



Love of Self, Love of Others



One of the most frequently cited verses in the Torah appears in Parshas Kedoshim, which states, 've'ahavta lere'acha kamocha,' meaning 'love your neighbor as yourself.' This principle is widely regarded as the fundamental guideline for social conduct. It emphasizes the importance of treating others in a way that one would desire for oneself. Every individual possesses unique preferences, communication styles, and personality traits. To love others as oneself involves acknowledging these differences and embracing and valuing others for who they are, just as you would hope for acceptance of your individuality.

Let us contemplate what is needed to fulfill this mitzvah. For example, if an individual intends to distribute a cookie from their cookie jar, it must contain cookies. It is impossible to take or give something from an empty container. The same applies to people. A fundamental requirement for individuals to offer and accept love and friendship is the presence of self-love and self-acceptance.

Enough or Too much

An individual's character is formed through diverse qualities, most of which are not inherently positive or negative. Patience, for example, is frequently seen as a beneficial attribute; however, if taken to an extreme, it may lead to apathy or allow others to take advantage of one's willingness to be patient. On the other hand, selfishness is often deemed a negative characteristic, but when exercised judiciously, it can help create necessary boundaries for self-care.

A self-aware individual recognizes both their successes and challenges. They focus on cultivating positive traits and reducing negative behaviors. This commitment results in a rewarding sense of achievement. By accepting that their difficulties are an inherent aspect of the human experience, they can forgive their shortcomings and embrace self-love, imperfections included.

Pay Yourself First

Financial professionals frequently emphasize the importance of the "Pay Yourself First" philosophy. This concept encourages individuals to allocate funds for savings before engaging in monthly budgeting, thereby safeguarding their financial well-being and facilitating the management of other financial obligations. If this principle is valid for a person's fiscal circumstances, it is even more pertinent to one's self-concept.

There is a societal push to accept everyone and everything. At first glance, it seems many individuals extend these principles of love and acceptance more readily to others than to themselves. We tend to forgive and accept others more swiftly than we forgive and accept ourselves. However, the Torah teaches that the process should begin with self-love, and only then can a person love others.

Self-love vs Selfishness

Dr. Cristina Gómez, Psy.D., explains that selfishness involves appropriating from others, manipulating them, and possibly mistreating them to achieve personal objectives, while



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neglecting their well-being. A selfish person is primarily self-centered. In contrast, a self-loving individual recognizes the needs of others but retains the capacity to judiciously assess whether they can help or must refuse a request.

Natacha Duke, MA, RP, a Registered Psychotherapist, posits that self-love is intrinsically connected to self-compassion. It represents a purposeful commitment to focus on one's needs and desires while recognizing personal limitations. To love oneself is to perceive oneself as a complete individual, appreciating both the commendable traits and actions, acknowledging the less favorable aspects, and remaining receptive to personal growth. To accomplish this, a person must take care of themselves. Accepting their limitations and their boundaries in all areas of life.

One notable advantage of self-love is its ability to promote a constructive mindset. Those who practice self-love are inclined to perceive their flaws not as definitive aspects of their identity, but rather as chances for self-improvement, and more frequently seek the good within themselves. This attitude further encourages them to recognize and appreciate the positive attributes in those around them.

Are We Really Different?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menchem Mendel Schneerson, z"l, provides an innovative interpretation regarding the deaths of Rebi Akiva's students. It is possible that each student, having their distinct understanding of their teacher's instruction, held a condescending view towards their fellow students for not perceiving the genuine meaning of their teacher's words. This misunderstanding may have arisen from their interpretation of the phrase 've'ahavta lere'acha kamocha', meaning 'love your neighbor as yourself', which they may have misconstrued as loving oneself only if one is akin to oneself.

The Torah provides a fundamental understanding of human nature and interpersonal relationships. The commandment to 'Love your neighbor as yourself' emphasizes the importance of self-love as a vital step in loving others. By nurturing their own well-being, they are better equipped to extend genuine care to others. It is crucial to recognize that self-love and self-care are not acts of selfishness; rather, the affection, empathy, and acceptance one cultivates within oneself should be shared with others.

In the same way that a person acknowledges their own positive and negative attributes and endeavors to satisfy their emotional, physical, and spiritual needs, they are also tasked with viewing those around them through a similar perspective. After all, others share the same complexity of traits and qualities as oneself. A person with such a view of others could say that the verse could be understood as 'like yourself' or 'if they are akin to you', since intrinsically we are all not that different.

Have a wonderful Shabbos,

Binyomin Stolov



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