

COMMITTED LOVE



The first step in acquiring wisdom is to define our terms. We learned in booklet #1 that “love” is the emotion you experience when focusing on and taking pleasure in another’s virtues. **How would you define “commitment”?**

1 Rabbi Yosef Albo – *Sefer Ha’Ikarim* (4:45)

- “Commitment” is a permanent connection between two parties, based on mutual love. They forge one entity, each caring for the other as himself.
- If one sees harm coming, he does his utmost – risks danger, if necessary – to rescue the other as he would himself...
- The Hebrew word for “love” (*ahava*) has a numerical value (*gematria*) of 13. This is the same numerical value as the word *echad*, meaning “one.” The beloved should be viewed as no different from oneself.
- This foundation of trust facilitates the confidential sharing of one’s inner self.

הרב יוסף אלבו – ספר העיקרים (ד:מה)

והטעם לפועל הזה בכריתת הברית הוא: שכריתת הברית הוא קשר קיים בין שני אנשים כורתי הברית, כדי לקשור ולדבק האהבה ביניהם, עד שיהיו שניהם כאלו הם גוף אחד. וישמור כל אחד מהם את חברו כשמירתו את עצמו...

ומזה יתחייב כי כאשר ירגיש האחד איזה נזק או צער בא על חברו בעל בריתו, שיכניס עצמו בדוחק להצילו, כמו שיכניס עצמו בסכנה בעד עצמו...

ולזה תמצא כי אהבה בגימטריא עולה לאחד, כי אין האהוב זולת עצמו כלל.

ולזה יבטח בו ויגלה אליו סודותיו, כמו שמגלה אותם לעצמו.

Committed love is a bond of loyalty, devotion and trust – uniting “two into one.”

2 Rabbi Avigdor Nebenzahl – *Yerushalayim B’Mo’adeha* (Pesach p. 190)

Rabbi Aryeh Levin was visiting the doctor with his wife. He said, “Doctor, my wife’s foot is hurting us.”

At this level of sensitivity, her pain was his pain. Ideally, this is how husband and wife should feel for one another.

הרב אביגדר נבנצל – ירושלים במועדיה (פסח עמוד קצ)

ידוע הסיפור על הגאון הרב אריה לוי זללה”ה שבא פעם לרופא עם אשתו, ואמר לרופא: “אדוני הרופא, הרגל של אשתי כואבת לנו.” כי הוא הרגיש שאם כואב ברגל של אשתו, הרי שכואב גם לו. כך בעל צריך להרגיש עם אשתו.



What is one way to apply the lesson of this story to strengthen your own close relationships?

Rabbi Yosef Albo (1380–1444) lived in Spain and authored the classic philosophical treatise, *Sefer Ha’Ikarim* (“Book of Fundamentals”).

Rabbi Avigdor Nebenzahl (born 1935) has served as Chief Rabbi of the Old City of Jerusalem, Dean of Yeshivat Netiv Aryeh, and spiritual leader of the Ramban Synagogue.

HIERARCHY OF RELATIONSHIPS

Not all relationships are the same. The Talmud uses three symbols – a river, a kettle and a bird – to represent three levels of committed relationships:

3 Rabbi Aharon Feldman – *The River, the Kettle and the Bird* (ch. 1)

[1] Transactional

In its lowest form peace means the absence of conflict, or peace in a purely negative sense. This state exists when two people or groups of people maintain contact with each other to the extent that this serves each of their interests. Although there is an active relationship between them, each member to this sort of peace remains a separate and discrete unit.

The symbol for this type of peace is a **river**. A river is the classic vehicle of commerce between two cities. As such, it represents a state of communication which exists between two separate entities **connected only by their mutual benefit**.

[2] Teammates

There is a second degree of peace. This exists where two people or groups of people join together to reach a common goal which neither alone would be able to achieve. For example, individuals band together to build skyscrapers; corporations form monopolies to increase their competitiveness; nations join in mutual defense pacts. None of these could be performed by each participant alone; only the joint efforts of all parties working together achieve the desired aims. This is not mere co-existence. This represents a type of peace which is dynamic, resulting in the achievement of an objective which could not have been reached if not for the peace.

This type of peace is symbolized by a **kettle**. A kettle is designed to prepare food by utilizing the **combined talents** of water and fire. Water alone would ruin the food through soaking. Fire alone would burn it. But through the mediatory effect of the kettle, an environment proper for cooking is created. The kettle

harnesses the talent of water to retain heat and the talent of fire to produce it to create an edible product. The kettle has thus made possible a productive peace between fire and water.

[3] Single Unit

The third and final level of peace is the peace of the **bird**. A bird has two disparate talents: the ability to survive on earth as well as to fly in the heavens. These talents are not separate skills which exist side by side. Rather, they are details of a **single organism which operates in these two realms**. The way the bird walks on earth is affected by the way it is designed to fly. Conversely, the way it flies the heavens is affected by the way it is intended to walk the earth. It is simultaneously both an earthbound and air-borne being.

A bird, therefore, represents an embodiment of a peace where two natures and **two entities have merged into one unit**. The two parties to this sort of peace not only work together but in doing so have merged into one unit. For example, the fifty states of the United States are not individual entities, but have submerged their individual identities into the common unit to which they belong...

The relationship has become so vital and meaningful that none of them conceives of himself as a separate entity. An emotional bond has been created between them which has gone beyond the feeling of mutual dependence or awareness of benefits received. Each is as keenly sensitive to the other's needs as if they were his own. Each is as happy to give to the other as he is to receive from him. **There is no separate sensation of "I"; there is only "we."** A selfless love exists between them which transcends all reason.



The deeper the level of commitment, the greater the expression of love. What are your primary commitments in life? (Not only family and friends, but career, community, organizations, hobbies, possessions, ideals, etc.)

