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# Love Between God and Israel

Using Prayer Books' Alternative Translations, Interpretive Readings and  
Commentary to Analyze the Jewish People's Evolving Understanding of Their  
Relationship With God

SUBMITTED TO RABBI DR. DVORA WEISBERG AND RABBI DR. DAVID ELLENSON  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR ORDINATION

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February 28, 2023

## Acknowledgments

When David Ellenson suggested I turn the paper for his class, History of Reform Prayer Books, into a Capstone project, I immediately asked if he would advise on the project, and he agreed. His encouragement and support have been truly uplifting and his guidance, clear and helpful without fail. If David Ellenson got the capstone off the ground, Dvora Weisberg got my whole rabbinic career off the ground. Initial conversations nearly a decade ago with her and Adam Allenberg made me think that just maybe this unconventional path could be realistic after all. She cleared a path, and has been there for me every step of the way. Her work as my Capstone advisor, including reading these pages multiple times is only a small sliver of the hours of presence she has devoted to helping me reach this milestone. Thanks also to Beth Lieberman for reading drafts of the Capstone and providing helpful feedback.

The entire clergy team at Congregation Emanu-El of San Francisco, the Youth and Family Education Staff, and the larger staff have been incredibly supportive. In particular, Rabbi Beth Singer, beginning long before rabbinical school seemed realistic, has spent hours meeting with me, advising me, strategizing with me, and helping me see and understand.

I am brought nearly to tears when I think about the many sacrifices my wife Liz made so that I could reach this moment. I am grateful beyond words. My children, Zachary and Jeremy, have cheered me on, and ribbed me whenever they caught any hint of procrastination. My sister, Sarah, and brother, Ben, always let me know they are in my corner. I also thank my parents, Victoria and Rabbi Stephen Fuchs. Their teaching instilled in me my initial love for our tradition and our people. When I asked my mom how I could support her as she persevered through chemotherapy, she said I should write a strong capstone. I dedicate this work to her.

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## Part I

### Chapter 1: Introduction - Our Evolving Relationship With God

The purpose of this capstone is to trace how the Jewish people's understanding of their relationship with God has evolved by analyzing changes to interpretive readings, alternative translations, and commentary in the *Sh'ma u'Birchotecha* rubric in modern prayer books, with particular attention to its intended messages about love, revelation and covenant.

This capstone will focus specifically on the *Ahavah Rabbah* blessing in the morning service and its corollary *Ahavat Olam* in the evening service, examining its usage in the Conservative movement's *Sim Shalom* published in 1985 and its replacement *Lev Shalem* published in 2016, as well as the Reform Movement's *Gates of Prayer* published in 1975 and its replacement *Mishkan T'filah* published in 2007. In addition, I examine several readings from the new siddur of the Israeli Reform Movement, *T'filat Ha'Adam*. Focusing on *Ahavah Rabbah* and *Ahavat Olam* in this set of prayer books allows comparison within movements over time and comparison across movements.

#### Why Liturgy?

The prayer book offers a unique keyhole through which to peer at the way Jews have understood the relationship between God and Israel. As Lawrence Hoffman writes:

Of all the books that line the shelves of a Jewish library, it is the Siddur, not the Talmud and not even the Bible, that Jews know best. The prayer book is our diary of the centuries, a collection of prayers composed by generations of those who came before us, as they endeavored to express the meaning of our lives...To know the prayer book is to be in touch with the soul of the Jewish people.<sup>1</sup>

The prayer book reflects accepted expressions of the Jewish people's theological positions. While theologians and philosophers try to grasp theological understanding and to influence it, the prayer book, more than the academic journal, represents it. Drawing on Talmudic sources, Zecharias Frankel wrote that "That which was adopted by the entire community of Israel and was accepted by the people and became a part of its life, can not be changed by any authority."<sup>2</sup> The prayer book's representation is, then, not only spiritual but also halakhic (legal), and unchangeable other than by the community as a whole. It is of course mutable by the community of Israel, and changes to prayer books represent the way the people's understanding of their relationship with God has evolved, so there can be change.

As of 2021, according to the Pew study, the 33% of American Jews who identify as Reform Jews constitute a plurality, or the largest number of Reform Jews. Conservative Jews make up 15% of the American Jewish population whereas 29% claim no denomination and 8% identify as Orthodox.<sup>3</sup> For the reason that these two groups form a majority of American Jews, this study focuses on changes between the two American Reform prayer books and the two American Conservative prayer books from the twentieth to the early twenty-first centuries. Differences in the ideas reflected by these two communities are noted.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Hoffman, "Minhag Ami: Our Diary of Prayer Across the Centuries," in *My People's Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries*, Vol. 1, pg. 1.

<sup>2</sup> This quote comes from Zecharias Frankel, "On Changes in Judaism, as found in *The Jew in The Modern World*, 1980, pg. 175. Benjamin Sommer defends the notion that that which is adopted by the entire community of Israel is authoritative on the basis of Berakhot 45a, Eruvin 14b and Menahot 35b in *Revelation and Authority*. In each of these places, we find in response to the question "what is the halacha?" the response פוק יְהוּי מֵאֵי עֲמָא דְבֵר "go out and see what the people are doing." Sommer would exclude from those whose practice determines law those who do not follow the law, which, if what Jews do determines the law, begs the question which Jews he means.

<sup>3</sup><https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/06/22/denominational-switching-among-u-s-jews-reform-judaism-has-gained-conservative-judaism-has-lost/>

<sup>4</sup> Different communities certainly adopt different prayer books at the same time. This raises again the question from footnote 2 of what is meant by "the entire community of Israel." A comment by R. Menachem Meiri on the dispute between the houses of Hillel and Shammai in Yevamot 13a-14a states that two separate courts, even

In addition to being representative spiritually and *halakhically*, prayer books are also formative pedagogically. In other words, the prayer book not only reflects the people's sense of relationship with God, it forms and informs it. For the person who picks up the prayer book with little background knowledge, the prayer book is not just a diary of her ancestors, nor only a reflection of what is in his heart, but also their primary educational tool by which they learn what, according to their tradition, should, can and must be said about relationship with God.<sup>5</sup>

That the siddur's Hebrew prayers have been altered over time has been documented in *Minhag Ami* by David Ellenson, who surveyed liberal Jewish prayer books of the last 200 years "to see how their writers agonized over attempts to update [the prayer book] for modern times."<sup>6</sup> Although many liberal prayer books omitted certain prayers,<sup>7</sup> the text of the prayers, despite some alterations, would be recognizable to a Jew living more than a thousand years ago, containing words similar to those of Seder Rav Amram Gaon in the 9th century CE, and even more so to those of Saadya Gaon of the tenth century.<sup>8</sup> Presumably, it would be similar to the texts of the sages of the Talmud, but we only know for certain that the names of some prayers have remained the same as they are referred to in the Talmud.<sup>9</sup>

Although changes to the text of prayers have remained within certain bounds, the last two hundred years has seen wide variation in interpretive readings, alternate translations, alternate prayers and commentary on prayers that appear alongside the prayers within the prayer book.<sup>10</sup> By analyzing these texts, we may gain insight into how Jewish communities'

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though they reside in the same city, each one holding to its own understanding of the law, do not violate the rule 'do not divide yourselves.' I found this in the 5758 (2017) responsum, "Orthodox Minyan in a Reform Synagogue". <https://www.ccarnet.org/ccar-responsa/nyp-no-5758-12/>. It seems this may apply to two communities using two different prayer books.

<sup>5</sup> For more on what we should, can and must say about God, see Michael Marmur, "Speaking Truthfully About God" and the last paragraphs of this introduction.

<sup>6</sup> Ellenson summarized these changes very helpfully in *My People's Prayer Book*, pages 22, 30, 32, 45, 48, 69, 71, 75, 79, 100, 102, 105, 108, 111, 114, 126-127, 130, 132. Eric Caplan offers helpful notes on changes to the liturgy in Eric Caplan, *From Ideology to Liturgy: Reconstructionist Worship and American Liberal Judaism*, pgs. 65, 92, 101, 105, 108, 194, 227-228, 238-239 277, 311, 313, 324, 363

<sup>7</sup> Thank you to David Ellenson for pointing this out and pointing out that this is noted by Richard Rubenstein in *After Auschwitz*.

<sup>8</sup> Ellenson, pg. 48. With regard to Yotser Or.

<sup>9</sup> For purposes of this capstone, I refer to prayers mentioned especially in Berakhot 11b.

<sup>10</sup> To some extent, these may be compared to piyyutim, though piyyutim were strictly poetry following defined forms and with reference to rabbinic and biblical texts that were reproduced widely. Perhaps these are more

evolving conceptions of their relationship with God have been recorded. To my knowledge, there are no extant studies of the interpretive readings, alternate translations, alternate prayers and commentary on prayers that appear alongside the prayers. These forms have been extensive in the last century, in particular. If “to know the prayer book is to be in touch with the soul of the Jewish people,” then analysis of these forms of substitution and annotation especially in the most widely-used prayer books, offers insight into the growth of the Jewish people’s soul through its evolving understandings of its relationship with God and with Judaism’s fundamental theological ideas.

## On the Significance of *Sh’ma u’Birchotecha*

The *Sh’ma* has been called the watchword of our faith, our creed and a statement of faith. The last connection many Jews have to Jewish prayer are the first six words of *Sh’ma*. “Even when all other traces of Jewish identity have been erased” wrote Norman Lamm, “the *Sh’ma* survives as an after-image on a Jew’s memory.”<sup>11</sup> That *Sh’ma* resonates with so many Jews and contains waiting-to-be-renewed and discovered meanings about covenant, relationship with God and revelation, indicates its potential as an entryway for deeper study of and connection with Jewish tradition. That Jews have traditionally recited *Sh’ma u’birchotecha*, one of the two oldest known prayer rubrics, twice daily since Mishnaic times adds to its relevance. The primary reason, however, for looking closely at this prayer rubric to understand how the Jewish perception of relationship with God has evolved is that the rubric refers to the four fundamental mythic events in our people’s history - creation, revelation, redemption from Egypt, and, by association, redemption in time to come.<sup>12</sup> More specifically, the content of the portion of the

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comparable to a hymnal. The literature analyzed in this capstone sometimes draws on piyyutim but is generally not widely reproduced and is specific to the particular prayer book in which it appears.

<sup>11</sup> Norman Lamm, *The Shema: Spirituality and Law in Judaism*, pg. 5.

<sup>12</sup> As Reuven Kimelman puts it “Once past redemption is invoked, hope for future redemption cannot be far behind.” He also refers to a midrash (Sifre Deut. 31 ed. L. Finkelstein, pg. 54, line 1) linking *Adonai echad* with Zechariah 14:9 - “On that day God shall be One and God’s name shall be One.” Reuven Kimelman, “The *Sh’ma* and Its Rhetoric: the Case for the *Sh’ma* Being More than Creation, Revelation, and Redemption,” in *Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, Vol 2, pgs. 111-156, 1992, pg. 142.



rubric that alludes to revelation makes claims about the nature of covenant and the nature of love between God and Israel.<sup>13</sup>

Many scholars and rabbis have written about the meanings and significance of the *Sh'ma*. In modern times, Reuven Kimelman's "The *Sh'ma* and Its Rhetoric: The Case for the *Sh'ma* Being More than Creation, Revelation, and Redemption," offers thorough analysis and review of earlier literature on the topic. Great scholars in the field of liturgy such as Reuven Hammer and Jacob Petuchowski have written at length about the meaning of the rubric, its foundations in Torah and interpretations in rabbinic literature. The volume, *The Shema and Its Blessings*, volume 1 of the *My People's Prayer Book* series, provides a scholarly summary of the way the Bible is embedded in these prayers by Marc Brettler, theological reflections from Elliot Dorff and Judith Plaskow, *halakhah* of the prayers by Daniel Landes, Hasidic interpretation by Nehemiah Polen and Lawrence Kushner, a survey by David Ellenson, of liberal Jewish prayer books of the last 200 years and historical development of the liturgy by Lawrence Hoffman.<sup>14</sup> In addition, while much literature exists that examines the blessings and biblical passages that make up this rubric, less has been written about the relationship of *Ahavah Rabbah*, *Sh'ma*, *V'ahavta* and *Mi Chamocha* to one another. An exception is Kimelman's "The Shema' and Its Rhetoric: The Case for the Shema' Being More Than Creation, Revelation, and Redemption." In the first paragraph of this piece, Kimelman notes that "There is precious little work that presents the synthetic meaning of liturgical units as a whole and even less as complete pieces of literature."<sup>15</sup>

## Summary of the Chapters That Follow

This capstone proceeds as follows. First, it lays out the basic structure and content of the rubric *Sh'ma u'Birchotecha* to further clarify its relevance for examining the love-covenant-revelation nexus and its implications for understanding evolving Jewish claims

<sup>13</sup> Love is mentioned 6 times in *Ahavah Rabbah*, for example.

<sup>14</sup> Minhag Ami, pg. 22.

<sup>15</sup> Reuven Kimelman: "The Shema' and Its Rhetoric: The Case for the Shema' Being More Than Creation, Revelation, and Redemption." *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 2, no. 1 (1993): 111–56.  
<https://doi.org/10.1163/105369993790231094>.

about the nature of relationship with God. Next, I summarize several Jewish ideas about revelation and covenant before exploring a number of meanings of love in Jewish sacred texts and their implications for understanding revelation and covenant. Next, the capstone takes a deeper look at the *Sh'ma* rubric with these understandings of love, covenant and revelation in mind. I then turn to an examination of alternative readings and commentary in modern prayer books to highlight changes in understanding the revelation-covenant-love nexus, and finally offer some synthesis and insights resulting from this exploration. My hope is that a careful look at our changing relationship to such a fundamental set of prayers offers the potential for Jews who pray seriously and for those on the margins of religious practice to reclaim a connection to covenant, revelation and loving relationship with God.

## A Concluding Introductory Thought

Michael Marmur wrote that three boundaries set limits for a discussion of God - what we should say, what we can say and what we must say. The first - what we should say - "delves within traditional discussion, learning from the wisdom of what has come before us." The second - what we can say - asks "what our best understanding of morality, history, science, and society allows us to believe."<sup>16</sup> To describe the third - what we must say - Marmur offers the words of Abraham Joshua Heschel:

A tremor seizes our limbs; our nerves are struck, quiver like strings; our whole being bursts into shudders. But then a cry, wrested from our very core, fills the world around us, as if a mountain were suddenly about to place itself in front of us. It is one word: GOD. Not an emotion, a stir within us, but a power, a marvel beyond us, tearing the world apart.<sup>17</sup>

In a sense, this thesis attempts to engage all three boundaries. The initial section will look backwards at ideas about love in our tradition, the second reports on more recent history - what our prayer books have said we can say about our relationship with God in the times of

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<sup>16</sup> Michael Marmur, "Speaking Truthfully About God," pgs. 39, 43-44.

<sup>17</sup> As it appears in Michael Marmur, "Speaking Truthfully about God," pg. 44.

each of the prayer books examined. Throughout, and especially in conclusion, it represents a search for what we must say, for what tremor seizes our limbs; our nerves struck, our whole being bursting into shudders with one word wrested from our core.

## Chapter 2: The Content and Structure of *Sh'ma u'Birchotecha*

The section or rubric of the prayer service called *Sh'ma u'Birchotecha* (Sh'ma and accompanying blessings) contains the following prayers in the morning:

- 1) Yotzer Or
- 2) Ahavah Rabbah
- 3) Sh'ma (including *V'Ahavta, V'Haya im Shamo'a, Vayomer*<sup>18</sup>)
- 4) Emet v'Yatziv (including Mi Chamocha)

In the evening, the prayers are as follows:

- 1) Ma'ariv Aravim
- 2) Ahavat Olam
- 3) Sh'ma (including *V'Ahavta, V'Haya im Shamo'a, Vayomer*)
- 4) Emet v'Emunah (including Mi Chamocha)
- 5) Hashkiveinu

These prayers are multivocal, meaning they refer to more than one thing at a time. Minimally, each both has a plain meaning and refers to a major event in the story of the Jewish people. A simplified summary of the content of each blessing and the major event in the story of the Jewish people to which it alludes is below.

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<sup>18</sup> As noted below in the chart reproduced from My People's Prayer Book, the Sh'ma includes Biblical passages Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Deuteronomy 11:13-21 and Numbers 15:37-41 (The MPPB chart has a typo for the Numbers passage).

