

Kol Nidrei Drasha 5784

Rabbi Jake Singer-Beilin - Bet Mishpachah

“*V ahavta et Adonai Eloheicha*/Love Adonai your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.”

“*V ahavtem et ha-ger*/Love the stranger for you were strangers in the land of Egypt”.

“*V ahavta l rei acha kamocha*/Love your neighbor as yourself.”

The Torah commands us to love.

Three different *mitzvot* that instruct us to love. All are vitally important. All make our world better when we fulfill them. Love the Holy One, love the stranger, and love your neighbor. But someone is missing from this list. Nowhere in the Torah does it command us to love ourselves.

And yet, each of these three categories of love point to that very need. First, the commandment to love God. We are taught that each person is created in the Divine image - *b tzelem Elohim*. There is a holy spark within us. Part of me is also part of God. Therefore, if I am to fully love the Infinite One, then I must also love the part of me that is God. Though I may not feel that part of myself at all times, it is there, it is real, and it is worthy of love.

Second, the commandment to love the stranger makes it clear why we must do so. Because we were once strangers in a strange land. Loving the stranger means loving the parts of ourselves that feel like strangers. Loving our strangeness, and let's be honest, we all have some strangeness. Sometimes it is easy to love these unique qualities that make us who we are. But there are times when it is much more difficult. Fulfilling this commandment doesn't just entail sending love out to

the strangers in our midst, it also means finding the stranger within and sending love to that part of us.

Finally, the Torah instructs us to love our neighbor and the words could have ended there, but they did not. The verse continues “love your neighbor *as yourself*”. We can read this to mean “in order to love your neighbor, your fellow, completely, you must first love yourself. Only then can you properly find and express love for another.” Even though the Torah does not explicitly call on us to love ourselves, the *mitzvot* that do call us to love others contain within them the necessity to find a way to love ourselves. I want to acknowledge that this is not an easy thing for many of us to do.

Why is this essential? In an era when hate fills our airwaves and weighs heavily on our hearts, in a time when vicious Antisemitism is on the rise, in a time when anti-trans and homophobic laws are making their way through state legislatures, love has never been more necessary. We are taught that the Second Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed due to *sinat chinam* - baseless hatred. Hate is strong. It is pervasive, destructive, and exhausting. As Rabbi Stephanie Kolin related: “Rav Kook, the first Ashkenazi Chief rabbi of pre-state Israel taught: “If we were destroyed, and the world with us, due to *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred, then we shall rebuild ourselves, and the world with us, with baseless love — *ahavat chinam*.”

If *sinat chinam*, unbridled hatred, destroys – then *ahavat chinam* – public and courageous love – rebuilds.<sup>1</sup> Yes, we must rebuild with love for God, love for the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.centralsynagogue.org/worship/sermons/then-we-shall-rebuild-ourselves-with-love-yom-kippur-5778>

stranger, and love for our neighbors, but we can't do any of that if we can't find ways to love ourselves as well.

How do we do this? How do we overcome the noise that tells us that we're not good enough, that we're not lovable, that we should hide ourselves? Professor Brene Brown outlines 10 rules for loving oneself. They are:

1. You are enough
2. Share your whole story and whole heart
3. Engage with the world
4. Vulnerability is the birthplace of love
5. Get vulnerable
6. Let go of your armor
7. Speak to yourself the way that you speak to someone you love
8. Let go of perfection
9. Be grateful
10. Practice authenticity<sup>2</sup>

You are worthy of love. You are enough just the way you are. You are already loved unconditionally, and fully - our tradition teaches this exact thing. Before we recite the *Sh ma* we proclaim this very concept. In the prayers of *Ahavat Olam* and *Ahava Raba* we say that the Holy One loves us greatly, eternally. Despite our own failings, despite our missteps and doubts, that love remains. It is always there, waiting for us to find it, to bring it into ourselves, to accept it. If God knows our very being, all of the things that we would hide from the world and from ourselves, and loves us anyway, couldn't we find it within us to love ourselves too?

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<sup>2</sup> <https://mindspo.com/2020/08/10/brene-browns-top-10-rules-for-self-love/>

Rabbi Rachel Timoner encourages us:

See if you can call to mind right now a moment when you knew you were loved. It could have been a long time ago or recent. Think of a specific time, a memory, when you felt so loved, when someone radiated a wish of love to you through smiling eyes, or a quality of presence, or words. Picture their kind face sending love to you, the wish that you be safe, happy, well. Imagine that you can absorb that love and fill yourself with it, down to your toes, in every part of your being, in your very bones, in your mind, any place of tension in your body. Saturate yourself with that love.<sup>3</sup>

To remember that we are loved, to feel that love filling us up, is an essential part of being able to love ourselves fully. It is how we recognize and embrace the Divine image within. When we love ourselves, then we can fulfill the *mitzva* of loving our neighbors and the strangers in our midst. Once we find a way to discover the spark of God within us, to love that spark, to love our strangeness, to love ourselves, then perhaps we can show others that they, too, are worthy of love and worthy of self-love. We can be living examples of what it looks like to love oneself. I don't need to tell you that legislative and physical attacks on drag shows are becoming more and more common. Those who feel threatened by someone loving themselves and showing it on stage lash out with hate and insecurity. What is the goal of protestors at drag story hours? The goal is to show the children who are attending that they should hide their true selves - that there are parts of themselves that should not be loved, that should be hidden away, that should be made to disappear.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://cbebk.org/hhds/sermons/on-love/>

The same thing is happening with laws that make it more difficult for trans youth to get the medical care they need, or laws that attempt to dictate which gendered sports trans athletes may participate in. Those who make these laws are trying to tell trans folks that there is a part of themselves that should be denied, rejected, and hated. Especially for young people, these messages of hate find a voice within and they get amplified. Those who hate deliver this message to LGBTQ+ youth who are trying so hard to understand who they are, and find ways to love those parts of themselves. It is vile, it is dangerous, and it is damaging. In these very moments we, with self-love as our guide, must show others that it is possible to love oneself. By embracing our strangeness and living out loud, we can show others what it looks like to love who we are in our fullness. There is holiness within, and our uniqueness is not something to hide or be ashamed of, but to love entirely. Finding ways to love ourselves and inspire others to do the same is nothing other than life-saving work.

It is a holy act to spread love to the young boy who sees a spark of himself in the drag queen reading him a story. It is a mitzvah to show love to the 12-year-old who wants to share new pronouns in class for the first time. It is our responsibility to inspire self-love in the teen who is told that their transition is not medically necessary or even permitted because it is just a fad and they are confused.

Loving oneself is not some flighty, selfish, new-age thing. It is ancient, it is core to our religious tradition, and it is vital. In finding a way to feel the Divine spark within, to love oneself, and to embrace our strangeness, we fulfill the essential *mitzvot* of spreading love to God, to our neighbor, and to the stranger. *Vahavta* - You shall love and you are loved, all of you.

*G mar Chatima Tova* - May you be sealed in love for goodness.