How would you prioritize the top 3?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____

Keep your list in mind as we gather insights for strengthening life's most important relationships.

Rabbi Aharon Feldman is dean of Yeshivat Ner Israel in Baltimore, Maryland.

PARENT & CHILD

Having a child is the ultimate commitment to life's most primal, unbreakable bond.

In a literal sense, parents provide the elements from which a child is formed:

4 Rashi – Genesis 2:24

A child formed through the union of father and mother is a physical manifestation of their “one flesh.”

רש"י – בראשית ב:כד

הַיּוֹלֵד נוֹצֵר עַל יְדֵי שְׁנֵיהֶם, וְשֵׁם נִעְשָׂה בְּשָׂרָם אֶחָד.



- What do you think is the most important factor in forging the parent-child bond?
- What obligation, if any, does the child have in this relationship?

5 Rabbi Mattisyahu Salomon – *With Hearts Full of Love*

Life has become increasingly complicated in modern times, and... it seems to me that parents no longer have **enough time for their children**. The pace of modern life is very fast. Everyone is busy today. The father is busy. The mother is busy. And they're busy doing good things. And they simply do not have enough time to give to their children.

The children are not getting the normal attention they need, and they feel it. Sometimes, they can actually feel

that their parents consider them a hindrance in their lives...

A child has to feel that his parents care about him, that they're interested in him... It is a terrible thing when a child thinks his parents aren't interested in him, when he wants something and they have neither the time nor the patience to listen to him. A child needs special care and special attention. He feels safe and protected if he knows that he's the focus of his parents' world...

6 Rabbi Raphael Pelcovitz and David Pelcovitz, PhD – *Balanced Parenting* (“Instilling Values”)

Among the most basic values that parents must instill in their children is gratitude. In fact, gratefulness is such a central value of Judaism that the very name *Yehudi*, “Jew,” has as its source the Hebrew word, *hoda'ah*, thankfulness... (see Genesis 29:35)

Yet many children take for granted what their parents do for them. They are not even aware of the debt of

gratitude that they owe their parents. In turn, parents are often uncomfortable with asking for **recognition for the countless acts of kindness** they do for their children.

Instilling in children the habit of thanking their parents is an important component of teaching them the central value of being a Jew.

For more insights on Jewish parenting, see the LifeWisdom series: “Parenting.”

Rabbi Mattisyahu Salomon is the spiritual guide (*Mashgiach*) at Beth Medrash Gavoha in Lakewood, New Jersey, the largest Torah academy in North America with over 5,000 students. Originally from Gateshead, England, he served as *Mashgiach* of the Gateshead Yeshiva for 30 years.

Rabbi Raphael Pelcovitz served for 60 years as spiritual leader of Congregation Kneseth Israel (the White Shul) in Far Rockaway, New York. His son, **Dr. David Pelcovitz**, is Professor of Psychology at Yeshiva University in New York.

THE FAMILY CONNECTION

- All blood relationships – parents, siblings, grandparents – have an aspect of closeness not found even in marriage.
- There is no “divorcing” your family. And when the chips are down, we know on whom to rely:

7 Genesis 14:14

When Abram heard that **his nephew** [Lot] was taken captive, he summoned 318 troops and pursued the captors until the Dan region.

Midrash Aggada – Genesis 14

Abraham went to great effort to rescue Lot because it was **his nephew**.

Rabbi Ovadia Seforno - Genesis 2:9

Human nature is to be concerned with the needs of family, as it says: “A brother is destined [to help] during adversity” (Proverbs 17:17).

בראשית יד:יד

וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם כִּי נִשְׁבָּה אָחִיו, וַיִּרְקַ אֶת חֲנִיכָיו יְלִידֵי בֵיתוֹ שְׂמֹנֶה עָשָׂר וּשְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת, וַיִּרְדְּף עַד דָּן.

מדרש אגדה – בראשית פרק יד

ולא עשה מלחמה אלא להציל את לוט ואת רכושו, לפי שהיה בן אחיו.

פירוש הרב עובדיה ספורנו – בראשית ב:ט

שדרכו לתת לב לצרכי קרובו, כאמרו “ואח לצרה יולד” (משלי יז:יז).

8 Maimonides – *Guide for the Perplexed* (3:42)

The Torah preserves and strengthens the idea of closeness and kindness to one’s family... One of the Torah’s most important objectives is **interaction with relatives**, and to become close to anyone we share “brotherhood.”

Even if our relative has made bad mistakes and is basically lost, we must still not ignore him.

רמב"ם – מורה נבוכים (ג:מב)

וזאת המידה תשמרה ותחזקה זאת התורה הישרה מאד: רצוני לומר נשיאת פני הקרובים והיטב להם... וכבר הודיעתנו התורה בזאת המדה הפלגה גדולה מאד, והיא שהאדם צריך לישא פנים לקרוביו, ולקרב מאד כל מי שיש לו עמו אחוה.

ואפילו חטא לו וחמסו, ואפילו היה הקרוב ההוא בתכלית ההפסד, אי אפשר לו מבלתי שישא פנים לקרובו.



Imagine receiving a phone call at 3 a.m. from your cousin, saying he’s been arrested on false charges and has no one else who can help. He needs you to drive two hours with \$1,000 cash to bail him out. **What will you do?**

For insights into the “**Jewish family**” bond, see page 8.

Genesis is the first of the Five Books of Moses. **Midrash Aggada**, based on classical Torah texts, is the work of an anonymous author in the 12th-13th century. **Rabbi Ovadia Seforno** (1475-1550) was an Italian rabbi and physician.