Blessings in the Morning Service (Shacharit)	Blessing in the Evening Service (Ma'ariv)	Basic content	Major Event in the Jewish story to which the blessing alludes
1) Yotzer Or	1) Ma'ariv Aravim	Magnificence of creation/ passing of time - day into night	Creation
2) Ahavah Rabbah	2) Ahavat Olam	<b>God's love</b> for the Jewish people	<b>Revelation and Covenant</b>
3) Sh'ma <sup>19</sup>	3) Sh'ma	Listening and Oneness	<b>Revelation and Covenant</b>
3) V'Ahavta	3) V'Ahavta	<b>People's love</b> for God	<b>Revelation and Covenant</b>
4) Emet V'Yatziv (includes Mi Chamocha)	4) Emet V'Emunah (includes Mi Chamocha)	Truth and Freedom	Redemption from Egypt Redemption in time to come
	5) Hashkiveinu	Protection at night	

In addition to laying out the contents of the prayer rubric, this chart demonstrates the connection within the prayers between love, revelation and covenant. Each time a Jew prays this, one of the two oldest rubrics of Jewish prayer, she is supposed to have in mind simultaneously the loving relationship between God and Israel, revelation at Sinai and the covenant between God and Israel. Reuven Kimelman also explicitly connects the *Sh'ma* with

<sup>19</sup> Though Sh'ma includes V'ahavta, for purposes of this chart I separate them to more clearly elucidate the content.

the covenant and revelation, pointing out that in Exodus and Deuteronomy the decalogue is explicitly part of (if not all of) the content of revelation and explains that the *Sh'ma* functions as a stand in for the decalogue, that in fact the single line "Listen Israel, God is Our God, God is One," succinctly summarizes the first two of the Ten Commandments.<sup>20</sup> Kimelman wrote that according to Geza Vermes, the decalogue was dropped from worship and excluded from the phylacteries because of the claim of the *minim*.<sup>21</sup> Kimelman states that Vermes derives this from J. Berakhot 1:8 3c, having translated it as "It used to be proper to recite the Ten Commandments every day. Why then do they not recite them now? Because of the claim of the *minim*, so that they may not say, 'Only these were given to Moses on Sinai.'" <sup>22</sup> Kimelman proceeds to cast doubt on the argument that the *minims'* perception was the reason for excluding the decalogue from the liturgy. Nonetheless, the discussion in the Talmud demonstrates some level of concern that there be no misunderstanding that the content of revelation was more than just the decalogue.

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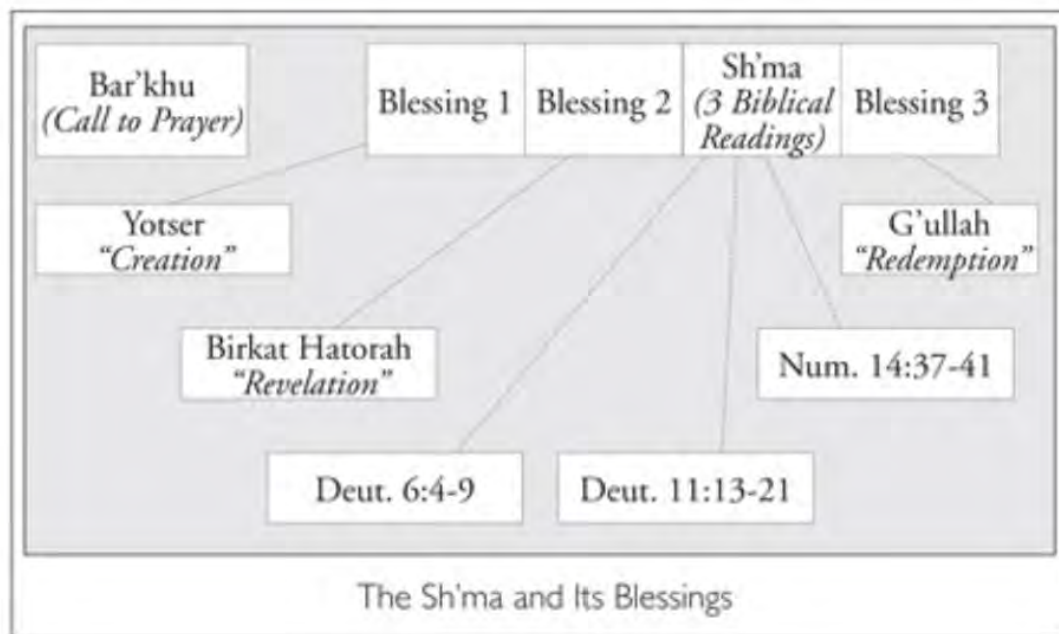
<sup>20</sup> Kimelman, pgs. 139-141. He further demonstrates how in multiple decalogue related passages, a version of the words "Hear O Israel" precede their presentation of the decalogue on pages 140-141 and especially note 122. *Minim* refers to people who express "a theological viewpoint which the sages viewed as illegitimate" or whose views separated them from the community. For more on *minim*, see

<https://www.hartman.org.il/minim-minot-and-the-great-crisis-in-jewish-identity/>

<sup>21</sup> Kimelman, pg. 155. Lawrence Hoffman also describes this passage and the idea of the *minim* as reason for removal of the decalogue from the liturgy present in both Talmuds, in *My People's Prayer Book*, pgs. 69 and 72

<sup>22</sup> Kimelman, pg. 155.

My People's Prayer Book offers the following diagram illustrating the structure of the rubric, *Sh'ma u'Birchotecha*:<sup>23</sup>



Reuven Kimelman notes the chiasmic structure of the rubric as follows:

A1 - Creation

B1 - *Ahavat Olam/Ahavah Rabbah*

C - *Sh'ma*

B2 - *emet ve-yatsiv*

A2 - Redemption<sup>24</sup>

According to Kimelman, B1, C and B2 constitute a covenantal ceremony and adding A1 and A2 “transforms an ancient pact form into a comprehensive rite for the realization of divine sovereignty.”<sup>25</sup>

### Reciprocity in *Sh'ma*

<sup>23</sup> MPPB, Vol. 1, pg. 20.

<sup>24</sup> Kimelman, pg. 145.

<sup>25</sup> Kimelman, pg. 146.

Before a more thorough examination, it is important to highlight the reciprocity of love between God and Israel in the *Sh'ma* rubric. Two scholars offer conflicting descriptions of this reciprocity. Reuven Kimelman notes that “it is God’s love of Israel that produces a God-loving Israel.”<sup>26</sup> Kimelman points out that though the love is reciprocal it is imbalanced. He offers a metaphor to describe that imbalance. He suggests that though love is more likely to evoke a marital image than a pedagogical one, the teacher image is more appropriate for depicting a senior partner that can “command fealty, exercise mastery and elicit love.”<sup>27</sup>

Reuven Hammer notes a reciprocity that begins with the human partner. He observes that:

Judaism affirms many times that God ‘hears prayer.’ Does the worshiper hear [God]? One of the ways God speaks and we listen is through the words of the Bible... However one understands revelation and the divine character of the Bible, Judaism continues to affirm that within the Bible, the voice of God can be heard. Because of this, listening to the words of the Bible is one way of listening to God.<sup>28</sup>

In Hammer’s description, human listening elicits God’s response through the text.

### *Sh'ma u'Birchotecha in Reform Liturgy*

Most Reform Jews have never recited *emet ve-yatsiv*, though they have certainly recited *Mi Chamocha*.<sup>29</sup> The experience of Reform Jews more closely approximates the following chiasmic structure:

- A1 - Creation (*Yotser Or*)
  - B1 - *Ahavat Olam/Ahavah Rabbah*
  - C - *Sh'ma* and *Baruch Shem*
  - B2 - *V'ahavta*
- A2 - Redemption (*Mi Chamocha/ G'ullah*)

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<sup>26</sup> Kimelman, pg. 127.

<sup>27</sup> Kimelman, pg. 127. I had thought I had an original idea about the love of a teacher prompting the love of students being a function of this liturgical rubric, but it turns out Kimelman wrote about it long ago.

<sup>28</sup> Reuven Hammer, *Entering Jewish Prayer*, pgs. 121-122

<sup>29</sup> Most Reform Jews also have not recited parts the second and third paragraph of the *Sh'ma* as described by Ellenson in MPPB as per an earlier note.



Due to omissions to the liturgy, for Reform Jews there is an especially strong sense of love preceding and following recitation of the *Sh'ma*.<sup>30</sup> Before the *Sh'ma*, we recall God's great love for us. After the *Sh'ma*, we are reminded of the command to love God. This is not true only for Reform Jews, but it is particularly pronounced in Reform liturgy because of the omissions of other prayers.

### *The Straightforward (P'shat) Meaning of Blessings That Mention Love*

The prayers that explicitly mention love in this rubric include *Ahavah Rabbah* in the morning, *Ahavat Olam* in the evening, and *V'Ahavta* as part of *Sh'ma* in both prayer services. We will look briefly at the plain text of these blessings' mention of love. I share here the traditional texts as well as that adopted by the Reform and Conservative Movements to demonstrate the way the text has been presented for thousands of years and the modifications made by current American Movements.

### *Ahavah Rabbah*

Siddur Sefard	Siddur Ashkenaz [Lev Shalem adds]	Mishkan T'filah
<p><b>אהבת עולם</b> אהבתנו יהוה אלהינו חמלה גדולה ויתרה חמלת עלינו: <b>אבינו מלכנו בעבור שמך הגדול</b> ובעבור אבותינו שבטחו בך ותלמדם חקי חיים לעשות רצונך בלבב שלם בן תחננו ותלמדנו: <b>אבינו אב הרחמן</b> המרחם רחם עלינו ותן בלבנו בינה להבין ולהשכיל לשמע וללמוד וללמד לשמר ולעשות ולקיים את כל דברי תורתך באהבה:</p> <p>והאר עינינו בתורתך ודבק לבנו במצותיך ויחד לבבנו לאהבה וליראה את שמך <b>למען</b> לא נבוש ולא נכלם ולא נכשל לעולם ועד, כי בשם קדשך</p>	<p><b>אהבה רבה</b> אהבתנו יהוה אלהינו חמלה גדולה ויתרה חמלת עלינו: <b>אבינו מלכנו בעבור אבותינו</b> [ואמותינו] שבטחו בך ותלמדם חקי חיים בן תחננו ותלמדנו: <b>אבינו האב הרחמן</b> המרחם רחם עלינו ותן בלבנו להבין ולהשכיל לשמע וללמוד וללמד לשמר ולעשות ולקיים את כל דברי תלמוד תורתך באהבה:</p> <p>והאר עינינו בתורתך ודבק לבנו במצותיך ויחד לבבנו לאהבה וליראה</p>	<p>אהבה רבה אהבתנו ה אלהינו חמלה גדולה ויתרה חמלת עלינו. בעבור אבותינו ואמותינו שבטחו בך ותלמדם חקי חיים כן תחננו ותלמדנו המרחם רחם עלינו ותן בלבנו להבין ולהשכיל לשמע וללמוד וללמד לשמר ולעשות ולקיים את כל דברי תלמוד תורתך באהבה.</p> <p>והאר עינינו בתורתך ודבק לבנו במצותיך ויחד לבבנו לאהבה וליראה את שמך ולא נבוש ולא נכלם ולא</p>

<sup>30</sup> Conservative and Reform Jews usually use the single word *Sh'ma* to refer to the paragraphs that follow. In this capstone, aligned with Reform Jewish parlance, *Sh'ma* refers to Deuteronomy 6:4 and the sentence beginning *Baruch shem*.

<p>הַגָּדוֹל הַגִּבּוֹר וְהַנּוֹרָא בְּטַחְנוּ. נְגִילָה וְנִשְׁמָחָה בִּישׁוּעֶתְךָ: וְרַחֲמֶיךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְחַסְדֶּיךָ הַרְבֵּים אֵל יַעֲזֹבֵנוּ נֶצַח סֵלָה וְעַד: מִהֵרָ וְהִבָּא עֲלֵינוּ בְּרָכָה וְשְׁלוֹם מִהֵרָ מֵאֲרֻבַּע כְּנָפוֹת כָּל הָאָרֶץ וְשִׁבּוֹר עוֹל הַגּוֹיִם מֵעַל צִנְאָרֵנוּ וְתוֹלִיכֵנוּ מִהֵרָ קוֹמְמִיּוֹת לְאַרְצֵנוּ: כִּי אֵל פּוֹעֵל יִשׁוּעוֹת אֶתָּה וְבָנוּ בְּחֵרֶת מְכַלְעִים וְלִשׁוֹן וְקִרְבָּתֵנוּ מִלִּכְנוּ לְשִׁמְךָ הַגָּדוֹל סֵלָה בְּאֵמֶת בְּאַהֲבָה לְהוֹדוֹת לָךְ וּלְיַחְדְּךָ בְּאַהֲבָה וּלְאַהֲבָה אֶת שִׁמְךָ: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה הַבּוֹחֵר בְּעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאַהֲבָה:</p>	<p>אֶת־שִׁמְךָ: וְלֹא נִבּוֹשׁ לְעוֹלָם וְעַד כִּי בְשֵׁם קְדוֹשְׁךָ הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא בְּטַחְנוּ נְגִילָה וְנִשְׁמָחָה בִּישׁוּעֶתְךָ: וְהִבִּיאֵנוּ לְשְׁלוֹם מֵאֲרֻבַּע כְּנָפוֹת הָאָרֶץ וְתוֹלִיכֵנוּ קוֹמְמִיּוֹת לְאַרְצֵנוּ: כִּי אֵל פּוֹעֵל יִשׁוּעוֹת אֶתָּה וְבָנוּ בְּחֵרֶת מְכַלְעִים וְלִשׁוֹן. וְקִרְבָּתֵנוּ לְשִׁמְךָ הַגָּדוֹל סֵלָה בְּאֵמֶת לְהוֹדוֹת לָךְ וּלְיַחְדְּךָ בְּאַהֲבָה: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה הַבּוֹחֵר בְּעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאַהֲבָה:</p>	<p><b>נכשל</b> לעולם ועד. כי בשם קדשך הגדול והנורא בטחנו נגילה ונשמחה בישועתך. והביאנו לשלום מארץ ותוליכנו קוממיות לארצנו. כי אל פועל ישועות אתה ובנו בחרת וקרבתנו לשמך הגדול סלה באמת להודות לך וליחדך באהבה. ברוך אתה ה הבוחר בעמו ישראל באהבה.</p>
<p>[With] everlasting love You have loved us Adonoy, our God; [With] great and abundant pity have You pitied us. Our Father, our King! for the sake of your great Name and for the sake of our forefathers who trusted in You, and whom You taught statutes of life, carry out your will with a perfect heart, so too, be gracious to us and teach us. Our Father, merciful Father, Who acts with compassion have compassion on us and put into our hearts [comprehension] to understand and <u>to be intellectually creative</u>, to listen, to learn, and to teach, to preserve, to practice, and to fulfill all the words of instruction in Your Torah with love. And enlighten our eyes in Your Torah, and cause our hearts to hold fast to Your commandments, and unify our hearts to love and fear Your Name; and may we not be subject to shame, disgrace or stumbling forever for in Your holy Name— great, mighty and awesome— have we trusted; may we exult and rejoice in Your deliverance. And may Your mercy Adonoy our God, and Your abundant kindness never forsake us. Hasten and bring upon us blessing and peace quickly from the four corners of the earth break the yoke of the nations from our neck and speedily</p>	<p><b>[With]</b> unbounded love You have loved us Adonoy, our God; [With] great and abundant pity have You pitied us. Our Father, our King! for the sake of our forefathers who trusted in You, and whom You taught statutes of life, so too, be gracious to us and teach us. Our Father, merciful Father, Who acts with compassion have compassion on us and put into our hearts to comprehend, and <u>to be intellectually creative</u>, to listen, to learn, and to teach, to preserve, to practice, and to fulfill all the words of instruction in Your Torah with love. And enlighten our eyes in Your Torah, and cause our hearts to hold fast to Your commandments, and unify our hearts to love and fear Your Name; and may we never be put to shame, for in Your holy, great, and awesome Name— have we trusted; may we exult and rejoice in Your deliverance. And bring us to peace from the four corners of the earth and lead us upright to our land.</p>	<p>How deeply You have loved us Adonai gracing us with surpassing compassion! On account of our forebears whose trust led You to teach them the laws of life, be gracious to us, teaching us as well. O Merciful One, have mercy on us by making us able to understand and discern, to heed, learn and teach, and, lovingly, to observe, perform, and fulfill all that is in Your Torah.</p> <p>Enlighten our eyes with Your Torah, focus our minds on Your mitzvot, unite our hearts in love and reverence for Your Name. Then we will never feel shame, never deserve rebuke, and never stumble. Having trusted in Your great and awesome holiness, we shall celebrate Your salvation with joy. Gather us in peace from the four corners of the earth and lead us upright to our land. For You, O God, work wonders. You chose us. Truly, you drew us near to Your Great</p>

<p>lead us upright to our land. Because, You are the Almighty, Who performs acts of deliverance, and You have chosen us from among all peoples and tongues, and You have brought us near our king to Your great Name, forever in truth; with love, that we may give thanks to You, and proclaim Your Oneness, with love. and love Your Name. Blessed are You, Adonoy, Who chooses His people Israel with love.</p> <p><sup>31</sup></p>	<p>Because, You are the Almighty, Who performs acts of deliverance, and You have chosen us from among all peoples and tongues, and You have brought us close to Your great Name, forever in truth; that we may give thanks to You, and proclaim Your Oneness, with love. Blessed are You, Adonoy, Who chooses His people Yisrael with love.<sup>32</sup></p>	<p>Name, that we might acknowledge You, declaring You One in love. Praised be You, Adonai, who chooses Your people Israel in love.<sup>33</sup></p>
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Lev Shalem translation: You have loved us deeply, ADONAI our God, and showered us with boundless compassion. *Avinu Malkeinu*, for the sake of our ancestors who trusted in You and to whom You taught the laws of life, so may You be gracious to us and instruct us. Kind creator, have compassion for us, open our hearts so that we may understand and discern, hear and study, observe, perform, and fulfill all the teachings of Your Torah with love. 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. Bring us safely from the four corners of the earth, and lead us in dignity to our land, for You are the God who effects deliverance. You have chosen us from all other tongues and peoples, always drawing us nearer to Your name, that we may truly acknowledge You and lovingly proclaim your oneness. *Baruch atah ADONAI*, who lovingly cares for the people Israel.

