divided in body, but in soul we can overcome all the divisions that cause love to die.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION II

- ☞ We started by comparing and contrasting two differing viewpoints on love and individuality. We examined whether staying single ensures freedom, or if committing to love another actually gives a greater sense of self.
- ☞ What “feels good” about love is that it promises us completion.
- ☞ The Torah shows us how “a need for a committed relationship” was implanted in Adam and Chava, and in all of us, to bring each of us to completion. Marriage is designed as one of the greatest tools to help us do this.
- ☞ A couple is like two halves of a cup split from top to bottom. The cup may be filled to completion only when it is whole. When it is split into two halves, we can fill it all day but it will always be empty.

SECTION III. ENSURING WE FIND LOVE

PART A. SAFE PARAMETERS FOR LOVE

If we ask, “Is nuclear power good or bad?” the answer would be: “It depends on how we use it. It can be horribly destructive, or it can revolutionize our modern energy crisis.” Everyone agrees on one point: Nuclear energy’s massive potential can be harnessed only under very special conditions.

From a Jewish perspective sexual desire is like spiritual nuclear energy. Used correctly, it can help bring a couple to perfection. Misused, it can reap massive emotional destruction.

When used with the proper conditions, what does it help build?

Oneness.

1. **Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, *Made in Heaven*, pg. 8 – Love Creates One from Two.**

...the Hebrew word for love, *ahavah*, has the same numerical value as the Hebrew word *Echad* meaning “one.” In its deepest sense, love takes two people and makes them into one.

In the last class we explained that everything in the world teaches us about a spiritual reality. We gave the example from Rabbi Akiva Tatz of “missing home,” which is the soul’s expression of longing to return to its real home in the spiritual realm (see our previous class in the series, *Gratifying Our Deepest Desires*, Section II, Part A, Sources #3 and #4).

Let’s ask: Why is love so exciting for us? What spiritual concept is love supposed to teach us?

In order to teach us about the ultimate experience possible – connection with the One Infinite Source of All – God packaged it in one of humanity’s most exhilarating experiences: love.

Funnily enough, our desire to fall in love shares the same goal. The goal of man and woman in love is the same goal as spiritual connection – to bring us to oneness. This will sound especially strange to those of us who were raised in a predominantly Christian culture, in which religion denies expressions of sexual desire and condemns them as sinful. However, Judaism sees love and sexual desire as gifts that are central to marriage and reflect a yearning for a deeper spiritual awareness of unity, as well.

The Talmud, in fact, relates marital harmony to a home blessed by God's Presence, and marital discord to the lack thereof.

2. Talmud Bavli, Sotah 17a – The appropriate union of man and woman brings God's Presence.

Rabbi Akiva taught: When a man and woman are worthy of it, God's Presence is found between them. When they are not worthy, a fire consumes them.

דריש ר"ע איש ואשה זכו שכינה ביניהן לא זכו
אש אוכלתן.

3. Rashi to Sotah 17a – Male and female are only separate because God is not between them; when He is, they are one.

The Presence is between them – For God divided His Name (Yud-Hey) and placed it between the two of them: the letter *yud* in the word *Ish* (man) and the letter *hey* in the word *Isha* (woman). *When they are unworthy, a fire consumes them* – For God removes His Name from between them and they each remain as “fire.” (Man and woman in Hebrew each consist of *alef* and *shin*, which together spell *aish* [fire]; as well as a third letter, *yud* in *Ish* and *hey* in *Isha* – Ed.)

שכינה ביניהם - שהרי חלק את שמו ושיכנו
ביניהם; יו"ד באיש וה"י באשה. לא זכו אש
אוכלתן - שהקב"ה מסלק שמו מביניהם ונמצאו
אש ואש.

The tremendous energy and excitement felt between a man and woman can be compared to the power produced by the nuclear power plant. This energy can be used constructively to create unity between them.

4. Rabbi Akiva Tatz, The Jewish Teenager's Guide to Life, pg. 60 – God created love so exhilarating to serve as a metaphor of the ultimate connection – to Him.

[Regarding marital intimacy] What is the meaning of the potency of human experience compressed into this area? Why is there a sense of timelessness and ultimate “having arrived” inherent in this particular interaction?

The secret here is startling in its depth: the source of all that is contained in the intimacy between man and woman in this world is in fact the nature of existence in the world to come. The ecstasy of the next world...is the bond between the...elevated human soul and the Creator. In that great relationship is contained the ultimate sensation, the knowledge, of having arrived. In that state of togetherness, ultimately and absolutely, there is no other place to go. There, in the deepest sense possible, time and motion stretch into the infinite meshing of soul with its Source at a cosmic intensity. There, two become one in essence. And there, in the most essential sense, life is conceived.

All experience in this world reflects its source in the higher experience. When that higher experience is the ultimate and eternal relationship between the Creator and the human soul, the parallel experience in this world which it generates must be exceptionally potent and ecstatic.

Under the wrong conditions, man and woman together produce destruction. A faulty relationship turns into a consuming conflagration that leaves only destruction and pain in its wake, similar to nuclear power unchecked. (On a personal level, anyone who has been used in a relationship or suffered a breakup may easily relate to this idea based on the emotional pain they experienced.) The fallout is that one may be afraid to invest in a relationship of unconditional commitment.