Maimonides (Rambam, 12th century Spain and Egypt) is author of the philosophical treatise, *Guide for the Perplexed*. Written in Arabic, it has influenced philosophers throughout the ages.

GOALS & VALUES



Besides family, most of life's loyalties are those we choose: friends, spouse, career, ideals. To make wise choices, define your core beliefs:

What do I care about? What are my priorities? What are my deepest aspirations?

Build a self-knowledge database. On your own time, complete the worksheet on page 15: **“15 Ways to Define Your Goals & Values”**

Love is built on the commitment two people make to pursue shared goals and values.

9 Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Two are better than one. They are well-rewarded for their efforts: For if one falls, the other will lift him up. Whereas, one who falls alone has no one to lift him up.

קהלת ד:ט-י

טובים השניים מן האחד, אשר יש להם שכר טוב בעמלם. כי אם יפלו האחד, יקים את חברו. ואילו האחד שיפול, ואין שני להקימו.

Friendship is more than simply having fun together. Use your “self-knowledge database” to proactively seek friends whose values and ambitions are compatible with your own.

10 Rabbi Noah Weinberg – 48 Ways to Wisdom (#11)

Most of our friends become so due to circumstances beyond our control. You were assigned a roommate in college; a neighbor shares your passion for tennis. But what happens when you move locations, or you no longer enjoy playing tennis? The friendship is over...

A friend is meant for life. Friendship should be based on a loyalty that is unbreakable, no matter what the

circumstances, even if your paths diverge. That's why the Hebrew word for “friend,” *chaver*, comes from same root as *chibur* – “joined”...

Don't randomly bond with someone. Think through your criteria for a friend and proactively search for the right person who can be that kind of friend.



Think of your closest friend.
What is the bond holding that relationship together?

Ecclesiastes is the biblical book of life lessons authored by King Solomon.

Rabbi Noah Weinberg (1930–2009) was the dean and founder of Aish HaTorah. For 50 years, his visionary educational programs brought many thousands of Jews closer to their heritage. *48 Ways to Wisdom* is his classic commentary on chapter 6 of *Pirkei Avot*.

ACQUIRE A FRIEND

11 Talmud – Avot 1:6

Make for yourself a mentor and **acquire a friend**...

Maimonides – Mishnah Commentary (Avot 1:6)

It is imperative to acquire a close friend, because one's deeds and matters are refined through this relationship. That is why the Talmud says, “**Either a friend or death**” (Ta’anit 23a)...

One type of friend is a “**confidant**” in whom one can intimately confide, not withholding any actions or words. One informs this friend of all issues, both good and bad. One does so feeling safe, not vulnerable. With this degree of confidence, great pleasure is derived from their words and friendship.

Another type of friend is a “friend for virtue” – when two people desire the same positive goal, and **collaborate to achieve that ideal**.

It is this type of friend which the Torah enjoins one to “acquire.”

תלמוד – אבות א:ו

הושע בן פרחיה אומר: עשה לך רב, וקנה לך חבר...

רמב"ם – פירוש המשניות (אבות א:ו)

הכונה בזה שצריך לאדם שיקנה אוהב לעצמו, שיתקנו בו מעשיו וכל עניניו, כמו שאמרו או “חברותא או מיתותא”...

ואמנם אוהב בטחון הוא שיהיה לאדם אוהב תבטח נפשו בו. לא ישמר ממנו – לא במעשה ולא בדבור. ויודיעהו כל עניניו – הטוב מהם והמגונה – מבלתי שירא ממנו ששיגהו בכל זה חסרון, לא אצלו ולא זולתו. כי כשיגיע לאדם בטחון באיש זה – השעור ימצא מנוחה גדולה בדבריו ובאהבתו הרבה.

ואוהב מעלה הוא שיהיה תאות שניהם וכונתם לדבר אחד, והוא הטוב. וירצה כל אחד להעזר בחבירו בהגיע הטוב ההוא לשניהם יחד.

זה האוהב אשר צוה לקנותו.

12 Rabbeinu Yonah of Gerona – Mishnah Commentary (Avot 1:6)

“Acquire a friend” specifies an expression of “acquisition.” This teaches that, when necessary, one should spend money (or sell assets) to acquire a good friend.

רבינו יונה – פירוש המשניות (אבות א:ו)

“קנה לך חבר” – בלשון קניה, שאם לא ימצאנו בחנם, יקחנו בכספו ויבזבו נכסיו כדי להשיג אל חבר טוב.



Think of someone you'd like to be better friends with. If \$500 was allotted toward this goal, how would you get his/her attention, spark the connection, and give the friendship a chance to truly develop?

For an inspiring story of “**true friends**,” see Appendix-B – page 16.

The Talmud is the foundation of Jewish law. Comprised of Mishnah and Gemara, it represents centuries of analysis in the great Torah academies. The standard Talmud edition was published in Babylonia in 500 CE; a companion version was published in Israel.

Maimonides (Rambam, 12th century) began writing his *Mishnah Commentary* at age 23 in Morocco, completing it seven years later in Egypt. He also authored *Mishneh Torah*, the most important post-Talmudic codification of Torah Law, and the philosophical treatise, *Guide for the Perplexed*.

Rabbeinu Yonah of Gerona was a Jewish ethicist best known for his classical work, *Gates of Repentance*. He died in Spain in 1263.

CHOOSING GOOD FRIENDS

Choosing Friends: Tool #1

13 Proverbs 27:21

A person is known by his praise.

Rabbeinu Yonah – *Gates of Repentance* (3:148)

The meaning of this verse is that a person's qualities correlate with what he praises. If he praises good deeds, and wise and righteous people, that is a sign he is a good person, rooted in justice.

Rabbi Yitzhak Abuhav – *Menorat HaMe'or*

If you want to know someone's true character, look at what he praises. If he praises goodness, then you know he is virtuous, and vice versa.