My translation: With overflowing love You have loved us, Adonai our God. With great and incomparable understanding You have forgiven us. For the sake of our ancestors who trusted in You whom You taught laws of life, be gracious to us and teach us. O Compassionate One, have compassion on us, and allow our hearts to

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[https://www.sefaria.org/Siddur\\_Sefard%2C\\_Weekday\\_Shacharit%2C\\_The\\_Shema.16?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en](https://www.sefaria.org/Siddur_Sefard%2C_Weekday_Shacharit%2C_The_Shema.16?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en)

<sup>32</sup>

[https://www.sefaria.org/Siddur\\_Ashkenaz%2C\\_Weekday%2C\\_Shacharit%2C\\_Blessings\\_of\\_the\\_Shema%2C\\_Second\\_Blessing\\_before\\_Shema.1?lang=bi](https://www.sefaria.org/Siddur_Ashkenaz%2C_Weekday%2C_Shacharit%2C_Blessings_of_the_Shema%2C_Second_Blessing_before_Shema.1?lang=bi)

<sup>33</sup> Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur, pg. 62

understand and to discover, to hear, to learn and to teach, to guard and to enact and to establish all that would come from studying your Torah with love.

May our eyes find light in Your Torah and our hearts cleave to Your commandedness; and make our hearts one in love and in reverence for Your name; and may we never cower nor fail nor be distraught for trusting in Your great and holy Name, rejoicing and celebrating in your redemption. And bring us in peace from the four corners of the earth, and guide us, arisen, to your land, for You, God, Who acts and redeems, chose us and drew us near to Your great incomprehensible Name to give thanks to You and to bring You oneness in love. Blessed are You, God, Who chose Your people Israel in love.

In *Ahavah Rabbah*, love is associated with compassion (רחם), including in the form of pity or mercy (חמל). We ask God to teach us out of mercy and compassion and for the sake of our ancestors. The content of the instruction includes laws of life which can be understood as rules or more broadly as guidance for living. The teaching that flows from love will allow us to understand God's Torah (תורתך) and to act in accordance with God's will. We also ask for help loving God, and we acknowledge that God chose us out of love.

## Ahavat Olam

Siddur Sefard	Siddur Ashkenaz
<p>אהבת עולם בית ישראל עמך אהבת תורה ומצוות חקים ומשפטים אותנו למדת. על כן יהוה אלהינו בשכבנו ובקומנו נשים בחקיקה ונשמח בדברי תורתך ובמצוותיך לעולם ועד. כי הם חיינו וארץ ימינו ובהם נהגה יומם ולילה. ואהבתך אל תסיר<sup>34</sup> ממנו לעולמים. ברוך אתה יהוה אוהב עמו ישראל:</p>	<p><b>אהבת</b> עולם בית ישראל עמך אהבת תורה ומצוות חקים ומשפטים אותנו למדת: על כן יהוה אלהינו בשכבנו ובקומנו נשים בחקיקה ונשמח בדברי תורתך ובמצוותיך לעולם ועד: כי הם חיינו וארץ ימינו ובהם נהגה יומם ולילה: ואהבתך אל תסיר ממנו לעולמים: ברוך אתה יהוה אוהב עמו ישראל</p>
<p>[With] An everlasting love You loved the House of Israel, Your people. Torah and commandments, statutes and laws, You taught us. Therefore, Adonoy, our God, when we lie down and when we rise, we will discuss Your statutes, and rejoice in the</p>	<p>[With] An everlasting love You loved the House of Israel, Your people. You taught us Torah and commandments, statutes and laws. Therefore, Adonoy, our God, when we lie down and when we rise, we will discuss Your statutes, and rejoice in the</p>

<sup>34</sup> Green notes in *Kol HaNeshama* that the Sephardic version says אל תסור meaning God will never remove God's love. This particular version seems aligned with the Ashkenazic text in this way.

words of the teachings of Your Torah and in Your commandments forever. For they are our life and they lengthen our days, and on them we will meditate day and night. [May] Your love never be removed from us Blessed are You, Adonoy, Who loves His people Israel.	words of Your Torah and in Your commandments forever. For they are our life and they lengthen our days, and on them we will meditate day and night. [May] Your love never be removed from us. Blessed are You, Adonoy, Who loves His people Israel.
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Mishkan T'filah	Siddur Lev Shalem
<p><b>אַהֲבַת עוֹלָם בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל עִמָּךְ אֶהְבֵּת תּוֹרָה וּמִצְוֹת חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים אוֹתָנוּ לְמִדָּתְךָ: עַל כֵּן יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּשִׁכְבָּנוּ וּבְקוּמָנוּ נִשְׁיַח בְּחֻקֶּיךָ וְנִשְׁמַח בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָתְךָ וּבְמִצְוֹתֶיךָ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד: כִּי הֵם חַיֵּינוּ וְאַרְץ יְמֵינוּ וּבְהֵם נִהְגֶּה יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה: וְאַהֲבָתְךָ אֵל תִּסִּיר מִמֶּנּוּ לְעוֹלָמִים: בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אוֹהֵב עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל</b></p>	
Everlasting love You offered Your people Israel by teaching us Torah and mitzvot, law and precepts. Therefore, Adonai our God, when we lie down and when we rise up, we will meditate on Your laws and Your commandments. We will rejoice in Your Torah forever. Day and night we will reflect on them for they are our life and doing them lengthens our days. Never remove Your love from us. Praise to You, Adonai, who loves Your people Israel.	With timeless love, You have loved Your people, the house of Israel: You have taught us Torah and mitzvot, statutes and laws. Therefore, ADONAI, our God, as we lie down and as we rise up, we shall speak of Your laws, rejoicing in the words of Your Torah and in Your mitzvot forever and ever. For they are our life and the fullness of our days, and on them we shall meditate day and night. Do not ever withdraw Your love from us. <i>Baruch atah ADONAI</i> , who loves the people Israel.

My translation: You have loved Your people Israel with an eternal love. You taught us Torah, mitzvot, laws and precepts, and so, God, our God, when we lie down and when we rise up, we will discuss Your laws and rejoice in the words of Your Torah and Your commandments forever. For they are our life and the length of our days and in them we rejoice day and night. Never remove Your love from us. Blessed are You, God, Who loves Your people Israel.

God's love is eternal and it comes in the form of Torah and commandments, laws and precepts. That we rejoice in Torah and talk about it all the time presumably is an indication of our love for God. It is ambiguous, perhaps intentionally, whether Torah here means laws, instruction in Jewish teachings, or learning more broadly.

*V'Ahavta*<sup>35</sup>

Reform prayer services often exclude Deuteronomy 11:13-21 which explicitly connects the people's love for God to reward and by association absence of love with punishment. Reform prayer services also often exclude Numbers 15:37-39 which is about wearing tzitzit to remind Jews not to stray from God's commandments and thereby remain holy, though *Mishkan T'filah* does include this passage.

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<sup>35</sup> Because the *V'Ahavta* is Biblical text beginning in Deuteronomy 6:5, (immediately following the single line of *Sh'ma* in Deuteronomy 6:4), I will not reproduce it here.

## Chapter 3: The Importance of Revelation and Covenant<sup>36</sup>

To understand ideas of the love between God and Israel in *Shema u'birchotecha*, we first have to examine ideas of love in Jewish sacred literature. As a foundation for understanding ideas of love in Jewish sacred literature, we first need an understanding of ideas of revelation and covenant to which the *Shema u'birchotecha* intend to allude as part of an expression of a loving relationship between God and Israel.

### *Revelation*

The Bible's redactors left ambiguous - arguably intentionally<sup>37</sup> - the content of revelation, when it happened, where it happened, the method of delivery and its participants. Candidates for its content include the Ten Commandments,<sup>38</sup> the first two of the Ten Commandments,<sup>39</sup> law more broadly,<sup>40</sup> Torah,<sup>41</sup> teaching and learning,<sup>42</sup> the alphabet,<sup>43</sup> the sound of the letter aleph,<sup>44</sup> God's love.<sup>45</sup> Candidates for its time-frame include a moment in the wilderness and an event that is happening right now.<sup>46</sup> Candidates for revelation's geographic location include Mount

<sup>36</sup> Note that much of what is written in this section draws on thoughts, language and references I used in other papers I have written during my time in Rabbinical School, including "Impregnated With Covenant - A New Metaphor for Revelation," "The Presence of Children at Sinai" and "Undressing and Dressing the Torah."

<sup>37</sup> See Sommer, pgs. 42-45.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Sommer, pg. 37.

<sup>39</sup> Song of Songs Rabbah 1:2 as described in George Savran, "Seeing the Voices: Some Thoughts on the Nature of Revelation." The Schechter Institutes, December 16, 2018.

<https://schechter.edu/seeing-the-voices-some-thoughts-on-the-nature-of-revelation/>.

<sup>40</sup> Sommer, pgs. 35, 46. On pg. 46, Sommer attributes this view to Biblical author E.

<sup>41</sup> See for example Jerusalem Talmud Shekalim 2a:1 and b. Avodah Zarah 2b:15 as presented on Sefaria.org in connection with Exodus 19:17.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Gabriel Moran, "Revelation as Teaching-Learning," in Religious Education, 95, no 3, Sum 2000, pgs. 269-283.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, Daniel Chanan Matt. *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*. Vol. IV. Stanford (Calif.): Stanford University Press, 2006, pg. 443, n. 278.

<sup>44</sup> I learned the teaching of R. Menachem Mendel of Rymanov about the letter aleph as the content of revelation from Lawrence Kushner. It can also be found in Sommer, pgs. 89-91. Sommer connects this interpretation to the story of Elijah in I Kings 19:11-13 in which Elijah hears קול דממה דקה.

<sup>45</sup> Petuchowski explains that this is Rosenzweig's view in Jakob J. Petuchowski, "Revelation and the Modern Jew" as it appears in Michael Marmur and David Ellenson, *American Jewish Thought Since 1934: Writings on Identity, Engagement and Belief*, Brandeis University Press, 2020) Kindle location 1675 to 1682.

<sup>46</sup> For example, see Sommer, pgs. 193-196.

Horeb, Moab, and all places and all times.<sup>47</sup> Candidates for the delivery method include a voice from the midst of the fire,<sup>48</sup> 70 voices in the 70 languages of the world<sup>49</sup> and a set of internal voices reaching each person in the manner she or he can understand that penetrate to the multiple levels of each person's soul.<sup>50</sup> Candidates for its recipients include the Israelites who left Egypt, the second generation of those who left Egypt and all of us in every generation.<sup>51</sup>

Many modern Jews only know what Benjamin Sommer calls the “stenographic theory of revelation”.<sup>52</sup> This theory holds that God wrote or dictated the entire Torah word for word to Moses as well as the full Oral Torah, including the Mishnah, Gemara and Midrash. The participatory theory, however, holds explicitly that revelation includes the contributions both of people and of God, that revelation was collaborative and incorporates both God's will and Israel's response to God's will.<sup>53</sup> Adherents of the participatory theory of revelation fully embrace the school of Biblical criticism. They accept scholarship establishing multiple authors and redactors of our Biblical texts and maintain the sanctity of our canonical texts.<sup>54</sup> Texts like Shemot Rabbah 47:1 exemplify different understandings of revelation and covenant.

בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁנִּגְלָה הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּסִינֵי לִתֵּן תּוֹרָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, אָמְרָה לְמֹשֶׁה עַל הַסֵּדֶר מִקְרָא וּמִשְׁנָה

תִּלְמוּד וְאַגָּדָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (שְׁמוֹת כ, א): וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, אֲפִלּוּ מֶה שֶׁהִתְלַמֵּיד שׁוֹאֵל

לְרַב אָמַר הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְמֹשֶׁה בְּאוֹתָהּ שָׁעָה

At the hour that the Holy Blessed One was revealed at Sinai in the giving of the Torah to Israel, God told Moses the order – Bible, Mishnah, Talmud and Aggadah. As it is

<sup>47</sup> See Sommer, pgs. 190-196.

<sup>48</sup> Deuteronomy 4:12.

<sup>49</sup> Shemot Rabbah 5:9 as seen at “Shemot Rabbah 5.” Sefaria. Accessed December 2019. [https://www.sefaria.org/Shemot\\_Rabbah.5?lang=bi](https://www.sefaria.org/Shemot_Rabbah.5?lang=bi).

<sup>50</sup> Matt, pg. 442.

<sup>51</sup> Sommer, pgs. 190-196. Please note that a version of this paragraph also appears in a paper I wrote in Fall 2019 entitled “The Presence of Children at Sinai: טפכם in Deuteronomy 29:10”

<sup>52</sup> Benjamin Sommer, Revelation and Authority, pg. 2.

<sup>53</sup> Sommer, pgs. 1-2.

<sup>54</sup> Sommer, 11-26.



said, and God spoke *all* these things. Even what a student asks the teacher The Holy Blessed One said to Moses at that same hour.  
Shemot Rabbah 47:1<sup>55</sup>

Some read this text to mean that nothing new can ever be produced, because all was already foretold at Sinai. Others read it in exactly the opposite way, understanding it to promote flexibility in, and evolution of, Torah. It was perhaps this text that inspired Emmanuel Levinas to write:

“...the totality of truth is made out of the contributions of a multiplicity of people: the uniqueness of each act of listening carries the secret of the text; the voice of Revelation, in precisely the inflection lent by each person’s ear, is necessary for the truth of the whole...This contribution of the readers, listeners and pupils to the open-ended work of the Revelation is so essential to it that...the slightest question put to the schoolmaster by a novice constitutes an ineluctable articulation of the Revelation which was heard at Sinai.”<sup>56</sup>

## Revelation and Covenant

The relationship between Revelation and Covenant differs according to Biblical authors. Read without redaction, the E source understands law and covenant as the sole content of revelation.<sup>57</sup> The P source, alternatively, understands covenant as preceding revelation at Sinai and evolving in that singular moment, mediated entirely through a human filter and including both law and the presence of God and the people’s methods for keeping the presence of God nearby.<sup>58</sup> The D source, which includes nearly all of Deuteronomy - chapters 1-31, explicitly includes not just the generation that left Egypt but every generation that follows. It contains

<sup>55</sup> Sommer cites this and similar statements in y. Peah 4a (2:6), y. Hagigah 2d (1:8), b. Megillah 19b, Wayiqra Rabbah 22:1 and Qohelet Rabbah 1:29 and 5:6. Sommer, pg. 149. The two different ways of reading this text came up in the course of class discussion in the class “Reform Prayer Books,” led by David Ellenson.

<sup>56</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Revelation in the Jewish Tradition,” in *The Levinas Reader*, pg. 195.

<sup>57</sup> Sommer, 46.

<sup>58</sup> Sommer, 56-57.

instructions not to add or subtract what is given (4:2) but also contains the understanding that the terms are being named in the present rather than the past (5:2-4 and 29:11-14).<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Sommer, 64-75 and 190-196.

## Part II

### Chapter 4: Jewish Ideas About Love

The *Sh'ma u'birchotecha* recalls revelation at Sinai, the giving of Torah and the covenant between God and Israel within the frame of reciprocal love. As discussed in earlier sections, the prayers in the *Sh'ma* rubric remind the pray-er of covenant, revelation and loving relationship with God. So what does love have to do with it? What does love have to do with covenant and revelation, and what is the nature of the love between God and Israel?

Ideas about the nature of the love between God and Israel in the Hebrew Bible and Oral Torah range from William L. Moran's understanding of love as obligation modeled on ancient middle eastern suzerain and vassal treaties<sup>60</sup> to Adin Steinsaltz's sublime love that "opens one up to a growing degree of awareness of inner identity with divinity."<sup>61</sup> This chapter explores the wide range of understanding of love - (אהב -*ahav* in particular) in Jewish sacred literature between God and Israel, and explores the implications of each definition of love for understanding the nexus between love, covenant and revelation.

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<sup>60</sup> William L. Moran, "Ancient Near Eastern background of the love of God in Deuteronomy," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 25.1 (Jan. 1963): 77-87.

