

Spiritual Reflection on Love (*Ahavah*)

This year, our religious celebrations began early -- in August (or the 14th day of the month of Elul) with the celebration of commitment for Larry and Jenn. Jewish tradition has much to say about love and relationships -- both between human beings, and between the human and the Divine. With respect to loving God, our Machzor (prayer book) for the High Holy Days contains the following passages:

Ahavat Olam (Love of the world):

You have loved Your people, the House of Israel, with infinite love; You taught us Torah and mitzvot, statutes and laws. Therefore, ADONAI our God, as we lie down or rise up, we shall think of Your laws and speak of them, rejoicing in Your words of Torah and Your mitzvot forever and ever. For they are our life and the fullness of our days, and on them we will meditate day and night. May You never withdraw Your love from us. Baruch Atah Adonai, who loves the People Israel.

Ve-ahavta (from the Shema, Devarim 6:4-9):

You shall love Adonai your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all that is yours. These words that I command you this day shall be taken to heart. Teach them again and again to your children, and speak of them when you sit in your home, when you walk on your way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. Bind them as a sign upon your hand and as a symbol above your eyes. Inscribe them upon the doorposts of your home and on your gates.

Ahavah Rabah (God's great love):

You have loved us deeply, ADONAI our God, and shown us boundless compassion. Avinu Malkeinu, for the sake of our ancestors who trusted in You and whom You taught the laws of life, be gracious to us as well, and instruct us. Compassionate Creator, care for us: Allow our hearts to understand and discern; to hear, study, and teach; to observe, fulfill, and perform with love all the teachings of Your Torah. Enlighten our eyes with Your Torah; attach our hearts to Your mitzvot; unify our hearts to love and revere Your name so that we never lose hope. As we trust in Your great, holy, awe-inspiring name, we will delight and rejoice in Your deliverance.

God's Love (Richard Levy):

You were God
and we were Israel,
God alone
and lonely people,
long ago.

You loved us with God's love
and You taught us
how to respond to You.

Through mitzvot,
recollections,
celebrations, Torah.

They are the light of
our eyes, the uniqueness of
our being.

In the joy of them
You have drawn us close
to You. In the truth of them
we have discovered You,
the only One.

We are together still.

You respond to every people
in Your chosen way; with
Your love You have chosen
to respond to us.

With our love,
we offer You our praise.

The loving relationship between God and God's people is the subject of the book of Song of Songs (Shir Ha-Shirim). There is some extraordinary imagery in this text; some passages even border on the erotic. It is common to use passages as part of the wedding service; here's a representative one:

Thus my beloved spoke to me:
Arise, my darling, my fair one, come away!
For lo the winter is past,
the rain is over and gone
The blossoms have appeared on the land
The pruning time has come;
The song of the turtledove is heard in our land.
The green figs form on the tree,
The vines in blossom give off fragrance.
Arise, my darling,
My fair one, come away. (Song of Songs 2: 10-13)

For this year's reflection, I'd like you to collect some thoughts on what love means to you in a Jewish sense. You may choose to write about your relationship with God, or about your relationship with another person or persons. The most important thing is to maintain your focus on how this love you are describing derives from a Jewish perspective, or a Jewish feeling.

Please write out your thoughts on the attached sheets. You can either use this form in hard copy, or you can email it to me, at leonlitvack@mac.com

Please take your time over this. Please be as honest as you can, and please use your own words.

If you want to learn more about the Jewish understanding of love, try reading some of

the Song of Songs (also called the Song of Solomon). It's available online at

<http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/text/song-jps.html>

There are also numerous websites that address the Jewish understanding of love:

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/loving-and-fearing-god/>

<http://www.jewfaq.org/brother.htm>

<http://www.aish.com/sp/f/48971341.html>

<https://reformjudaism.org/blog/2016/02/11/what-love-jewish-look-giving-and-receiving>

<https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/No-Holds-Barred-Jewish-lust-versus-Christian-love>

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/a-model-of-unconditional-love/>

<https://louisjacobs.org/articles/greater-love-hath-no-man-the-jewish-point-of-view-of-self-sacrifice/>

https://www.jewishquotations.com/love/?doing_wp_cron=1534184481.4744889736175537109375

NOTE: DISCRETION WILL BE ASSURED! I WILL NOT READ OUT ANY NAMES, AND WILL NOT ATTRIBUTE ANYTHING I RECEIVE TO ANY SPECIFIC INDIVIDUAL!

You can email this form to leonlitvack@mac.com

or bring the hard copy with you to the synagogue on Tuesday 18 September (Kol Nidrei night)

We will hold a discussion about your answers on Wednesday 19 September, during the time for Yom Kippur Minchah (4:30 pm).

With best wishes for a shanah tovah,

Cantor Leon Litvack

My Description of Love from a Jewish Perspective