This is King Solomon's intent that "a person is known by his praise." He only praises qualities where he is similar (whether for good or bad).

משלי כז:כא

ואיש לפי מהללו.

רבינו יונה – שערי תשובה (ג:קמח)

פירושו: מעלות האדם לפי מה שיהלל. אם הוא משבח המעשים הטובים והחכמים והצדיקים, תדע ובחנת כי איש טוב הוא, ושרש הצדק נמצא בו.

הרב יצחק אבוהב – מנורת המאור (פרק יז)

והרוצה לדעת מידות חברו יסתכל במה שהוא משבח. אם משבח הטובות, בידוע שהוא בעל מדות טובות, ואם בהפך הוא בהפך.

והוא שאמר שלמה ע"ה: "מצרף לכסף וכור לזהב, ואיש לפי מהללו." אינו מהלל אלא הדומה למדותיו, אם רעים ואם טובים.



A person's priorities are revealed by what he holds in esteem and praises. Name two of your "heroes." What values do they epitomize?

Choosing Friends: Tool #2

14 Talmud – Eruvin 65b

A person's inner self is revealed in three ways:

- *b'Koso* – his **cup** (how he acts when drunk).
- *b'Kiso* – his **pocket** (how he spends money).
- *b'Kaso* – his **anger** (what presses his button).
- Some add: *b's'chako* – what he **laughs** at.

תלמוד – ערובין סה:

אמר רבי אילעאי: בשלשה דברים אדם ניכר – בכוסו ובכיסו, ובכעסו. ואמרי ליה אף בשחקו.



Name a few character traits that you consider most important in a friend – e.g., optimistic, generous, sincere, sensitive, patient, appreciative, communicative, etc.

Now prioritize: Identify two deal-breakers – "must-have" qualities that you feel are absolutely necessary. [Also, identify two "negative" qualities you wish to avoid.]

For a full **list of virtues**, refer to booklet #1 of this series, "Foundations of Love."

SEAL THE DEAL

The Torah term for “pledge of commitment” is *Karet Brit* – literally to “**cut a covenant.**”
(see Genesis 15:18, 31:44; Exodus 24:8, 34:10; Deut. 28:69, 29:13)

15 1-Samuel 18:3-4

Jonathan made a pact (*Karet Brit*) with David, because he loved him as his own soul.
Jonathan took off his cloak and gave it to David...

שמואל א' יח:ג-ד

וַיִּכְרֹת יְהוֹנָתָן וְדָוִד בְּרִית בְּאֶהְבְּתוֹ אֹתוֹ כְּנַפְשׁוֹ.
וַיִּתְּפֹשֶׁט יְהוֹנָתָן אֶת הַמְּעִיל אֲשֶׁר עָלָיו וַיִּתְּנֶהוּ לְדָוִד...

Giving a precious part of oneself to another person creates attachment: “Part of me is now with you.”

“Cut” implies separation, whereas “covenant” connotes joining together.
Why the apparent oxymoron?

16 Vilna Ga'on – Commentary to Sefer Yetzirah (1:8)

The conceptual basis of a covenant (*brit*) is when one person loves another as his own soul, and does not wish to be separated. However, since they cannot be together all the time, one gives the other something **very precious and dear**, and through this they become attached.

Even if the object is removed from him, his thoughts will remain with it. “*Brit*” is a promise that through this exchange, they will never be separated.

This explains the expression *Karet Brit* (“cut a covenant”) – **cutting away a part of self** and giving it to the other, [thus sealing the bond].

הרב אליהו – הגאון מוילנה פירוש לספר יצירה (א:ח)

אומר לך מהו ענין ברית: והוא אדם שיש לו אוהב כנפשו, ורוצה שלא יפרוש ממנו, אבל אי אפשר להיות אצלו, נותן לו דבר שכל מגמתו ותשוקתו אליו, והן נקשרים על ידי הדבר ההוא.

אע”פ שנוטל ממנו את הדבר, מ”מ כל מחשבתו שם הוא. ולשון ברית הוא הבטחה שע”י הדבר ההוא, ודאי לא יתפרד ממנו.

וזהו ענין לשון כריתה – שכורת ממנו דבר הדבוק לו, ונותן לו.



Commitment is built on trust, a promise to faithfully uphold agreed-upon boundaries.
“As I invest in the relationship with loyalty and devotion, I trust you to reciprocate.”

Recall a time in life when you committed to share something precious – your time, resources, or inner feelings. **How did this help cement the relationship?**

Samuel was a Jewish prophet who anointed the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David. Today, his tomb in northern Jerusalem is a popular holy site.

Vilna Ga'on (Rabbi Eliyahu Kramer, 1720–1797) is regarded as the greatest rabbi of the past 500 years. Known to sleep only two hours each day, he wrote commentaries on all the classical Jewish works, including *Sefer Yetzirah* (“Book of Creation”).

SIGN OF THE COVENANT

In the realm of Jewish identity, *Karet Brit* (“cutting a covenant”) finds literal expression in ***Brit Milah***, the Jewish covenant of circumcision. God tells Abraham, the first Jew: “If you loyally keep the circumcision rite forever, I will keep my promises to you, forever”:

17 Genesis – ch. 17

I will set My covenant between Me and you... and with your descendants after you throughout their generations, as an eternal covenant...

You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and that will be the sign of covenant between Me and you.

Rabbi Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag)

God says: “I continually desire that you fulfill this eternal covenant... On this basis, your descendants will permanently acquire the Land of Israel (Canaan), and I will be your God.