<sup>61</sup> commentary by Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) ; editor-in-chief, Tzvi Hersh Weinreb ; senior content editor, Shalom Z. Berger ; managing editor, Joshua Schreier, Adin Steinsaltz, Adin Steinsaltz, Hotsa'at Koren (Jerusalem), Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, Shalom Zvi Berger, Joshua Schreier, and Hotsa'at Koren (Jerusalem). [תלמוד בבלי]: Koren Talmud Bavli. Edited by Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, Shalom Zvi Berger, and Joshua Schreier. First Hebrew/Englished. Jerusalem: Shefa Foundation, 2012., pg. 74.

## Love as Obedience and Loyalty

Perhaps the simplest and least satisfying definition of love in the Hebrew Bible was advocated by William L. Moran in 1963. He argued that *ahavah* refers only to the loyalty of a suzerain to a vassal and a vassal to a suzerain. He describes this obedience- patronage relationship as “covenantal love,” saying that it is a love related to fear and reverence and is expressed “above all... in loyalty, in service and in unqualified obedience.”<sup>62</sup>

In this framework, obedience sows reward, and disobedience sows punishment. The Deuteronomic section that Reform Jews omit from *the Sh'ma* affirms this framework.

והיה אם־שמע תשמעו אל־מצותי אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם היום לאהבה את־יהוה אלהיכם ולעבדו

בכל־לבבכם ובכל־נפשכם ונתתי מטר־ארצכם בעתו יורה ומלקוש ואספת דגןך ותירשך ויצהרך

If, then, you obey the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, loving your God יהוה and serving [God] with all your heart and soul, I will grant the rain for your land in season, the early rain and the late. You shall gather in your new grain and wine and oil...(Deuteronomy 11:13-14)

Discussion in the rabbinic literature includes the notion of God’s love expressed through reward and punishment. In Berakhot 5a, for example, God’s love in the form of punishment is understood as Torah, often translated in this context as “instruction.” The sugya reads in part:

אמר רבא, ואיתימא רב חסדא: אם רואה אדם שְׂסוּרִין בְּאֵין עָלָיו — יִפְשֹׁשׁ בְּמַעֲשָׁיו, שְׁנֵאמַר: “נִחַפְשָׁה דְרִכֵּינוּ וְנִחְקְרָה וְנִשְׁוּבָה עַד ה'”. פִּשְׁפֹּשׁ וְלֹא מִצָּא — יִתְלָה בְּבִטּוֹל תּוֹרָה, שְׁנֵאמַר: “אֲשֶׁרִי הַגָּבֵר אֲשֶׁר תִּסְרְנוּ יָהּ וּמִתּוֹרַתְךָ תִּלְמְדוּ”... בִּידוּעַ שְׂסוּרִין שֶׁל אֱהָבָה הֵם, שְׁנֵאמַר: “כִּי אֶת אֲשֶׁר יֶאֱהָב ה' יוֹכִיחַ

<sup>62</sup> Moran, pg. 78. For a thorough examination of the semantic and archaeological justifications for this idea of love, see Levenson, pgs. 1-58.

“Rava and some say Rav Hisda said ‘if a person sees that suffering has befallen them, they should examine their actions as it is stated ‘we will search our ways and return to God (Lamentations 3:40) ...as it is stated ‘Happy is the person You punish, God, and teach from Your Torah’ (Psalms 94:12)...a person may be confident that these are afflictions of love, as it is stated ‘For whom God loves, God rebukes’ (Proverbs 3:12).<sup>63</sup>

The rabbinic view of suffering from punishment (ייסור) as love is compared to when a father reluctantly punishes a child for their own good (Berakhot 5a:22). Immediately following this comparison, the Talmud refers to Proverbs 6:23 to prove that *Olam HaBa* comes as a result of self-improvement deriving from rebuke. The verse reads:

כִּי נֵר מִצְוָה וְתוֹרָה אֹרֶךְ יָדָיו וְדֶרֶךְ חַיִּים תּוֹכְחוֹת מוֹסֵר:

For Mitzvah is a lamp and Torah is a light. The way of life is proven by turning (in response to consequences).

The word מוֹסֵר (*musar*) comes from the same root that is used above for suffering ייסור (*yisar*). The word play here is important. *Musar* means discipline, which can result from punishment. It also means “turning”. The *derech chayim* - way of life - then is to turn and turn - to revise our way of going in response to the results of our ( successes and) mistakes. Read this way, this verse seems to acknowledge the interplay of discipline /musar and learning/Torah.

The rabbis seem to have understood this relationship.

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<sup>63</sup> *Berakhot* 5a:9-10. See also *Arakhin* 16b where a short ma’aseh about Yohanan ben Nuri ends with praise for Akiba who loved him more because of the lashes he received as a result of Yohanan ben Nuri’s complaints to the Rabban. The Talmud then quotes “Do not rebuke (תוכח) a scorner lest they hate you. Rebuke a wise person and they will love you (Proverbs 9:8).” See also *Bava Metziah* 85a where it says the afflictions of Eliezer ben Shimon came and left out of love in contrast with those of Yehuda HaNasi whose afflictions came and went due to separate incidents. Note: Throughout this capstone, I use Sefaria translations and sometimes modify them myself to elucidate my understanding of the text and to replace gender specific language. I choose to add Sefaria’s paragraph markings with a colon because it helps me re-locate the source more specifically (and I am more likely to re-read this than anyone else is to read it other than my advisors :)

A conversation follows about whether afflictions of love are limited only to those that do not interfere with Torah study, those that do not interfere with prayer or both. Variations on modern interpretations that understand rebuke as God's love might do so conditionally, seeing it as Torah only when the rebuke guides future action and/or something significant is learned. Those who hold such a view might argue that it is not for humans to arrogate to themselves the ability to do a cosmic cost/benefit analysis. Some things, however, such as the severe sickness of a child, many simply cannot accept as purposeful.

## Alternative Rabbinic Understandings of Love and Punishment

In some passages, individuals can choose to reject suffering and its reward - that which can be learned from the suffering (5b:10 - 5b:16). Shimon ben Lakish, alternatively, suggests Torah - which in *Ahavah Rabbah*, *Ahavat Olam* and many *midrashim* is given in love - can distance one from suffering (5a:6)

Another view of the relationship of suffering to Torah is that suffering helps one arrive at a purified state necessary to receive certain rewards, one of which is Torah. Shimon ben Lakish suggests that suffering cleanses transgressions.<sup>64</sup> Shimon bar Yochai says that by means of suffering Israel acquired Torah, the land of Israel and *Olam haBa*.<sup>65</sup> In this line of thinking, Psalm 94:12, quoted above, becomes a proof text for the idea that Torah is acquired through suffering in contrast with the earlier notion that suffering is a form of Torah.

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<sup>64</sup> Sefaria, Berakhot 5a:19-21

<sup>65</sup> Sefaria, Berakhot 5a:19-21

At the end of the section of the sugya that runs from 5a:4 - 5b:20 (the sugya goes from 2a - 9b), a *ma'aseh* (story) returns the reader to the idea from the beginning of this section of the sugya, namely that love relieves suffering. In the *ma'aseh*, Rav Huna's repentance and learning from a particular situation's suffering leads to the removal of the source of the suffering (a quantity of vinegar either returns to being wine or sold at its price) (5b:20).

### Implications of love as obedience for the love-revelation-covenant nexus

In the love as obedience framework, God promulgates laws and people follow them. The people's loyalty in following the laws demonstrates their love. God's rules and protection of the people show God's love. The covenant is the agreement of the people to follow the laws and God's agreement to give them and to provide protection and other explicitly stated rewards for loyalty including but not limited to the Land of Israel. This definition aligns with reward and punishment as consistent with responses to demonstrated love or its absence. Identifying this definition with covenantal love limits the range of possibility for the relationship of love to covenant, and the term "covenantal love" as Moran uses it will not be how I will use the term throughout the remainder of this capstone. As we shall see, "covenantal love" has the potential to mean a great deal more than simply obedience and patronage. The rabbis of the Talmud also understood the relationship between love and covenant as more complex than simple obedience and patronage.

Even when the Talmud conceives of God's chastisement of disobedience as God acting out of love, we see something more than just loyalty and obedience at work in the conception

of love. Torah, in the sense of learning, results from punishment and is associated with love. This is different from the idea that punishment itself expresses love. Torah (in the sense of law) dictates punishments to provide Torah (in the sense of instruction) eliciting learning and change, and this teaching and learning is what is associated with love. Already we see here a rabbinic notion of Torah as God's love. It remains to be further explored in what way Torah is a source of love.<sup>66</sup>

### Implications of love as obedience for loving one's neighbor

Any attempt to define the love between God and Israel in Jewish sacred literature must also explain how that definition includes the commands *ואהבת לרעך כמוך* Love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18) which sits in the physical center of the Torah and which Akiva called *כלל גדול בתורה* - a great principle of the Torah,<sup>67</sup> and *הגר אתכם ואהבת לו כמוך* the stranger among you shall love as yourself (Leviticus 19:34).<sup>68</sup> Moran does not deal with these and similar verses. Lapsley rejects as “too neat” Herbert Rücker’s conclusion that in the case of the call to love God, emotion is involved but not in the verses calling on humans to love the stranger and neighbor.<sup>69</sup> Lapsley argues that the diverse uses of the language of love in Deuteronomy warrants inquiry beyond Moran’s findings, noting in particular that the recall of the experience

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<sup>66</sup> For an extended discussion of covenantal love as Moran describes it, see the first chapter of Jon Levenson, *The Love of God*. Also Lapsley, “Feeling Our Way: Love for God in Deuteronomy”; Ackerman, “The Personal Is Political: Covenantal and Affectionate Love ('āhēb, 'ahābā) in the Hebrew Bible”; Bill Arnold, “The Love-Fear Antinomy in Deuteronomy 5-11.”

<sup>67</sup> Y. Nedarim 9:4:3 as quoted by Rashi on Leviticus 19:18. Of note, this is disputed by ben Azzai who claims the descent of humanity (presumably from one human being so as to demonstrate that no race is better than another) is a greater principle.

<sup>68</sup> This command is repeated with slightly different formulation in Deuteronomy 10:19

<sup>69</sup> Lapsley, pgs. 362-363.



in Egypt is a call to empathy, that is, emotion.<sup>70</sup> This chapter is an attempt to engage in such inquiry.

## Beyond Obedience and Loyalty - Love and Awe/Fear

Several Talmudic sources understand love as a source of motivation to act in a manner that goes beyond loyalty. Sometimes this is understood as doing something for its own sake and sometimes as doing out of a deep feeling of passion for the loved One. Mishnah Sotah 5:5, in the name of R. Yehoshua ben Hyrcanus, puts forward the idea that Job acted out of love, citing the verse "Though God will slay me, still will I trust in God" (Job 13:15).<sup>71</sup> Job acted faithfully not only when no reward was available but even after receiving seemingly undeserved punishment.

Mishnah Sotah 5:5 is part of an ongoing discussion of human love for God expressed as human action motivated by אהבה/love in contrast to human action motivated by ירא/awe/fear.

The Jerusalem Talmud's discussion of this mishnah, includes the following:

כְּתוּב אֶחָד אוֹמֵר וְאֶהְיֶה אֶת יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְכְתוּב אֶחָד אוֹמֵר אֶת יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ תִירָא וְאוֹתוֹ תַעֲבֹד. עֲשֵׂה מֵאֲהָבָה וְעֲשֵׂה מִיִּרְאָה. עֲשֵׂה מֵאֲהָבָה שְׂאֵם בָּאֵת לִשְׂנוֹא דַע כִּי אֶתָּה אוֹהֵב וְאֵין אוֹהֵב שׁוֹנֶה. עֲשֵׂה מִיִּרְאָה שְׂאֵם בָּאֵת לִבְעוֹט דַּע שְׂאֶתָּה יִרָא. וְאֵין יִרָא מְבַעֵט.

One verse (6:5) says, "you shall love the Eternal, your God," and another verse (6:13) says, "fear the Eternal, your God, and God you should serve." Act from love and act from fear. Act from love, because if you are tempted to hate, know

<sup>70</sup> Lapsley, pg. 363.

<sup>71</sup> An opposing view is also presented: that Job acted out of fear.

that you must love and a lover is no hater. Act from fear, because if you are tempted to rebel, know that you must fear and one who fears does not rebel.<sup>72</sup>

The passage understands love and fear as emotion that leads to action. Bill Arnold, working with the 22 occurrences of אהב and forty-four occurrences of ירא in the book of Deuteronomy,<sup>73</sup> finds an antimony - "a contradiction between conclusions which seem equally logical, reasonable or necessary..."<sup>74</sup> Like the Mishnah, Arnold concludes that acting from love and fear both have value. He wrote that love and fear "complement each other, so that love prevents terror and fear prevents irreverent familiarity."<sup>75</sup> Sifrei Devarim suggests that Arnold's conclusion applies only to relationships between humans and God, as love and fear cannot coexist between humans:

ואהבת את ה' אלהיך. עשה מאהבה! הפריש הכתוב בין העושה מאהבה לעושה מיראה: מאהבה - שכרו כפול ומכופל. לפי שהוא אומר (דברים ו) "את ה' אלהיך תירא ואותו תעבוד", יש לך אדם, כשהוא מתיירא מחברו - כשהוא מטריחו, מניחו והולך לו. אלא אתה עושה מאהבה, שאין לך אהבה במקום יראה ויראה במקום אהבה אלא במדת הקב"ה בלבד.

(Deuteronomy 6:5) "And you shall love the Lord your God": Act out of love. Distinguish between acting out of love and acting out of fear. From love one's reward is doubled and multiplied. It is written (Deuteronomy 6:13) "Adonai your God shall you fear, and God shall you serve." In the case of a person, when they fear their friend, they disturb them and leave and go from them. You, however, act out of love. There is no love in the place where there is fear, and no fear where there is love except in the case of the Holy One Blessed be God alone.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>72</sup> This text also appears in Yerushalmi Berakhot 9:5:7 and b. Berakhot 9:6.

<sup>73</sup> Arnold, Bill T. 2011. "The Love-Fear Antinomy in Deuteronomy 5-11 \*." *Vetus Testamentum* 61 (4): 551–69. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853311X560754>. pgs. 559, 562.

<sup>74</sup> Anold, pg. 567, see n. 51.

<sup>75</sup> Arnold, pg. 567.

<sup>76</sup> Sifrei Devarim 32. I have modified the translation heavily from the one found here [https://www.sefaria.org/Sifrei\\_Devarim.32.1?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en](https://www.sefaria.org/Sifrei_Devarim.32.1?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en). We see here an implied irony that is more explicit in other sources: acting out of love suggests acting for no reward, and acting in such a way leads to a greater reward.

The Yerushalmi in Berakhot 9:5:7 strongly favors acting righteously out of love over fear, stating

פְּרוּשׁ אֱהָבָה כְּאַבְרָהָם. אֵין לֶךְ חֲבִיב מִכּוּלָּם אֶלָּא פְּרוּשׁ אֱהָבָה כְּאַבְרָהָם.  
Righteous from love, like Abraham. No one is beloved as much as the righteous from love, like Abraham.

Explaining in what way Abraham demonstrated that he acted righteously from love, the sugya says Abraham turned his evil instincts into good.<sup>77</sup>

Unlike the Yerushalmi, in the Bavli, Abaye and Rava reject the construct of righteous acts rooted in fear as distinct from righteous acts rooted in love in favor of a construct of actions for their own sake and actions not for their own sake.<sup>78</sup> Commenting on a mishnah that distinguishes righteousness (פרושין) due to love from righteousness due to fear, the Gemara in b. Sotah 22b states:

אָבִי וְרָבָא לִתְנָא לָא תִיתִינִי פְּרוּשׁ מֵאַהֲבָה פְּרוּשׁ מִיִּרְאָה דְּאָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר רַב לְעוֹלָם יַעֲסוֹק אָדָם בִּתְוֵרָה וּבְמִצְוֹת אֶפִּילוּ נִשְׁלָא לְשִׁמְהָ נְשִׁמְתוֹךְ נִשְׁלָא לְשִׁמְהָ בָּא לְשִׁמְהָ  
Abaye and Rava said to the *tanna* “Do not teach [distinctions between acts that are] righteous due to love [vs] righteous due to fear, as Rav Yehuda says that Rav says: A person should always engage in Torah and in mitzvot even if not for their own sake, as through performing them not for their own sake, one comes to perform them for their own sake.”<sup>79 80</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Y. Berakhot 9:5:8 טוב עֲשֵׂה יִצְרָהּ רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר רַב לְעוֹלָם יַעֲסוֹק

<sup>78</sup> This might be understood as a precursor to Carol Dweck’s theory regarding growth mindset or an understanding of the need to warm up in order to act with true intention. See Carol Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*

<sup>79</sup> A similar text, Pesiqta Rav Kahana 15:5, is quoted by Levenson as follows: Rav Huna and R. Jeremiah said in the name of R. Hiyya bar Abbah: It is written, “They abandoned Me [and they did not keep My Torah]” (Jer. 16:11). If only they had kept My Torah! Would that they had abandoned Me and kept My Torah! For if “they had abandoned Me and kept My Torah,” the starter dough that is in it would have brought them back to me. Rav Huna said: Study Torah, even if not for its own sake. From the very fact that you are studying it (though not for its own sake) and because you are involving yourself with it, you will turn back and do it for its own sake. Levenson, pg. 33. These texts support an idea that will be further developed in this capstone: Torah, like the kevaḥ of prayer and halachah are intended as runways for the attention to and awareness of love of God, which I liken to Rosenzweig’s Gebot.