Based on the insights we have discovered in this class, a discerning person will flip the stereotype of “marriage as old fashioned,” and discover just the opposite. The Jewish marriage is totally revolutionary. It sets up the ideal conditions to bring two passionate people to perfect oneness in body and soul. Every detail of the Jewish marriage has only one goal – to make the couple unified here on earth, as they are on the level of their root soul in heaven.

From here we learn the opposite as well. Those involved in relationships lacking a framework to build a deeper bond move toward lesser levels of commitment and end up feeling separate and alone, cast into a world of self-estrangement.

PART B. LOVING IS GIVING

One of the ways we create unity in marriage is by giving to the one we love. The desire to give rather than take is seen as the litmus test for love. In fact, the Hebrew word *ahavah* – love, comes from *hav* – to give.

1. **Rabbi Rabbi E.E. Dessler, *Strive for Truth, Vol. I*, pp. 126, 131, 133 (translated by Rabbi Aryeh Carmell, Feldheim 1978) – Giving leads to love.**

We see that love and giving always come together. Is the giving a consequence of the love, or is perhaps the reverse true: is the love a result of the giving?

We usually think it is love which causes giving, because we observe that a person showers gifts and favors on the one he loves. But there is another side to the argument.

Giving may bring about love for the same reason that a person loves what he himself has created or nurtured: he recognizes in it part of himself...

Perhaps [we would think that the love between man and wife] is merely something implanted in us by the Creator as part of His deep-laid plan for the maintenance of the world, just as hunger is given to us to ensure the preservation of the body. But this seems most unlikely. To achieve this end the biological urges of physical desire and yearning for children would suffice. What is the point of this additional emotional attachment?

...[T]his love arises between husband and wife because they complement each other... Alone, every person is defective and unable to carry out his proper function...by giving each other this completion they come to love each other, on the principle we have already established: the one who gives, loves.

...The best relationship between husband and wife [is] when both achieve and practice the virtue of giving. Then their love will never cease, and their lives will be filled with happiness and contentment for as long as they live on this earth.

Compare this to the relationship Amnon had with Tamar (page 4 above).

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

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...

Becoming a giver is part of the challenge and purpose of marriage. A spouse who focuses on giving the other one pleasure, receives the greatest pleasure from pleasing the other.

3. **Rabbi Moshe Bleicher, *Shechinah Beineihem*, pg. 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.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION III

- ∞ From a spiritual perspective, sexual desire is perhaps one of the most potent forces that exist.
- ∞ Within the proper parameters, it produces oneness from two. Unchecked, it causes suffering and hinders our ability to reach oneness.
- ∞ Jewish marriage sets up the ideal conditions to bring two passionate people to perfect oneness in body and soul.
- ∞ Giving leads to love. It creates unity, allowing each partner to become complete, and building a deep sense of oneness.

CLASS SUMMARY:

IN OUR PURSUIT OF LOVE, ARE WE ENERGIZED, ACTUALIZING OUR POTENTIAL, OR DO WE FIND OURSELVES RUNNING INTO DEAD ENDS?

- All too often people find themselves in dead-end relationships that do not result in them actualizing their potential. This has sometimes led to the belief that to truly develop as an individual, one is better off alone.

HOW CAN WE DISTINGUISH BETWEEN LOVE AND LUST, BETWEEN TRUE LOVE AND COUNTERFEIT LOVE?

- We saw that Jewish tradition offers a simple litmus test for determining whether love is genuine or not: Does it depend on something else? If the love is based on something superficial or external, then when that basis disappears, so does the love.
- True love is based on appreciating the essence of the other person, his soul. When we appreciate the virtues of another and love him for who he really is, we have the basis for everlasting love.

WHAT DEEPER “SOUL NEED” DRIVES US TO GET INVOLVED IN RELATIONSHIPS?

- A person alone feels an inner lack. We learn this from the story of our own creation when God declared that it was “not good for man to be alone.” Neither Adam nor we, his descendants, can achieve real goodness and the completeness we desire, on our own.

- This awareness existentially prompts us to look for someone with whom we can become complete.
- By giving to the one we love, we create unity, which enables both of us to be complete.

IF WE WERE TO FOLLOW A SPIRITUAL PATH TO LOVE, WOULD THIS EXPAND US?

- The spiritual path will expand our sense of self, because instead of seeking to satisfy our desire for completeness in counterfeit ways, we will seek a spiritual connection that will develop us, and the one we love, in the deepest way possible.
- True love will create unity between us and our soul mate, the product of which will be more than the sum of its parts. It will be a reunification of the original form of Adam and Chava.
- The most basic condition for finding eternal love is the commitment we call “marriage.” The Jewish marriage is built on spiritual principles and is therefore designed to bring those who follow its parameters to completion.

Now that we have a clear idea of what love can be and how marriage helps spouses actualize their potential as well as unify, we need to develop a fuller understanding of who that spouse should be. In other words, what’s the Jewish connection in marriage? This is the theme of the final class of this series – Am I Ready to Find My Soul Mate IV.