בראשית – פרק יז

וְאֶתְנֶה בְּרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ... וּבֵין זַרְעֲךָ אֶתְרִיד
לְדֹרֹתָם לְבְרִית עוֹלָם...
וּנְמַלְתֶּם אֶת בְּשָׂר עֶרְלֹתְכֶם, וְהָיָה לְאוֹת בְּרִית בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם.

הרב לוי בן גרשון (רלב"ג)

רוצה לומר: שתמיד ארצה שיקיימו זאת המצוה באופן שיהיה זה ברית עולם... והנה יהיה זה סבה שיהיה ראוי זרעך לירש כל ארץ כנען ירושת עולם, ואז אהיה להם לאלוהים.

Throughout the ages, Jews have demonstrated tremendous loyalty to this covenant.

18 *Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust* – Yaffa Eliach

Rabbi Yisrael Spira, known as the Bluzhever Rebbe, was working as a slave laborer in the concentration camp. One afternoon he saw trains arriving at the camp, loaded with a particular human cargo: women with babies. Hundreds of starved and weakened mothers were clutching their tiny, crying babies.

Suddenly one woman began to scream: “A knife! Give me a knife!” Immediately the rabbi dropped his tools and ran to her.

“Don’t even think of taking your life or that of your baby!” the rabbi exclaimed. “No matter how terrible the suffering in this Nazi hell, we must try to survive.”

But the rabbi’s words were cut short as a German guard sent him sprawling with a savage blow to the back of the head. “Jewish dog!” the Nazi demanded. “What were you telling her? Tell me now!”

The rabbi replied: “She wanted a knife. And I told her that it is forbidden to hasten one’s death, even here in this wretched camp.”

The Nazi sadist obligingly pulled a knife from his coat and handed it to the woman. Then he stepped back to enjoy the sight of a cowardly Jewish woman murdering her baby, then killing herself.

The woman gently put the child down on the ground, and undid his clothes. Then she looked up at the sky and said: “Dear God. You gave me a pure Jewish child. Now he is 8 days old, and we are being taken to the gas chamber. I return him to You, as a pure and holy Jew.”

She then took the knife, recited the blessing, and circumcised her child.



What does it mean to be part of the Jewish people?

Genesis is the first of the Five Books of Moses. **Rabbi Levi ben Gershon** (1288–1344), popularly known as Gersonides or by the acronym Ralbag, was a French philosopher, Talmudist, mathematician, physician and astronomer.

Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust is authored by Yaffa Eliach (1935–2016), a Holocaust survivor and scholar who created the Tower of Faces display at the US Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC. (This story was adapted for the LifeWisdom Series.)

“NOT ALONE”



The deepest potential connection between two people is marriage.

- What do you think are 2 good reasons for getting married?
- What are 2 questionable reasons?

The roots of committed love are found in the world’s first marriage:

19 Genesis 2:18

God said: It is not good for a person to be alone.

Targum Onkelos

The reason it is “not good to be alone” is because that is an **incomplete state**.

בראשית ב:יח

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֱלֹהִים – לֹא טוֹב הָיְתָה הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ.

תרגום אונקלוס

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֱלֹהִים לֹא תִקֵּין לְמַהְוֵי אָדָם בְּלְחֹדוֹהִי.



More than “loneliness” – i.e., the lack of companionship – the verse defines “alone” as existentially incomplete. **What is “incomplete” about living in isolation?**

20 Rabbi Chaim Kamil – *Imrei Chaim*

What did Adam lack prior to the creation of Eve, to the extent that it was “not good to be alone”? After all, the Talmud (Sanhedrin 59b) says that in the Garden of Eden, angels served Adam all types of delicacies. What did he “lack”?

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz explains: Whatever someone’s virtues, if he lacks the attribute of giving and benefitting others, then he lacks “completion” – because the purpose of mankind is to benefit and give to others.

Through acts of giving, a person “walks in the ways of God” – the consummate giver. Thus, “It is not good to be alone,” because a person only **achieves completion** with the ability to give to others.

Similarly, this appears in the introduction to *Nefesh HaChaim*:... “This is the entire purpose of man: Not created for self, but to benefit others to the best of his ability.”

הרב חיים קמיל – אמרי חיים

מה היה חסר לאדם לפני בריאת העוזר כנגדו עד כדי שנאמר עליו שלא טוב היותו לבדו? והרי דרשו חז”ל (תלמוד – סנהדרין נט:): “רבי יהודה בן תימא אומר: אדם הראשון מיסב בגן עדן היה והיו מלאכי השרת צולין לו בשר ומסננין לו יין”, ומה חסר עוד במצב זה?

וביאר הרב חיים שמואלביץ זצ”ל – שלמרות כל המעלות שישנן ביד האדם, אם תחסר לו מעלת הנתינה וההטבה לאחרים, תחסר לו ממידת שלמותו, דתכלית האדם להטיב ולתת לאחרים.

ועל ידי מידת ההטבה זוכה להידמות לדרכי ה' – הטוב ומטיב. ולכן כתיב “לא טוב היות האדם לבדו”, שהאדם מגיע אל שלמותו רק כשיש בידו את הכח ליתן לאחריו...

וכעין זה כתב בהקדמה לספר נפש החיים... “שזה כל האדם: לא לעצמו נברא, רק להועיל לאחריו ככל אשר ימצא בכחו לעשות”.

INSIGHT

Every well-functioning marriage is rooted in reciprocal giving.
This is the Torah’s answer to our original question: Why get married?

Genesis is the first of the Five Books of Moses. **Onkelos** was a prominent Roman nobleman who converted to Judaism in the first century CE. His masterful Aramaic translation, *Targum Onkelos*, is printed in most standard Hebrew editions of the Bible.

Rabbi Chaim Kamil (1933–2005) was Dean of the Ofakim Yeshiva in Israel. He was a close student of the esteemed Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz, and study partner of Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel.