<sup>80</sup> The word פְּרוּשִׁין is translated in Sefaria as righteousness, but can also refer to heresy depending on the perspective of the speaker as it seems to refer to being Pharasaic. In some places it is translated as “religious” rather than “righteous.” An isha prusha is an abstinent woman and that is condemned as m’valei olam, one who erodes the world. Dvora Weisberg cleared up this confusion for me. Prusha can have positive or negative

Mishnah Avot 5:19-20, brings nearer to one another the two constructs Rav and Abaye distinguish - 1) righteousness rooted in fear vs. love and 2) right action for its own sake vs. not.

Mishnah Avot 5:19-20 reads:

כָּל אֲהָבָה שֶׁהִיא תְּלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר, בְּטֵל דְּבָרָהּ, בְּטֵלָה אֲהָבָהּ. וְשִׂאִינָה תְּלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר, אִינָה בְּטֵלָה לְעוֹלָם.  
אִיזוֹ הִיא אֲהָבָה תְּלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר, זוֹ אֲהָבָה אֲמִנּוֹן וְתִמְרָה. וְשִׂאִינָה תְּלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר, זוֹ אֲהָבַת דָּוִד  
וְיִהוֹנָתָן.... כָּל מַחֲלָקֶת שֶׁהִיא לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם, סוּפָה לְהִתְקַיֵּם. וְשִׂאִינָה לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם, אֵין סוּפָה  
לְהִתְקַיֵּם.

All love that depends on something, [when the] thing ceases, [the] love ceases; and [all love] that does not depend on anything, will never cease...And what is an example of love that did not depend on anything? Such was the love of David and Jonathan....Every dispute that is for the sake of heaven, will in the end endure; but one that is not for the sake of heaven, will not endure.<sup>81</sup>

The example here of Jonathan and David is particularly intriguing because according to I Samuel 18, Jonathan and David make a *brit* - a covenant - forged in love as stated in

וַיְהִי כִּכְלֹתוֹ לְדַבֵּר אֶל-שָׂאוּל וְנִפְשׁ יִהוֹנָתָן נִקְשְׂרָה בְּנֶפֶשׁ דָּוִד (וַיֵּאָהֲבוּ) [וַיֵּאָהֲבוּ] יִהוֹנָתָן  
כְּנֶפֶשׁוֹ....וַיַּכֵּת יִהוֹנָתָן וְדָוִד בְּרִית בְּאַהֲבָתוֹ אֹתוֹ כְּנֶפֶשׁוֹ.

When [David] finished speaking with Saul, Jonathan's soul became bound up with the soul of David; Jonathan loved David as [his own soul]... Jonathan and David made a *brit*, because [Jonathan] loved him as himself. (ISamuel 18:1-3)

Jon D. Levenson discusses the relationship between David and Jonathan and its implications for our understanding of the relationship between Israel and God and the covenant.<sup>82</sup> He points out that in the Biblical text, we find the notion of love of God as expressed in acting righteously

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connotations, including referring to super (or over) punctiliousness. In this passage about prusha due to love and prusha due to fear, I think we can assume it is discussing attempts to be punctilious in religious practice that may overreach.

<sup>81</sup> In Sefaria, these are Mishnah Avot 5:16-17. Levenson discusses the love of Jonathan and David - the love identified in this Mishnah as an example of love that does not depend on anything.

<sup>82</sup> See Levenson, pgs. 21-26.

not just because we are commanded to do so but as an expression of love,<sup>83</sup> and that for Jonathan and David's *brit* "as is often [the case] in the Bible, love and *chesed* (lovingkindness) implicate each other."<sup>84</sup> As Levenson puts it, when love is an affective reason for going beyond what is required by ethical behavior, "no choice between love and law need be made, for in this case love and law entail each other."<sup>85</sup>

Levenson, drawing on work by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman, also suggests that the causality between emotions and actions runs in both directions and beyond, responding and contributing to the subjective reality and plausibility structures constructed by social processes.<sup>86</sup> In the context of arguing that Moran inappropriately tried to understand אהבה outside the narrative structure of the Pentateuch as a whole, Jacqueline E. Lapsley draws on Damasio and Nussbaum's findings that an appropriate ethical response requires an appropriate emotional response, and that "emotions are crucial for ethics because they are an integral part of cognition."<sup>87</sup> Emotions, they argue, provide human beings with a sense of how their goals relate to the world, the absence of which derails decision-making and action.<sup>88</sup> Lapsley derives from this the conclusion that love "has emotion as a constitutive element," therefore "the emotionally loving response to the deity is not an irrelevant footnote to obedience in the law, but is fundamental to a proper relationship with God."<sup>89</sup> Love as a response to God, then, is an emotion necessary for ethical action.

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<sup>83</sup> Levenson, pgs. 13-14.

<sup>84</sup> Levenson, pg. 25.

<sup>85</sup> Levenson, pg. 26

<sup>86</sup> Levenson, pg. 32 and 205 n. 49.

<sup>87</sup> Lapsley, pg. 368.

<sup>88</sup> Lapsley, pgs. 356, 368.

<sup>89</sup> Lapsley, pg. 369

Comparing the relationship between God and humans to that between master and servant, 11th century Jewish philosopher Bahya ibn Paquda identifies levels or faces (פנים) of love, the first being that of doing the master's will because the master bestowed benefits and showed kindness, the second is doing because the master overlooked transgressions and forgave inequities, and the third being regard for the master's great and exalted character and not "because [the servant] hopes to receive aught or fears aught from [the master]...We love God for Godself, for God's glory-thus inducing us to magnify God and extol God. This last is the pure love of God, blessed be God".<sup>90</sup>

Tanna Debbe Eliyahu, a tenth century midrashic text, contrasts action rooted in love and action rooted in *yir'ah* fear/awe through a parable<sup>91</sup> about two servants whose master goes on a journey. The servant who loves the master used their free time to plant gardens while the other merely focused on doing no wrong. The master returned and the servant who served out of love basked in the joy of the master when the master gazed on the gardens. The servant who did nothing out of fear of acting incorrectly perceived the master's wrath. This parable illustrates the paradox in Jewish literature that to act out of love is to act not for a reward but leads to actions that end up deserving and receiving reward. It also illustrates the notion that love opens one to intuition about the *ikar* - the essence - of the Master's desire, one not available to those who simply follow the stated rules as transferred to them, leading a person

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<sup>90</sup> Bahyaben Joseph ibn Paquda, Duties of the Heart, translated from the Arabic into Hebrew by Jehudah ibn Tabbon with English translation by Moses Hyamson, vol. 2, pg. 347. The Hebrew translation by Jehudah ibn Tabbon from the Arabic is

והשלשי אהבתו אותו בעבור גדולתו ורוממתו ומוראו לעצם כבודו לא לתוחלת ולא לפחד ועל ההקשה הזאת תהיה האהבה ממנו באלוהים לרוב חסדו עלינו והתמדת טובתו לנו ותדבק נפשנו באהבתו לתקות גמולו. ויש שתהיה אהבתנו באלוהים ללהסתירו עונינו ועברו על פשעינו עם גודל מרינו אותו ועברנו על מצותיו. ויש שתהיה אהבתנו בו לעצמו ולכבודו לגדלו ולרוממו וזאת היא האהבה הזכה באלוהים יתברך

<sup>91</sup> The retelling here is a summary based on the retelling in חכמה ראשית חכמה The Beginning of Wisdom, Unabridged Translation of the Gate of Love from R. Eliahu de Vidas' Reishit Chochmah, translated by Simcha benYosef, pgs. 4-5.

(as ironically as receiving greater reward for not seeking one) to miss the point entirely. In the section on love as learning, we will see how the use of a single word in *Ahavah Rabbah* brings forward for the perceptive pray-er the idea of acting with love increasing the intuition of the servant.

*Implications of Love as Doing for Its Own Sake and as an Emotion for the  
Revelation-Covenant-Love Nexus and for Loving One's Neighbor*

This section has considered two ideas that both go beyond Moran's obedience/loyalty framework - 1) that love in Deuteronomy involves acting for its own sake rather than for reward and 2) that love involves acting out of emotional attachment to the loved One and the loved one. Love then implies attachment to the Other in the covenant which goes beyond the idea of legal contract. Practically, it may suggest that not all relationship needs and methods of meeting those needs can be laid out in advance in the form of rules. Rather, relationships require an underlying turning-toward that motivates action and informs the letter of any laws with spirit.<sup>92</sup> These definitions of love, therefore, suggest a covenant that goes beyond a legal contract. Such a sense of commitment requires motivation. Love provides this motivation and such love perhaps derives from empathy and perhaps derives from a sense of mutual knowing because the One has revealed something of Oneself. In the case of the neighbor and stranger, being known may result from a revealing or from empathy, something impossible from the human toward God without God choosing to reveal something of Godself.

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<sup>92</sup> I am reminded of Dr. Candice Levy's teaching that צדק צדק תרדוף *Tzedek tzedek tirdof* repeats the word *tzedek* because the first suggests justice that can be codified and the second suggests righteous action that goes beyond what can be codified but is necessary for a society to function harmoniously.

Parallel to human beings acting out of love is the notion that God chooses the people out of love. From Deuteronomy's perspective, that God chose Israel out of love means specifically that Israel had done nothing to earn or deserve that choice.<sup>93</sup> Other uses of אהב in Torah support the use of the word to mean "chosen" or preferred.<sup>94</sup>

## Love as L'Haskil - One Way to Understand Torah as Love

It would be beyond the scope of this capstone to examine the semantic range of each word in the *Ahavah Rabbah* prayer in order to understand its implications for understanding the nature of the love between God and Israel in the *Shema u'birkhotecha* rubric. Examining one word, *l'haskil*, expands the definition of love in this context (and establishes the value of similar study.)

The end of the first paragraph of *Ahavah Rabbah* reads:

הַרְחֵמֵנוּ הַמְּרַחֵם רַחֵם עָלֵינוּ וְתֵן בְּלִבֵּנוּ | לְהִבִּין וּלְהַשְׂכִּיל | לְשִׁמְעַת | לְלַמֵּד וּלְלַמֵּד | לְשָׁמֵר וּלַעֲשׂוֹת  
וּלְקַיֵּם אֶת־כָּל־דְּבָרֵי תִלְמוּד תּוֹרָתְךָ בְּאַהֲבָה:

May the Merciful One Who bestows compassion bestow compassion on us and allow our hearts to understand and perceive, to hear, to learn and teach, to guard and do, and to establish all the words of the study of Your Torah in love.

As noted elsewhere in this capstone, the structure of this line is significant in part because of the list of verbs and the choice in the placement of multiple uses of *lamed*/"to" and *vav*/"and". There are several word pairs connected by *vav*/and - "to understand and to perceive," "to learn and to teach," "to guard and to do". ולקיים "And to establish" begins a separate phrase. We

<sup>93</sup> Deuteronomy 7:6-8

<sup>94</sup> Especially Genesis 25:28 and 37:3 for example. The rabbis, however, go to lengths to offer a reason Abraham was selected such as the famous stories of smashing idols and noticing that the sun and moon are only in the sky temporarily.



therefore have three word pairs with one solitary word in the middle of the list - לשמוע

(*l'shmoa*) preparing us for the coming *Sh'ma*. להשכיל (*l'haskil*) is the second word in the first pair.

The word להשכיל (*l'haskil*) appears only four times as an infinitive in Tanakh - once each in Genesis (3:6), Psalms (36:4), Daniel (9:13) and Ezra-Nehemiah (8:13). In each case, it seems to refer to something much more than basic perception but more like eye-opening transformative epiphany. In Genesis, it refers to Eve understanding the impact of eating of the tree in the middle of the garden, suggesting that the word can mean “causing one to perceive reality in an entirely new way such that they can never go back to a previous state of being.”<sup>95</sup> In Psalms, it refers to the perception of the availability of moral betterment, something that can be hidden by distracting words. In Daniel, it means “to become wise” in a way that directs one away from sin, and in Ezra-Nehemiah, it refers for the first time to the power of Torah, suggesting Torah is capable of opening people’s eyes so they perceive the world in an entirely new way.

From the examination of *l'haskil*, we see that one facet of love from the liturgy’s perspective is an opening of the eyes of awareness to a way of seeing the world and one’s reality that otherwise would remain hidden or unknown.

Mishnah Avot 3:14 directly connects awareness with love and Torah:

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<sup>95</sup>In *Bereshit Rabbah* the word להשכיל is defined by an appositive - מוסיף חכמה - it adds to wisdom. See *Bereshit Rabbah* 19:5, 65:13. In *Shir haShirim Rabbah* 1:1:8, להשכיל means to enable people to perceive - Solomon made it so people could perceive Torah like a person who added handles to a boiling pot allowing it to be moved and like a person who put a bucket on a rope allowing the reaching of sweet water in a well theretofore unreachable or the affordable wick that allows the finding of a gold piece in the dark.

הוא הִיָּה אֹמֶר, חָבִיב אָדָם שֶׁנִּבְרָא בְּצֶלֶם. חֶבֶה יִתְּרָה נֹדַעַת לוֹ שֶׁנִּבְרָא בְּצֶלֶם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (בראשית ט) כִּי בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֶת הָאָדָם. חָבִיבִין יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁנִּקְרְאוּ בָּנִים לַמָּקוֹם. חֶבֶה יִתְּרָה נֹדַעַת לָהֶם שֶׁנִּקְרְאוּ בָּנִים לַמָּקוֹם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (דברים יד) בָּנִים אַתֶּם לַה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם. חָבִיבִין יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁנֶּתַן לָהֶם כָּלִי חֲמֻדָּה. חֶבֶה יִתְּרָה נֹדַעַת לָהֶם שֶׁנֶּתַן לָהֶם כָּלִי חֲמֻדָּה שֶׁבָּו נִבְרָא הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (משלי ד) כִּי לֶקַח טוֹב נָתַתִּי לָכֶם, תּוֹרַתִּי אֶל תַּעֲזֹבוּ:

Beloved is humanity for they were created in the image [of God]. Even greater is the love in that it is made known to them that they were created in the image [of God], as it is said, "For in the image of G<sup>O</sup>D, God made humanity." (Genesis 9:6) Beloved are Israel, for they have been called the children of God. Even greater is the love in that it is made known to them that they have been called the children of God, as it is said, "You are the children of Adonai your God. (Deuteronomy 14:1) Beloved are Israel, for a precious instrument has been given to them. Even greater is the love in that it is made known to them that the precious instrument through which the world was created has been given to them, as it is said, "For I have given you good instruction; Do not forsake My Torah." (Proverbs 4:2)<sup>96</sup>

Torah in this passage may be understood as the five books of Moses or as all of Jewish learning or even as all learning. In the latter sense, the idea of Torah opening one to a new way of perceiving self and the world can be understood as a truism, as learning understood broadly includes that which changes our perception of reality and our place in it. Openness to this kind of learning is related to openness to amazement at God's creation, something Tanna Debbe Eilyahu connects to love and unity through gematria noting that the gematria for *ahavah* and *echad* is 13 and the gematria for *bereishit* is 913 and adding those digits yields 13.<sup>97</sup>

*Implications of love as l'haskil for the revelation-covenant-love nexus and love of neighbor and stranger*

Love that opens one up to understanding reality and self in completely new ways includes the joy associated with discovery, the kinship associated with shared discovery, a sense of gratitude

<sup>96</sup> Here I mostly use Jon D. Levenson's translation on page vii.

<sup>97</sup> As recorded by *Reishit Chochma*

to the Source of discovery and ongoing recognition of there being more to learn and understand. This can contribute to a sense of in-it-together-ness. In the context of a project of establishing and ever-improving a just, compassionate and creative society, it can include a sense of shared joy in moments of progress and shared despondency in moments of slipping backward. It can include a sense of mutuality and the sense that the actualization of one supports the actualization of the partner, an idea which is present in Tanakh in the metaphor of God and the Jewish people as lovers.

Sheila Peltz Weinberg describes the purpose of mitzvot as “train[ing] our hearts to do the right thing.” Shabbat trains us to quiet down. “Other mitzvot train us to use the power of speech wisely, to treat the earth with respect, to care for the weak and ailing. These are all ways of expanding the ability to love and to feel connected to the whole of life.” Loving, living the commandments, and learning and expanding understanding are all intertwined in this framework. Mitzvot which flow from covenant and revelation lead to *l’haskil* moments of expanding the ability to love in a cyclical way.