BEYOND HALFWAY

- Nothing valuable in life comes free. Close relationships are built by a willingness to invest.
- When two sides go “beyond giving” – extending *more than halfway* – that creates an overlap of mutual interests. Here, life’s magic happens.

21 Rabbi Yitzhak Yedidya Frankel – “Omer” (Nissan 1958)

The story is told of Rabbi Yaakov Yitzhak Horowitz, the “Chozeh of Lublin,” going for a walk outside the city. He stopped to see a farmer constructing a log cabin, and stood for a while watching the farmer’s activities.

When he departed, his students asked: “Why did the rabbi stop so long here?”

The rabbi replied: “The farmer’s actions stirred in me a novel thought. I noticed that he built the hut from logs with bumps and outgrowths. I expected him to cut off the bulges, but he did not do so. Instead he cut a hole in the neighboring log to accommodate the bulge.

“I learned from here that if we see deficiencies in others, we should not try to cut that off. Rather we should accommodate the other’s shortcomings by making room in ourselves.”

הרב יצחק ידידיה פרנקל – “עומר” (ניסן תשי”ח)

חסידי מספרים שפעם יצא הרבי החוזה מלובלין לטייל מחוץ לעיר, והתעכב על יד ביקתה כפרית מוקמת, שאיכר עסק בהרכבתה ובנינה מגזרי וכפיסי עצים. עמד זמן מה והסתכל במעשי האיכר.

אחרי שפנה ללכת שאלו המלווים: “מה ראה רבינו להתעכב כאן?”

השיב להם החוזה: “חידוש נתחדש לי ממעשיו שלו. האיכר בנה ביקתתו מעצים מחוספסים בלתי מהוקצעים שיש בהם בליטות כדרך גידולם. היה נראה לי כי הוא יטול כלי ויקוץ את הבליטות. אך האיכר לא כן עשה. אלא כל מקום שהיתה בקורה בליטה, קדח האיכר בקורת עץ המקבילה חור, והתאים הבליטה לחור.

“למדתי ממעשיו כי אם נדמה לנו שרואים בחסרון אצל הזולת, אין לקצץ בחסרונות הזולת. אלא לקדוח חור בעצמנו, כדי להתאים בנו גם את החסרון של חברנו.”

In Hebrew, the commitment to accommodate others (called *Vitur*) is expressed by:

- Going beyond the letter of the law. (*Tosfot Yom Tov – Sotah 9:15*)
- Not standing on one’s honor. (*Torah Temimah – Deut. 33, fn. 69*)
- Not always pressing one’s rights. (*Talmud – Chulin 134a*)
- Yielding to the wishes of another. (*Netziv – Mashiv Davar 3:10*)



In planning a vacation with your spouse, you disagree about where to go. Your spouse loves the mountains, and you love the beach.
How do you determine what to choose?

Rabbi Yitzhak Yedidya Frankel (1913–1986) was born in Poland and later became Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv. He is the father-in-law of Chief Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau. The Chozeh (“Visionary”) of Lublin, Rabbi Yaakov Yitzhak Horowitz (1745–1815), was a beloved leader of the early Hasidic movement.

BESHERT: MADE IN HEAVEN



The Yiddish word *Beshert* refers to a predestined match: “The One.”
Do you believe in this idea of “soulmate”?

22 Rashi – Genesis 1:27

The primordial human was created conjoined, with two faces. Subsequently, God divided them [into distinct male and female, i.e. Adam and Eve].

רש"י – בראשית א:כז

שֶׁבְּרָאוֹ שְׁנֵי פְרָצוּפִים בְּבְרִיאָהּ רִאשׁוֹנָה, וְאַחַר כֵּן חִלְקוּ.

The story of Adam and Eve is our story, too.

Marriage is the reconnection and reunification of a single entity.

23 Zohar – Lech Lecha 91b

When God activates a soul, it includes male and female aspects joined together... When that soul descends into the world... the two parts become separated...

When the time comes for marriage, God, who knows the primal source of these souls, joins the male and female as originally... In joining together, they become one body and soul.

זוהר – לך לך צא:

בההיא שעתא דאפיק קודשא בריך הוא נשמתין לעלמא,
כל אינון רוחין ונשמתין כלהו כלילין דכר ונוקבא דמתחברין
כחדא... ובשעתא דנחתין... מתפרשין...
וכד מטא עידן דזווגא דלהון קודשא בריך הוא דידיע אינון
רוחין ונשמתין מחבר לון כדבקדמיתא... וכד אתחברן,
אתעבידו חד גופא חד נשמתא.

24 Talmud – Sanhedrin 22a

Forty days before the formation of a fetus, a Heavenly voice proclaims, “The daughter of so-and-so is to be matched with so-and-so.”

תלמוד – סנהדרין כב.

ארבעים יום קודם יצירת הולד, בת קול יוצאת ואומרת:
בת פלוני לפלוני.

25 Midrash Rabba – Genesis 17:8

The existential search for one’s “soulmate” is a yearning to retrieve a lost possession.

מדרש רבה – בראשית יז:ח

מְשַׁל לְמָה הַדָּבָר דּוֹמֶה, לְאָחַד שְׂאֵבֵד אֲבָדָה,
הוא מְבַקֵּשׁ אֲבָדָתוֹ.



If marriage partners are “predestined,” why do you think
so many marriages end in divorce?

For more insights on **Jewish marriage**, see the *LifeWisdom* series: “Marriage.”

CORNERSTONE OF COMMITMENT

On page 3, we understood “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24) as referring to offspring. “One flesh” may also refer to the emotional unity between husband and wife:

26 [Jerusalem] Talmud – Nedarim 9:4

If a person was cutting a piece of meat, and accidentally cut his hand, is it logical to take revenge on his own hand?

תלמוד ירושלמי – נדרים ט:ד
הוה מקטע קופד, ומחת סכינא לידוי –
תחזור ותמחי לידיה?

- Commitment in marriage is like the commitment to your hand.
- This strengthens one’s resolve to work through the challenging times, and the marriage should be severed only if it’s killing you.

27 Rabbi Nechemia Coopersmith – *Shmooze* (pp. 68-70)

You may have friends and relatives who are close to you. You may have children who are an extension of yourself. But your spouse actually is you. There is no other relationship in the world where two people, no matter how close, become one.

Becoming one means my spouse is part of me like my hand. What is my commitment to my hand? **I am not committed to my hand, I am my hand.** And my commitment to my hand is one I’d question only if it became infected and developed gangrene.

Forever

Certain marriages fall prey to gangrenous cycles of abuse. In such situations divorce is appropriate. But is this the case in marriages that fall into the 50% divorce rate we see today? Or is it that “We got tired of each other,” “The excitement has gone out of the relationship,” “we don’t laugh anymore.” If someone were to tell you that he’s amputating his hand because “the fun has gone out of it,” you’d know he is crazy.

No one reconsiders his commitment to his hand if it’s broken or ugly. No one feels his loyalties shaken if he meets someone with nicer hands. The only time one questions his commitment to his hand is if it’s killing him.

The commitment of marriage is binding until it’s

killing you. That is what commitment is all about. No one thinks that popping the question means “Will you marry me – for a while?” **It means forever.**

Challenging Times

Only this kind of commitment will keep you from bolting when the challenges of your marriage seem insurmountable. Only this kind of commitment will provide the security you need to allow yourself to become vulnerable and reveal your shortcomings.

A good marriage requires dealing with the frustration of repeatedly facing issues, discussing problems, and working them out. It means enduring the pain of confronting your evasions, bearing the responsibility of care of another person, and learning to give in a meaningful manner. **Only real commitment will prevent you from escaping the challenges of marriage.** Marriage isn’t always comfortable, but whenever it is invested, it is always very rewarding.

The reluctance to get married is often a reluctance to make this kind of permanent commitment. We want a relationship, but with an emergency exit in sight. However the pleasure of true intimacy cannot be achieved while having one hand on the ripcord, ready to end the relationship tomorrow.



Imagine someone you’re loyal to (e.g. a friend or employer) is harming others and refuses to stop. Are there “limits” to loyalty? What should you do?

FEAR OF COMMITMENT



Society is plagued by fear of commitment. Think of someone you know who fears the “C-word.” What do you think they are afraid of?

28 Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto – *Path of the Just* (ch. 9)

A key factor in causing a person to lose opportunities in life is fear and apprehension of what the future may bring. A person might imagine all kinds of obstructions – weather, accidents, illness... In the words of King Solomon: “A lazy person says, ‘There is a lion on the path!’” (Proverbs 26:13)...

While certain fears are justified, there is also “foolish fear”... i.e., when a person adds multiple layers of protection, fear upon fear, to the point where all these contingencies and precautions are at the expense of life’s true priorities...

That is why the Sages advise: “Do not assume any defect without cause” (Talmud – Chulin 56b), and “Do not be concerned beyond the available information” (Talmud – Bava Batra 131a).

This is also the intent of the verse: “A wise person **sees a problem** and hides” (Proverbs 22:3). A wise person avoids only those problems he can “see” – not what may *possibly* occur.

רמח”ל – מסילת ישרים (פרק ט)

עוד ממפסידי הזריזות הוא רוב הפחד וגודל המורא מן הזמן ותולדותיו, כי פעם יירא מהקור או מהחום, ופעם מהפגעים, ופעם מן החלאים, ופעם מן הרוח, וכן כל כיוצא בזה. הוא הענין שאמר שלמה עליו השלום: “אמר עצל שחל בדרך, ארי בין הרחובות...”

יש יראה ראויה ויש יראה שוטה... אך היראה השוטה היא, שיהיה האדם רוצה להוסיף שמירות על שמירות ויראה על יראה, ועושה משמרת למשמרתו באופן שיגיע מזה ביטול לתורה ולעבודה...

ועל כיוצא בזה נאמר: “ריעותא דלא חזינן לא מחזקינן” (חולין נו:), “ואין לו לחכם אלא מה שעניו רואות” (בבא בתרא קלא.).

הוא עצמו ענין הפסוק שהבאנו למעלה: “ערום ראה רעה ונסתר”, הא אינו מדבר אלא בנסתר מן הרעה אשר רואה, לא ממה שיוכל להיות שיהיה אפשרי שיבוא.

29 Rabbi Aryeh Nivin – “Fear of Commitment and the Quest for Comfort” (NewChabura.com)

By definition, any meaningful commitment adds new responsibilities to life. That means movement, growth, and the dreaded “leaving my comfort zone.”

With technology making everything so instant and easy, we equate comfort with pleasure. Yet that is a false notion. Engaging in the game of life is infinitely better than watching from the sidelines. As the Talmud says, *Lafum tzara agra* – “No pain, no gain” (Avot 5:26).

Marriage is hard work. And the beautiful result is that two people – each existentially “half a soul” – grow together as one unit. A failure to commit closes us off from fully knowing ourselves.

Another reason people fear commitment is because in Western society the institution of marriage is largely broken. Between the romantic illusions propagated by Hollywood, and the majority of marriages ending in painful divorce, we have become cynical about the possibility of a stable, successful marriage.

We need to adjust our thinking. When the honeymoon is over, we all grasp that our spouse is imperfect (and that we are imperfect). By viewing marriage as a vehicle for personal growth, all that challenging corrective work is a source of immense pleasure. Otherwise marriage feels more like a lot of needless pain. And nobody wants to sign up for that.