For Maimonides, too, love of God is *l’haskil* in form. For Rambam, love of God was to be fulfilled “by devoting all one’s bodily powers to knowing God. The knowledge of God...is attained through the scientific study of God’s creation.”<sup>98</sup> Maimonides wrote that contemplation of both God’s works and God’s commandments are the only way of “attaining a conception of God and reaching that stage of joy in which love of [God] will follow of necessity.”<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> As described by Warren Zev Harvey in “Notions of Divine and Human Love in Jewish Thought: An Interview with Warren Zev Harvey” which cites Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. R. Joseph Kafih (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1977). 1:39. English translation: Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University Press, 1961).

<sup>99</sup> Sefer HaMitzvot, 3-4 as quoted in James Arthur Diamond, *Maimonides and the Shaping of the Jewish Canon*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014.” pg. 32.

For Rav Kook, Sheila Peltz Weinberg's version of doing mitzvot in an expansive way and Maimonides contemplation that involves negating what God is not are both part of the path to loving God. For Rav Kook, "psychic enthusiasm, the illumination of the spirit, must be combined with moral and rational enlightenment."<sup>100</sup>

## Romantic Love

Rabbi Akiva famously claimed that

שָׁאִין כָּל הָעוֹלָם בְּלו כְּדַאי בְּיוֹם שִׁנְתָּן בּו שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, שֶׁכָּל הַכְּתוּבִים קֹדֶשׁ, וְשִׁיר  
הַשִּׁירִים קֹדֶשׁ קֹדְשִׁים.

The whole world is not as worthy as the day the Song of Songs was given to Israel. All the writings are holy and Song of Songs is the holy of holies.<sup>101</sup>

The Mekhilta de-Rashbi understands the Song of Songs to have been first spoken at Sinai, the day of the mystical marriage between God and Israel.<sup>102</sup> Arthur Green suggests that the line in *Ahavah Rabbah*, "Unify our hearts to love and fear your name" refers to the mix of emotions we felt [and feel] at the base of Mount Sinai and repeat at pinnacle moments of a religious life - a sense of "the burning fire of that mountain"<sup>103</sup> is also the fire within the beloved's heart, her desire for her Lover Who descends from the highest heavens to dwell in her midst."<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Lawrence Kaplan, "The Love of God in Maimonides and Rav Kook." *Judaism* 43 (3). 1994, pg. 229 Shadal and others reject Maimonides definition of loving God on the grounds that it borrows too heavily from Greek philosophy and loses track of loving God by acting rightly and justly. See Marty Lockshin, "The Mitzvah to Love God: Shadal's Polemic Against the Philosophical Interpretation." as found here <https://www.thetorah.com/article/the-mitzvah-to-love-god-shadals-polemic-against-the-philosophical-interpretation>.

<sup>101</sup> M. Yadayim 3:5

<sup>102</sup> As recorded by Arthur Green, "Judaism as a Path of Love," pg. 2.

<sup>103</sup> He means specifically the mountain as mentioned in Deuteronomy 4:11 The mountain burned into the very heart of heaven." This is personally significant because it is the first verse of the lines of Va'etchanan I read from the Torah as a Bar Mitzvah.

<sup>104</sup> Green, pg. 2.

B. Yoma 54a compares the love of the Jewish people and God to that of lovers:

אמר רב קטינא: בשעה שהיו ישראל עולים לרגל, מגלגלין להם את הפרוכת, ומראין להם את הכרובים שהיו מעורים זה בזה, ואומרים להן: ראו חבתכם לפני המקום כחבת זכר ונקבה.  
Rav Ketina said: When the Jewish people would ascend for one of the festivals, the priests would roll up the curtain for them and show them the cherubs, which were clinging to one another, and say to them: See how you are beloved before God, like the love of a male and female

One understanding of this love is that it is love of the not-yet consummated as in the b. Pesachim

49b where the Torah is the betrothed of Israel:

”תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה.” אל תקרי: ”מורשה”, אלא: מאורסה.  
“Moses commanded us the Torah, an inheritance [*morasha*] for the congregation of Jacob” (Deuteronomy 33:4). Do not read it as inheritance [*morasha*]; rather, read it as betrothed [*me’orasa*].

In this metaphor, according to the 16th century commentator, the Maharsha, this love can be consummated through study of Torah:<sup>105</sup>

כי התורה נמשלה לאשה בבמה מקומות ובתחלת נתינתה לישראל הרי היא בארוסה עד אחר שילמדה שנעשית לו באשה  
When [the Torah] is first given to Israel, it is like a betrothed woman. And only when one learns it, it becomes like a wife

Often, however, our sources think of this love as full of the tension and flirtation of not-yet-requited love with purpose. The unrequited nature of the relationship is in part because human beings cannot take in full meanings delivered plainly. Consider the following passage from the Zohar:

Human beings are so confused in their minds, they do not see the way of truth in Torah! Torah calls out to them every day, in love, but they do not want to turn

<sup>105</sup> As transcribed on Shai Held’s source sheet, “How Do We Love God?”  
<https://www.hadar.org/torah-resource/on-love-judaism-session8#source-10863>

their heads. Even though I said that the Torah removes a word from her sheath, is seen for a moment, then quickly hides away – that is certainly true – But when she reveals herself from her sheath and hides herself right away, She does so only for those who know her intimately.

A parable: To what can this be compared? To a beloved, who is beautiful in every way, and hidden deep within her palace. She has one lover, unknown to anyone, he is hidden too. Out of his love for her, this lover passes by her gate constantly, lifting his eyes to every side. She knows that her lover is hovering about her gate constantly. What does she do? She opens a little window in her hidden palace, and reveals her face to her lover, then swiftly withdraws, concealing herself. No one near her lover sees or reflects, only the lover, and his heart and his soul and everything within him flow out to her. And he knows that out of love for him, she revealed herself to him for that one moment to awaken love in him.

So it is with a word of Torah, She reveals herself to no one but her lover. Torah knows that he who is wise of heart hovers about her gate every day. What does she do? She reveals her face to him from the palace, and beckons him with a hint, then swiftly withdraws to her hiding place. No one who is there knows or reflects; He alone does, and his heart and his soul and everything within him flows out to her. That is why Torah reveals and conceals herself. With love she approaches her lover to arouse love with him. Come and see! This is the way of Torah: At first, when she begins to reveal herself to a human She beckons him with a hint. If he knows, good; If not, she sends him a message, calling him a fool. Torah says to her messenger: ‘Tell that fool to come closer, so I can talk with him!’ as it is written: “Who is the fool without a heart have him turn in here” (Prov. 9:4). He approaches. She begins to speak to him from behind the curtain which she has drawn, words he can follow, until he reflects a little at a time. This is ‘Derasha’. Then she converses with him through a thin veil, Words riddled with allegory. This is ‘Haggadah’. Once he has grown accustomed to her, She reveals herself face to face and tells him all her hidden secrets, all the hidden ways, since primordial days secreted in her heart. Now he is a perfect human being, husband of Torah, master of the house. All her secrets she has revealed to him, withholding nothing, concealing nothing. She says to him, ‘Do you see that word, that hint with which I beckoned you at first? So many secrets there! This one and that one!’ Now he sees that nothing should be added to those words and nothing taken away. Now the Peshat of the verse, just like it is! Not even a single letter should be added or deleted, Human beings must become aware, they must pursue Torah to become her lovers!...”<sup>106</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Zohar Vol. II:99a, ‘The old man of Mishpatim’, Trans. Daniel Matt. This textual arrangement comes from a source sheet compiled by Melila Hellner-Eshed. Note: this text like many rabbinic texts are heteronormative, androcentric and dismissive of women as students of Torah. Dvora Weisberg, citing Daniel Boyarin, points out in her article, “Women and Torah Study in Aggadah,” that “Rabbis are portrayed first and foremost as lovers of Torah, not their wives...the study of Torah displaced the wife as the focus of the rabbi’s energy” while “classical Talmudic Judaism denies women access to the most valued practice of the culture, the study of Torah.” Pgs. 47-48.

The Song of Songs speaks tantalizingly of this flirtation, and yet, in the interpretation of Tamara Eskenazi, there is a time for a maturation of the love. The man says in 2:10 and 2:13b, “Arise, my friend, my beautiful one and go forth.” Eskenazi understands 2:14 as an explanation for the call to go forth, “oh my dove, in the clefts of the rock/ in the covert of the cliff/ let me see your face/ let me hear your voice/ for your voice is sweet/ and your face is lovely.” In Eskenazi’s words, “This is not merely an invitation to see and enjoy nature. It is a call to the woman to blossom, to be heard, to be seen....It is time to see you and hear your voice. It is your time to blossom, like nature in springtime.”<sup>107</sup> Eskenazi understands these lovers as coaxing each other to bloom. She understands the call *Lechi Lach* (in Song 2:10 and 2:13b) to mean “Go forth, become who you will become.” A version of this idea can be found in a Midrash. A modern rendering of Bereshit Rabbah 10:6 reads: “Every blade of grass has an angel that whispers to it: Grow, grow.” All the more so we might imagine a person has a heavenly voice urging them to grow.<sup>108</sup>

The maturation of love in Eskenazi’s interpretation of Song of Songs requires of the lovers a (perhaps temporary) separation. Here we see an intersection (despite Fromm’s claim otherwise) with one interpretation of the parent-child metaphor for God and Israel. As put by Erich Fromm:

But the child must grow. It must emerge from mother’s womb, from mother’s breast; it must eventually become a completely separate human being. The very essence of motherly love is to care for the child’s growth, and that means to

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<sup>107</sup> Tamara Eskenazi, “With the Song of Songs in Our Hearts,” in *Chapters of the Heart: Jewish Women Sharing the Torah of Our Lives*. 2013. Pgs. 179-180.

<sup>108</sup> Thank you to Marsha Attie for mentioning this text to me. The original version of this midrash appears to say each blade of grass has a mazal that smacks it and tells it to grow.

want the child's separation from herself. Here lies the basic difference to erotic love. In erotic love, two people who were separate become one. In motherly love, two people who were one become separate. The mother must not only tolerate, she must wish and support the child's separation. It is only at this stage that motherly love becomes such a difficult task, that it requires unselfishness, the ability to give everything and to want nothing but the happiness of the loved one.<sup>109</sup>

As with Eskenazi's understanding of romantic love, parental love also reaches a point of maturity with the independence of the child.<sup>110</sup>

So far, the metaphor of romantic love between God and Israel includes implications that 1) love ignites a burning passion in the lover, 2) study of Torah requires love, 3) lovers help one another become what they are capable of becoming even if that requires temporary or permanent independence. A fourth implication of romantic love is explained by Rachel Adler in *Engendering Judaism*. She argues that the marriage metaphor in the book of Hosea, chapters 1 and 2, should be read as proof-text for the rabbinic dictum "that sometimes law must be violated so that justice may be upheld."<sup>111</sup> In the book of Hosea, even though Israel has violated the terms of the marriage covenant according to Deuteronomic law, God overcomes the rage of broken trust and reunites with Israel.<sup>112</sup> This violates the fundamental laws of patriarchal society that Biblical marriage descriptions and prescriptions otherwise uphold. In this way, Adler writes, "the metaphor that preserves the covenant breaks the law."<sup>113</sup> It is a case not of reform but of "the moral transformation of the law and the social world in which it is

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<sup>109</sup> As presented in *Gates of Repentance*, pg. 231.

<sup>110</sup> David Ellenson rightly points out in commenting on this capstone that "the teacher also hopes that their student will also exhibit such independence as they take what they have learned and hew out their own paths for understanding and discernment.

<sup>111</sup> Adler, 163.

<sup>112</sup> Adler, 163.

<sup>113</sup> Adler, 163.



practiced.”<sup>114</sup> The marriage metaphor for love between God and Israel includes the potential for upheaval of outdated meanings and society-redeeming transformation.

*On Betrothed as God, Israel, Shabbat, Torah*

Talmudic marriage metaphors include God as groom and Shabbat as bride<sup>115</sup>, the people of Israel as groom and Shabbat as bride<sup>116</sup>, the people of Israel as groom and Torah as bride.<sup>117</sup>

This suggests rabbinic literature is generally comfortable with moving back and forth between such metaphors as all are understood as different facets of understanding the overarching notion of love between God and Israel.<sup>118</sup> The Zohar and other mystical works suggest that when human beings act in concert with the commandments, it has a theurgical effect, bringing the male aspect of God and the female aspect of God into union. Israel as romantic lover of Torah and of Shabbat might be understandable in relation to this theurgy. Each of these metaphors suggest that observing the particular commandments to keep Shabbat and study Torah offer human beings the most intimate possible engagement with God.

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<sup>114</sup> Adler, 163, citing “it is a time to act for the Lord, therefore they have violated your Torah.” (b. Berakkhot 53-54)

<sup>115</sup> For example Bereshit Rabbah 10:9 which reads: “This may be compared to a king who made a bridal chamber, which he plastered, painted, and adorned; now what did the bridal chamber lack? A bride to enter it. Similarly, what did the world still lack? The Sabbath.”

<sup>116</sup> See, for example, Bereshit Rabbah 11:8 which reads R. Shimon bar Yochai taught: Shabbat pleaded with the Holy One, Blessed be God saying: “Everyone else has a partner, but I have nothing!” God answered saying: “The community of Israel will be your partner.” God continued: “And when they stood before Sinai, God said to the Israelites: “Remember what I said to Shabbat, that the community of Israel is your partner, [in the words of scripture] “Remember Shabbat and keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8)...”

<sup>117</sup> As in the example from the Zohar in the body of the text, Zohar Vol. II:99a

<sup>118</sup> As Rachel Adler says, “All metaphors lie and tell partial truths.”

## Parental and Teacherly Love

God as parent is firmly rooted in the Jewish consciousness. God's compassionate aspect as parent is held in tension with God's judgment as ruler. Stories that illustrate parental compassion include one about the child who has wandered far off. The king sends a message calling the child home. The child replies that the distance is too far. The king's message: come as far as you can and I will come the rest of the way to you.<sup>119</sup> Such a story metaphorically portrays the value of repentance. If we would only turn, God will meet us the rest of the way.

Repentance is a central need in a system in which a covenant is repeatedly broken. Throughout the Jewish story, beginning with the Torah, the Jews stray from God's expectations. Tamara Eskenazi points out, based on the work of Walter Brueggeman, that unlike a contract which ends when a party breaks the terms, a covenant is an agreement between parties that goes beyond the terms of a contract. It is a commitment of one to another. "Brit is always brit. Sinai is different from Genesis. The covenant's terms change but there is always a covenant."<sup>120</sup>

In *The Obligated Self*, Mara Benjamin offers a view of commandment as love analogized to maternal love (both from God toward Israel and from Israel toward God). She cites Kimelman in asserting that the prayers in *Shema u'birkhotecha* do not merely suggest "... that compliance with the commandments expresses love for God, [rather] the blessing maintains that compliance with the commandments engenders such love"<sup>121</sup> as doing for a child or doing for a

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<sup>119</sup> See this for example in S. Y. Agnon, *Days of Awe*, New York, Schocken, 1995, pg. xxi

<sup>120</sup> Tamara Eskenazi, Class sessions, Spring 2021. Eskenazi built on Walter Brueggeman's idea that if God is understood as immutable, the burden of making the covenant work falls only on people, but the bible portrays God as a free partner. Brueggeman suggests the metaphor of a dance in which there are different kinds of music, levels of intimacy, and times for each party to take initiative and responsibility for the relationship. See Walter Brueggeman, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, pgs. 136-37. Eskenazi assigns this text.

<sup>121</sup> Mara Benjamin, *The Obligated Self*, pg. 27.

parent can engender love. She also uses a Talmudic notion of *na'aseh v'nishma* (b. Shabbat 88a) to illustrate the idea that performance of mitzvot is a “means to disciplining the heart.”<sup>122</sup> She compares this to awakening of “an inborn capacity to love...activated by the activity of caregiving” as evolutionary biologist Sarah Blaffer Hardy has argued is part of the nature of maternal love.<sup>123</sup>

## Impregnation - A Metaphor at the Intersection of Metaphors for Love

At the intersection of the notions of God’s love as a parent, as a lover and as *l’haskil*, and of love as law is the metaphor of impregnation. In my paper, “Impregnated With Covenant,” I argue that this metaphor is rooted in Biblical text. In Deuteronomy 29:11 and Ezekiel 16:8, translators use terms like “enter into” to translate the verb עבר.<sup>124</sup> The verb עבר appears to be in the pi’el in each of these cases, though the grammar is not straightforward. In עבר, עִבְרָא means “to impregnate”. The metaphor of impregnation suggests that revelation grows within us, that the covenant continues to gestate, the product of a loving union. Within this metaphor, Franz Rozenzweig’s distinction between *Gebot* and *Gesetz* may feel right at home. Jews in every

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<sup>122</sup> Benjamin, pg. 28.