To get a snapshot of your life, here are 15 questions to ponder.
Don't be surprised if the answers aren't immediate.
Calm your mind and be patient. The answers are inside of you.

30

“Know What You’re Living For” **15 Questions to Define Your Goals & Values**

Based on Rabbi Noah Weinberg – *48 Ways to Wisdom* (adapted by Rabbi Shraga Simmons)

1. How do I allocate most of my time, money, and energy?
2. Why did I choose my career? Given the choice, would I switch?
3. What guidelines do I use in managing life-work balance?
4. What are my family obligations, and how does that impact my life?
5. What type of community do I prefer to live in, and why?
6. Who do I give charity to, and how much?
7. What are my strongly-held social and political beliefs?
8. What are my religious beliefs, and how does that impact my life?
9. On a scale of 1-10, how much do I value material things, and what sacrifice do I make to attain them?
10. What are my greatest strengths? Greatest weakness?
11. What has been my most satisfying accomplishment in life?
12. What is an activity so fulfilling that I would choose to do it all day long?
13. What is my great dream for the future?
14. Am I on track to fulfill that ambition? If not, what needs to change?
15. What “higher ideal” am I committed to? Why is this important to me?



Clarity on question #15 is the key to bringing everything else into focus.
This is your “life goal” – what you’d like written on your tombstone.

What single step can you take to shift more time and energy to that higher cause?

For more on attaining self-knowledge, see the LifeWisdom series: **“Success.”**

31 Rabbi Noah Weinberg and Rabbi Yaakov Salomon – “The Power of Love” (from *What the Angel Taught You* – pp. 169-171; based on *Sefer Chanoch*)

[Millennia ago,] two young men had grown up together and become very close friends. They lived at a time when the Roman Empire was split into two parts – one half controlled by an emperor in Rome and the other half ruled by an emperor in Syria. After each of the friends married, one moved to Rome and the other moved to Syria. Together they started an import-export business, and though they lived far apart, they remained very close friends.

One time, when the fellow from Rome was visiting in Syria, someone accused him of being a spy for Rome and plotting against the emperor. He was an innocent man – it was just a vicious rumor. Yet they brought him to the Syrian Emperor, and he was subsequently sentenced to death.

While being led out to execution, he was asked if he had any last requests. The accused man pleaded: “Please, I’m an innocent man, but I can’t prove it. So, if I’m going to die, at least let me go back to Rome first, settle my affairs, and say goodbye to my family. They don’t know my business, like who owes me money, where all my goods are. Let me just go back to Rome, put my affairs in order, and then I’ll come back and you can execute me.”

The Emperor laughed at him. “What are you, crazy? You think we’d let you go? What possible guarantee will we have that you’ll come back?”

The Jew said, “Wait. I have a friend here in Syria who will stand in for me. He’ll be my guarantor. If I don’t come back, you can kill him instead.”

The Emperor was intrigued. “This I’ve got to see. Okay, bring in your friend.”

The fellow from Syria was called in. Sure enough, he agreed without hesitation to take the Roman Jew’s place in prison, and to be killed in his stead if the friend did not return.

The Emperor was so startled by this arrangement that he agreed to let the Roman Jew go. “I’ll give you 60 days. Put your affairs in order. If you’re not back by the dawn of the 60th day, your friend is dead.”

Off went the Roman Jew, racing back to his family to say goodbye and to put his affairs in order. After many tears and goodbyes, he started back in plenty of time before the 60 days were up.

These were the days of sailing galleys, and sometimes you could sit for days waiting for the right wind to come up. As luck would have it, there was no wind for several days, the sailboat was delayed, and by the time the Jew arrived in Syria, dawn of the 60th day was breaking.

As agreed, the jailers took out the fellow from Syria for execution. In those days, an execution was a gala affair, and early in the morning the crowds began to gather. Finally, as they were just about to perform the execution, the fellow from Rome came running in. “Wait! Stop! I’m back. Don’t kill him. I’m the real prisoner!”

The executioner let the fellow from Syria go and was about to take the Jew from Rome in his place. “Wait a minute,” the relieved guarantor argued. “You can’t kill him. His time limit was up. I’m the guarantor. You’ve got to kill me instead!”

The two friends were equally adamant. “Kill me instead!” “No, kill me!” The executioner didn’t know what to do. The crowd was in an uproar, watching them fight it out.

Finally, the Emperor stepped in. In wonder and amazement, he turned to the two of them and said, “I’ll let both of you go free on one condition. That you make me your third friend!”

That’s friendship. That’s true unity.

That’s why the same verse that says, “Love your neighbor,” also says “I am God” (Leviticus 19:18). Unity and friendship among God’s children is so precious that God says, so to speak, “If you love each other, I want to be your third friend.”

Unity is so precious to God that even when we are not as good as we should be, our unity allows us to achieve far more than any one holy, talented, or great individual could possibly achieve alone. In sports, we call it, “teamwork.” Teams with unusual selflessness and chemistry often topple opponents with greater raw skill and power..

Infighting and strife amongst us is therefore our most insidious and debilitating enemy. Disharmony prevents us from being a predominant force, and reduces us to an impotent collection of self-absorbed individuals.

If we’re united, the Almighty is with us. If we’re divided, we’re on our own.

Rabbi Noah Weinberg (1930–2009) was the dean and founder of Aish HaTorah. For 50 years, his visionary educational programs brought many thousands of Jews closer to their heritage. **Rabbi Yaakov Salomon** is a noted author, lecturer and psychotherapist living in Brooklyn, New York. **Sefer Chanoch** first appeared in the 13th century.