<sup>123</sup> Benjamin, pg. 29. She also mentions the idea “*mitoch shelo lishma ba lishma*: ...out of not-for-its-own-sake comes for-its-own-sake.” (bPesachim 50b) in note 32 on page 34. Interestingly, Jonathan Sacks wrote (as paraphrased by Shmuly Yanklowitz and applied in a discussion of Pirke Avot 5:19) that “deeds of loving-kindness shift one’s inner being toward godliness and covenant building.” Shmuly Yanklowitz, *Pirke Avot: A Social Justice Commentary*, pg. 331. He derives the idea from Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility*, pgs. 51-54.

<sup>124</sup> As referenced also in “The Presence of Children at Sinai: טַפָּחַם in Deuteronomy 29:10,” Jewish Study Bible: “to enter into the covenant,” Alter: “for you to pass into the Covenant,” NIV: “to-enter-you into-covenant-of.” BHS indicates that Sperber’s second edition of the Targum reads להעבירך which is hiphil and therefore causative but still singular – “to cause you to cross over” or “to cross you over.” Targum Jonathan reads להעבירכם which has the causative sense and a plural direct object – “to cross you (plural) over.”

“today”<sup>125</sup> feel a sense of commanded-ness (*Gebot*) and continue to work to translate that commandedness into workable laws and rules (*Gesetz*) by which to live.

## Additional Love Ideas - Dvekut, *Presence*, and Soul to God Connection

### Love as Presence

For Sheila Peltz Weinberg, *sh'ma* means “pay attention” and *v'haya im shamo'a* means

“if you really pay attention...” We find the notion that paying attention, that is being fully present-with, is a form of love between God and Israel in b. Megillah 29a:

תניא, רבי שמעון בן יוחי אומר: בוא וראה כמה חביבין ישראל לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא, שבכל מקום שגלו – שכינה עמהן. גלו למצרים – שכינה עמהן, שנאמר: “הנגלה נגליתי לבית אביך בהיותם במצרים וגו'”. גלו לבבל – שכינה עמהן, שנאמר: “למענכם שלחתי בבלה”. ואף כשהן עתידין ליגאל – שכינה עמהן, שנאמר: “ושב ה' אליהם את שבותם”. “והשיב” לא נאמר, אלא “ושב”. מלמד שהקדוש ברוך הוא שב עמהן מבין הגליות.

§ It is taught in a *baraita*: R. Shimon ben Yoḥai says: Come and see how beloved the Jewish people are before the Holy One, Blessed be He. As every place they were exiled, the Divine Presence went with them. They were exiled to Egypt, and the Divine Presence went with them, as it is stated: “Did I reveal myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt?” (I Samuel 2:27). They were exiled to Babylonia, and the Divine Presence went with them, as it is stated: “For your sake I have sent to Babylonia” (Isaiah 43:14). So too, when, in the future, they will be redeemed, the Divine Presence will be with them, as it is stated: “Then the Lord your God will return with your captivity” (Deuteronomy 30:3). It does not state: He will bring back, i.e., He will cause the Jewish people to return, but rather it says: “He will return,” which teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, will return together with them from among the various exiles.<sup>126</sup>

Indeed, the blessing with which parents bless their children, lovingly placing hands on their children’s heads, and with which the ancient priests blessed the Children of Israel (and their

<sup>125</sup> See the use of היום in Deuteronomy 29:9-14.

<sup>126</sup> Thank you, Dvora Weisberg, for pointing me to this text.

descendants do so in some synagogues today), speaks of God's presence.<sup>127</sup> פָּנָיו (*Panav*) is often translated as "countenance" as in "may God lift up God's countenance to you." "Countenance" captures a dimension of the use of this word in many places in Tanakh that goes beyond presence to mean something like "presence positively disposed towards..."<sup>128</sup> In this context, פָּנָיו translates literally as "God's face," and if God faces us, God is present with us.

The notion of God as dwelling among the people has a root in Exodus 25:8:

וַעֲשֵׂה לִּי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְתוֹכָם Make me a sanctuary and I will dwell among them.

Sixteenth century rabbi, Moshe Cordavero summarizes Jewish tradition's understanding of the Shekhinah's presence with Israel as follows: "For *Malchut* (*Shechinah*) is the one who is expelled with us, ascending with us and descending with us. She is redeemed with us and exiled with us. She is the one connected to us always, never separated from us under any circumstance. She dwells with us. Our deeds cause her union or separation or mercy."<sup>129</sup>

## Love as Dvekut and Soul to God Connection

Related to the notion of God's presence as an expression of God's love is the notion of דְּבִיקוּת (*dvekut*), that is that one will cleave so fully to God and feel God's presence so intensely as to be immersed in God's spirit. An image that illustrates this feeling, identified in many Hasidic sources as a high goal of religious life comes from Isaac of Akko Isaac who described *dvekut* as

<sup>127</sup> Numbers 6:24-26.

<sup>128</sup> The second line of the priestly blessing speaks of the light of God's face which has a similar connotation.

<sup>129</sup> In a Sefaria Sheet prepared by Lauri Matzkin,  
<https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/223220.4?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en>

the soul and the Divine Intellect becoming one entity, “like one who pours a pitcher of water into a flowing spring, such that everything becomes one.”<sup>130</sup>

A slightly different version of presence distinct from *dvekut* that maintains the notion of feeling God’s presence as a connection between the soul and the divine was expressed by Yehuda HaLevi: My soul, seeing but unseen, come and thank the Seeing but Unseen and bless.<sup>131</sup>

## Love as Responsibility

No analysis of the meaning of love in Jewish sources is complete without attempting to synthesize any definition of love with God 's command of love between human beings. At the very physical heart of the scroll of Torah, Leviticus 19:18 reads אהתה לרעך כמוך - love your neighbor as yourself. Several times the Torah commands “love the stranger for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” Here in the *p’shat* - the simplest level of interpretation - we find that love includes taking responsibility. Emmanuel Levinas famously wrote that philosophy must begin with ethics. So, too, theology. No understanding of God’s love nor of human love for God can proceed without a foundational expectation that love demands humans take care of one another.<sup>132</sup>

Reuven Kimelman’s notion that a teacher-student relationship is the most appropriate metaphor for the God-Israel relationship in the *Sh’ma* suggests an imbuing of Israel with

<sup>130</sup> Eitan Fishbane, *As Light Before Dawn*, pg. 281. His translation of

תדבק בשכל אלוהות והוא ידבק בה... ונעשית היא והשכל דבר א כשופך כד מים במעין נובע שנעשה הכל אחד

<sup>131</sup> As presented in Siddur Lev Shalem For Shabbat and Festivals, The Rabbinical Assembly, 2016, pg. 149

<sup>132</sup> In other places, Levinas argues that we find God in the face of the person who makes us uncomfortable and feel responsible. Perhaps this discomfort is a facet of love.

responsibility. The idea of covenant with the patriarchs renewed at Sinai as presented by P source material<sup>133</sup> suggests a relationship in which the student, like Abraham and Moses, engage and even argue with God. The idea presented in the D source material of revelation and the renewal of the covenant not just as a past event but as taking place at every moment,<sup>134</sup> suggests a relationship in which humans are agents in the ongoing process of revelation. According to Ramban and his disciples, humans, not God, “constitute new norms” because as per Deuteronomy 30:12 and Bava Metzia 59a-b, “Torah is not in heaven.”<sup>135</sup> This idea is particularly important to Reform Jews for whom an understanding of revelation as progressive is foundational.<sup>136</sup> In each of these understandings of the relationship between covenant and revelation, revelation includes an expectation of assumption of responsibility. Just as a teacher expects students to take the material given and do something with it, so does God expect Israel to use the content of revelation to craft a just and compassionate society, thereby fulfilling a messianic vision.

## Conclusion to Exploration of Love in Jewish Sources

This chapter has attempted to lay out several Jewish ideas about love that our sacred texts evoke. It is not exhaustive, as it does not address the full range of types of love associated with such Hebrew roots as *TDN* nor does it compare types of love associated with different roots. It

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<sup>133</sup> Sommer, pgs. 56-57.

<sup>134</sup> Sommer, pgs. 64-75 and 190-196.

<sup>135</sup> Moshe Halbertal, “Authority, Controversy and Tradition,” *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning, and Authority*, pgs 63-65.

<sup>136</sup> See the first plank of the Pittsburgh Platform, the first plank of the Columbus Platform and the second sentence in the Torah section of the 1999 Statement of Principles.

does argue that love from a Jewish perspective is multivocal, and it contributes to an understanding of the loving relationship between God and Israel in our tradition. We have explored Jewish notions of love as 1) obedience and patronage, 2) doing for its own sake and not for reward and receiving not for being deserving, 3) as a parent with compassion and an undeserving child, 4) as lovers who ignite passion and help each other grow, 5) as soul to God connection, and 6) as responsibility. Within these six categories, I have identified 30 different ideas about love in Jewish sources. These are briefly summarized here:

#### Obedience and Loyalty

- 1) Love is obedience and patronage
- 2) Torah in the form of learning which is a token of love can be derived from suffering
- 3) Torah helps avoid suffering
- 4) Suffering can purify one to allow for reception of Torah
- 5) Love in the form of Torah relieves suffering

#### Love as Beyond Obedience and loyalty

- 1) Love is a source of motivation to act in a way that goes beyond action only for reward or avoidance of punishment
- 2) Love as a check on paralyzing fear (Arnold)
- 3) Love as righteous action like Abraham's that turns evil inclinations to good
- 4) Love as action that depends on nothing or that is for the sake of heaven or for its own sake
- 5) Love as action that goes beyond ethical behavior such that law and commandment "entail each other" (Levenson)



- 6) Love as emotion necessary for ethical action (Lapsley)
- 7) Love as leading to action because one's transgressions were overlooked
- 8) Love as enabling one to intuit the needs of one's beloved
- 9) Love as being chosen even though undeserving

#### Love as l'haskil

- 1) Love as opening one's eyes to perceiving the world in an entirely new way
- 2) Love as certain gifts and greater love as awareness of those gifts (Avot 3:14)
- 3) Love as feeling connected to the whole of life which can be trained by doing mitzvot  
(Weinberg)
- 4) Love as amazement at creation. (Maimonides)
- 5) Love as illumination of the spirit combined with moral and rational enlightenment (Rav Kook)

#### Romantic Love

- 1) Love can be consummated by the study of Torah (b. Pesachim 49b)
- 2) Love as vehicle for conveying meanings that can only be hinted at as lovers hint (Zohar II:99a)
- 3) Love as spurring another to grow (Eskenazi)
- 4) Love that allows preservation of covenant by breaking laws within the covenant spurring growth of the covenant (Adler)

#### Parental Love

- 1) love as forgiveness and meeting the loved where they can bring themselves

- 2) Awakening of inborn capacity to love - comparison of insight from mitzvot as insight from the discipline of the mother responding to the child's needs (Benjamin)

Impregnating as at the intersection of romantic, parental and lhaskil love

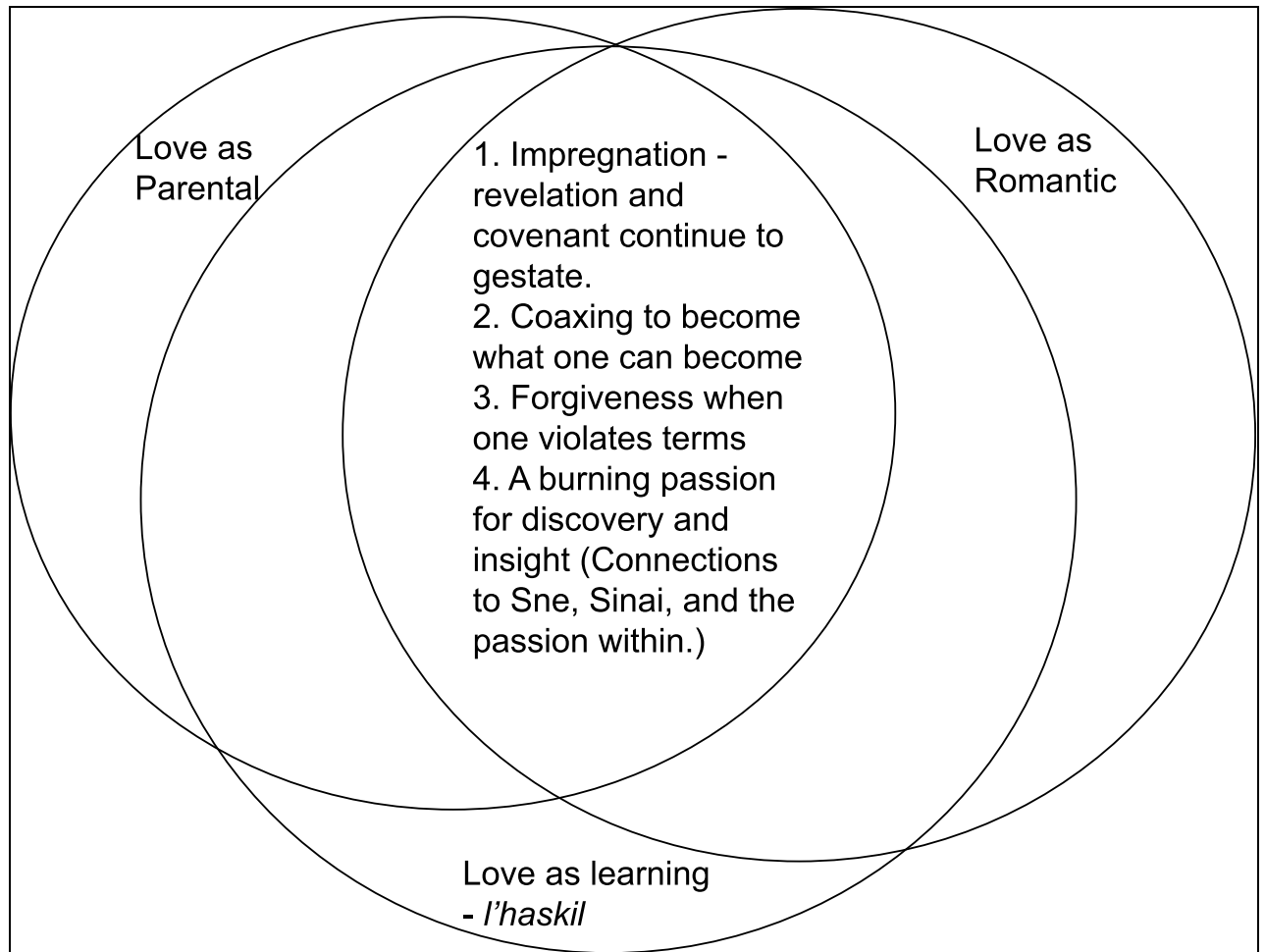
Love as Presence

- 1) Love as presence even in distress or in the case of God even when the people are in exile
- 2) Love as dvekut - becoming one-with
- 3) Love as soul within connecting to God Who is outside ourselves

Love as Responsibility

- 1) Love as taking responsibility, being disturbed to act
- 2) Love of God as taking responsibility even for God's actions and decisions

The following venn diagrams depict briefly some of the overlapping constructs among the types of love we have seen described in Jewish sources:



## Chapter 5: The Love-Covenant-Revelation Nexus and The Sh'ma Rubric

Having analyzed several understandings of love in Jewish tradition, we can look now at how these definitions of love impact understanding of the nature of covenant with God and God's revelation. The following chart offers a brief analysis. These charts demonstrate that each metaphor for the God-Israel relationship and each idea of love has particular implications for understanding covenant and revelation, and yet there are important points of overlap as demonstrated by the first chart below.

Love	Revelation	Covenant
Parental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impregnation and gestation of revelation over time as community</li> <li>• Coaxing the loved one to grow and become personally</li> <li>• Fanning flame of passion for insight and discovery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primacy of relationship over the terms of the contract allowing forgiveness of transgression</li> <li>• Covenant grows and evolves as Israel and God grow. Partnership leads to progress toward harmonious, just, compassionate society.</li> </ul>
Romantic		
L'Haskil		

Love as	Meaning relative to revelation	Meaning relative to covenant	Reciprocity	Meaning relative to love of neighbor	Meaning of Emotion
Obedience and loyalty	God revealed commandments and laws	Human job is to observe commandments	Humans follow commands God shows love by giving laws of life	These are additional laws	Could be -non-emotional -emotional as a form of cleaving to God
Acting not for reward	Same as obedience and loyalty	Same as obedience and loyalty	Same as obedience and loyalty	Same as obedience and loyalty	-cultivation of emotion by following commands -doing the commands l'shma and not for reward
L'haskil - learning	Love is the ongoing moment of discovery as we still stand at Sinai	The terms of the covenant change as we learn. As we learn God learns.	Our learning and God's learning go hand in hand. We are partners not just in establishing a just compassionate society based on Torah. We are partners in learning how to establish a just and compassionate society that includes human free will.	Learning in partnership and not just alone. Learning on its own is not acceptable. Ethics must be the foundation, so we cannot abandon righteous action.	Love as emotion includes feeling of elation at discovery.

Love as	Meaning relative to revelation	Meaning relative to covenant	Reciprocity	Meaning relative to love of neighbor	Meaning of Emotion
Romantic love	We are in a generative relationship with God with romantic tension. God's love helps us as we strive as individuals and humanity to become what we may become. At our best, we coax God to become modeling ourselves after Abraham before Sodom and Gomorrah and Moses after the golden calf.	We are responsible for helping one another become what we can become. This includes demanding, pleading, coaxing the other to take responsibility and accepting responsibility ourselves.	See previous two columns. God and human beings need each other to fulfill the mission of creating a harmonious, just and compassionate world.	The sense of being loved gives human beings the internal spark necessary to turn love outwards and act with love toward the neighbor and stranger.	The emotion of love includes the feeling of being taken care of and the feeling of taking care of an other. These feelings are mutually supporting when one feels partnership with the Divine (in part through partnership with other people) as we care for others. This is an antidote to burnout at feeling overworked or underappreciated.

Love as	Meaning relative to revelation	Meaning relative to covenant	Reciprocity	Meaning relative to love of neighbor and stranger	Meaning of Emotion
Parental Love	We are as children and God teaches us as parent	We forgive when we fail to meet the terms of the contract and the contract adjusts (see references to Brueggeman and Eskenazi). Overlap here with Romantic love.	God needs our love as we need God's love. We love God through study, prayer and acts of kindness, following of commandments just as we love a parent through listening to their wisdom, expressions of love and living the values they teach.	God models, we follow as per Leviticus 19:34. As per Shabbat 133b Just as God is merciful and gracious, so shall you be merciful and gracious.	Love includes feelings of mercy, compassion, forgiveness
Teacherly love	We are as students and God is Teacher	God's love for us induces our love for God. We want to do right in part to please God our teacher. This is a way station to acting <i>l'shma</i> - God's goal for us.	Just as a teacher's love motivates students. A student's reciprocation in the form of earnest engagement inspires the teacher.	A teacher models and students follow the model but the teacher eventually comes to learn from the student. Just as God cared for us so we must care for the stranger as said explicitly in Leviticus 19:34	Love includes pride, hope, encouragement , seeking to please, thrill of meeting an expectation, disappointment at falling short for someone loved.

Love as	Meaning relative to revelation	Meaning relative to covenant	Reciprocity	Meaning relative to love of neighbor and stranger	Meaning of Emotion
Presence	God revealed Godself at Sinai and God is always present with us. God's voice is available for us to hear when we listen.	God's ongoing presence symbolizes the constant availability of hearing God's voice and acting as God expects even as it is a reminder of God's love as God has forgiven our missing the mark repeatedly.	There is implied here a sense that God wants to be with us and our presence is comforting for God in some small way.	God's presence in the face of the other in Buberian terms allowing us to feel connection and holiness and in Levinasian terms calling us to take responsibility.	Love includes a sense of at-one-ness, a sense of not being alone.
Intersection of l'haskil, parent, teacher, lover - impregnation	Revelation is implanted within us and continues to gestate.	We continue to develop the rules by which to live that establish and uphold a just and compassionate society. That is we feel Gebot of the covenant and continue to develop the Gesetz.	We are at once God's romantic partner producing the gestation and the gestating being. We engage God and seek to understand and we act on what we believe to be right, inducing God's love and union.	Acting with love toward neighbor and stranger is a guidepost in our learning how to set up society so that this comes naturally.	

In a sense, these charts are simplistic yet they represent complex ideas. Rachel Adler reminds students regularly that "all metaphors lie and tell partial truths. To hold too tightly to any one metaphor, she teaches is idolatry. Our job as Jews is to grapple with the complexity as Jacob wrestled, birthing his transformation into our namesake, Israel.



## A Return to the Content of The *Sh'ma* Rubric

Having examined several Jewish ideas about love, we can return to the second blessing preceding Sh'ma and see how it evokes the types of love explored. The chart below identifies types of love each phrase may evoke:

Categories of love invoked by the first paragraph of *Ahavah Rabbah*

	Love as law	Love as learning	Romantic Love - a) Pushing to become, b) igniting passion c) subvert to save, d) study of Torah requires love	Parental and Teacher Love	Love as Presence	Love as Responsibility	Love as chosen despite not being deserving
אהבה רבה אהבתנו ה' אלוהינו	א	א	א	א	א	א	א
חמלה גדולה ויתרה חמלת עלינו				א		א	
בעבור אבותינו ואמותינו שבטחו בך							א
ותלמדם חוקי חיים	א	א		א			
כן תחננו ותלמדנו		א		א			א
המרחם רחם עלינו				א			א
ותן בלבנו להבין ולהשכיל		א	א	א			
לשמוע	א	א	א	א	א	א	
לשמור ולעשות	א					א	
ולקים את כל דברי תלמוד תורתך	א	א				א	
באהבה	א	א	א	א	א	א	א

## Part III

### Chapter 6: Analyzing Modern Prayer Books

We turn our attention to the alternative prayers, commentary, interpretive readings and translations of *Ahavah Rabbah* and *Ahavat Olam* in two Movements - Reform in the US and Israel and the American Conservative Movement to see how prayer books have changed in the last half century with regard to the range of understandings about the nature of loving relationship with God, revelation and covenant. Whereas the previous chapters describe traditional sources' understanding of love between God and Israel, and therefore what today's Jews might understand we *should* say. This chapter asks what the Jewish people, as represented by modern prayer books, have understood what they *can* say about this love and how that understanding changed from the second half of the twentieth century to the first decades of the twenty-first century. While not representative of all prayer books analyzed here, the comment of Elyse Frishman, editor of *Mishkan T'filah*, makes clear that looking in it for what was understood *can* be said is appropriate. She said there was an intention of including multiple Jewish theologies so that as many people as possible could find themselves represented in the prayerbook.<sup>137</sup>

#### Reform Movement

##### Gates of Prayer and Mishkan T'filah

*Gates of Prayer*, published in 1975 contains no fewer than 14 distinct evening services that include *Ahavat Olam* and 6 morning services that include *Ahavah Rabbah* or an alternative where *Ahavah Rabbah* is normally found. In *Gates of Prayer*, one finds either a translation of *Ahavat Olam/Ahavah Rabbah* or an alternative reading in place of a translation. Often, the alternative reading in English is grouped under pieces of the prayer in Hebrew allowing one unfamiliar with the Hebrew to think the alternative reading is a translation. This was corrected in *Mishkan T'filah* where a translation always appears on the same page as the Hebrew and the

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<sup>137</sup> Paraphrase of Elyse Frishman on the date of her visit to David Ellenson's Class on Reform Prayer Books, Fall 2021.

opposing page contains alternative or elaborative pieces. In *Gates of Prayer*, two of the twenty instances of the Hebrew prayer are followed by a translation - one each for *Ahavah Rabbah* and *Ahavat Olam*.

It is of note that of the 20 times these prayers appear in *Gates of Prayer*, Torah is mentioned five times explicitly and once referred to as Teaching with a capital “T.” There are five references to law or mitzvot in these twenty readings. This is significant because Torah traditionally is understood as the marker of God’s love and depending on which definition is used and by whom, Torah is what God revealed at Sinai or a part of what God revealed at Sinai. It is therefore startling that the word Torah appears so infrequently. It is still surprising but less startling that law and mitzvot are mentioned so infrequently because the emphasis in the Reform movement is less on following law codes strictly and more on studying Torah including laws to find the *ikar*, the essential wisdom, within. Nonetheless, the concept of the concept of ethical monotheism - that God guides through ethical principles - and the value of rules one should follow, particularly ethical rules, remains very much a part of the Reform movement.

In fifteen of the twenty instances, God is addressed in the second person. In three instances, God is referred to in third person and twice the only reference to God is in the form of a blessing, once in the form “Blessed is the Eternal One” and once in the form “Praised be the source of life, and love and Israel our people!”<sup>138</sup> It is of note in a prayer book that goes out of its way to offer so many different ideas in the section of the service about relationship with God, covenant and revelation that 18 of 20 readings mention God and 15 of 20 address God directly and personally. The remaining two offer a blessing formula that may allow some readers to not use the word God while others would understand it as addressing God.<sup>139</sup>

In *Gates of Prayer*’s 20 analyzed readings, the most frequent themes include awe of creation and nature, a sense of God’s Presence communally and as response to the individual including as a salve for loneliness and finally the theme of learning, knowledge and study.

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<sup>138</sup> Capitalization matches the usage in the texts referred to. These two are found on pages 93 and 209.

<sup>139</sup> With phrases of address such as “Blessed is the Eternal One” and “Blessed is the source of life, and love and Israel our people,” one might reasonably ask: for those for whom these are not addressing God, Who do they understand themselves to address when they say them.

In *Mishkan T'filah*, published in 2007, God's Presence remains an important theme as does learning. In *Mishkan T'filah*, though, it is more often framed as part of a personal struggle or quest. In addition, *Mishkan T'filah* alludes to the event of revelation and reciprocity in the experience of revelation in seven of the readings analyzed. This is reflected in phrases such as "...may Your law be our light. May our deeds reflect Your love" (pg. 9), "You spoke and we wrote" (pg. 63) and "All these things Your Torah gives to us. And the more we devote ourselves to it, the more it grows and gives" (pg. 151). As in *Gates of Prayer*, the alternative readings in *Mishkan T'filah* predominantly address God directly. Those readings that do not address God directly include an explanatory footnote that would not be expected to address God directly and the Ten Commandments inserted in Hebrew and English as an alternate reading. The use of the Ten Commandments in this way suggests that the Ten Commandments are at least a portion of revelation and represent God's love. In one of the instances in which God is not addressed directly, there is a sense of God's intimate care communicated in phrases "God disturbs us toward our destiny" and "God loves becoming."<sup>140</sup> The reading on page 266, which does not mention God reads in part "In each age we receive and transmit Torah. At each moment we are addressed by the World. At each moment we stand face to face with Truth."

The following charts indicate which ideas are expressed repeatedly.

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<sup>140</sup> *Mishkan T'filah*, pg. 231.

Themes in *Ahavat Olam* in *Gates of Prayer*

<i>Gates of Prayer</i> , 1975 Ahavat Olam	Torah	Creation/Nature	Universal/Unity/Oneness	Presence	Willin g spirit	kingsh ip	Surviv al	Justic e	Mitzv ot	Respo nsibilit y	Truth	Learn ing/kn owled ge/stu dy	Loneli ness/c onnecte dness
AO I. pg. 74	κ	κ		κ									
AO II pg. 84						κ		κ		κ	κ	κ	
AO III pg. 92		κ		κ					κ	κ		κ	κ
AO IV pgs. 103-104		κ		κ				κ			κ	κ	
AO V pg. 130	translation												
AO VI pg. 148 (Same as AR V)		κ	κ	κ									κ
AO VII pg. 165	Teachi ng		κ		κ				κ	κ		κ	
AO VIII pg. 181				κ				κ		κ			
AO IX pg. 194	κ	κ											
AO X pg. 209	κ						κ		κ			κ	κ
AO XI pg. 224				κ						κ			κ
AO XII pg. 250													
AO XIII pg. 262			κ								κ		
AO XIV		κ	κ										
Total	4+	6	4	6	1	1	1	3	3	5	3	5	4

Themes in *Ahavah Rabbah* in *Gates of Prayer*

Gates of Prayer, 1975 Ahavah Rabbah	Tora h	Creat ion/ Natu re	Univ ersal /Unit y/On enes s	Prese nce	Willi ng spirit	king ship	Survi val	Justic e	Mitz vot	Resp onsib ility	Truth	learn ing/k nowl edge /stud y	loneli ness/ conn ecte dnes s
AR I pg. 302	translation												
AR II pgs. 321-322			κ			κ		κ		κ	κ		κ
AR III pgs. 335-336	Translation - key difference with pg. 302 “fulfill the words of Your Torah” vs “uphold with love all the teachings of Your Torah”. The former implies completion the latter only obedience.												
AR IV pg. 353		κ		κ							κ	κ	κ
AR V pg. 368 (same as AO VI)		κ	κ	κ									κ
AR VI	κ								κ			κ	
Total	1	2	2	2		1		1	1	1	2	2	3
Total AO and AR	5+	8	6	8	1	2	1	4	4	6	5	7	7

Themes in *Ahavat Olam* and *Ahavah Rabbah* in *Mishkan T'filah*

<u>Mishkan T'filah</u> , 2007 Ahavat Olam and Ahavah Rabbah	Tora h	Creat ion/ Natu re	Univ ersal //On enes s	Prese nce	Perso nal strug gle	kings hip	Revela tion/r ecipro city h	Just ice	Mitzvo t/ laws	Resp onsib ility	Trut h	learn ing/s tudy	loneline ss/conn ectedne ss
1 AO pg. 9 a As You taught	κ				κ		κ				κ	κ	
2 AO pg. 9 b All goodness							κ						
3 AO pg. 9 c- footnote	κ				κ		κ	κ	κ	κ		κ	
4 AR pg. 63a Ten Commandments													
5 AR pg. 63 b Love your neighbor				κ	κ		κ					κ	
6 AO pg. 151 a -same as pg 9a													
7 AO pg. 151 b Wisdom and wonder	κ						κ					κ	
8 AR pg. 231 a Once in a lifetime	This is altogether different from the other readings. It expresses the ideas of 1) love as helping another become who they may become and 2) disturbing to action. These are, however, related to the theme of personal struggle.												
9 AR pg. 231 b Same as pg. 63b													
10 AO pg. 266 In each age	κ	κ		κ	κ		κ				κ	κ	κ
11 AR pg. 317			κ				κ			κ		κ	
Total out of 9 because of two repeats	4		1	2	5		7	1	1	2	2	6	1

An example of an alternative translation from *Gates of Prayer* that includes no explicit reference to Torah, but by its place in the service offers commentary on the nature of Torah and God's love reads as follows:

When justice burns within us like a flaming fire, when love evokes willing sacrifice from us, when to the last full measure of selfless devotion, we demonstrate our belief in the ultimate triumph of truth and righteousness, then Your goodness enters our lives and we can begin to change the world; and then You live within our hearts, and we through righteousness behold Your presence.

This passage is considered an alternative translation because it appears directly beneath *Ahavat Olam* on page 181 of *Gates of Prayer* leading some readers to assume it is a translation. It addresses indirectly the themes of the Hebrew prayer. One can infer, because it replaces an *Ahavat Olam* translation, that acting with justice as an inner fire is a way to show love for God and a way to enact God's Torah. The work to make this connection is up to the pray-er who would require prior knowledge to make such a connection. This passage also suggests a reciprocity that starts with the human being rather than with God as the outline of the rubric suggests. It offers the reader a suggestion about how to access God's Presence and indicates a partnership for the sake of establishing a just and compassionate world.

The following example of an alternative translation interposes Hebrew and English:

אהבה רבה

TO BEAR WITNESS

אֱהָבָה רַבָּה אֶהְבְּתֵנוּ, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, חֲמֵלָה גְדוֹלָה וַיִּתְּרָה חֲמֵלָתְךָ  
 עָלֵינוּ. אֲבִינוּ מִלְכֵנוּ, בְּעֶבֶר אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁבִטְחוּ בְךָ וַתִּלְמַדְם  
 חֲקֵי חַיִּים, בֵּן תִּחַנֵּנוּ וַתִּלְמַדְנוּ.

O God, the guide and inspiration of all humanity, You have  
 spoken in a thousand tongues for all to hear. In every land and  
 age, we, Your children, have heard Your voice and imagined



## SHABBAT

You in our separate ways. And yet, O God, You are One: though each may see You differently, You are the One God of all humanity.

אֱלֹהֵינוּ, הָאֵל הָרַחֵם, הַמְרַחֵם, רַחֵם עָלֵינוּ וְתֵן בְּלִבֵּנוּ לְהִבִּין  
וּלְהַשְׁכִּיל, לְשִׁמְעַת לְלַמֵּד וּלְלַמֵּד, לְשִׁמּוֹר וּלְעֲשׂוֹת וּלְקַיֵּם  
אֱדִיכְלִידְכִּי תִלְמוּד תּוֹרַתְךָ בְּאַהֲבָה.

We give thanks for the sages and teachers of all peoples and faiths, who have brought many to deeper understanding of You and Your will. Gratefully we recall that among them were the lawgivers and prophets, the psalmists and sages of Israel. And joyfully we remember that from the very dawn of Israel's life, Your children have turned to You and found strength.

וְהָאֵל עֵינֵינוּ בְּתוֹרַתְךָ, וְדַבָּק לִבֵּנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתֶיךָ, וַיַּחַד לִבֵּנוּ  
לְאַהֲבָה וּלְיִרְאָה אֶת־שִׁמְךָ. וְלֹא־נִבּוֹשׁ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד, כִּי בְשֵׁם  
קִדְשֶׁךָ הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא בְּטַחֲנוּ. נִגִּילָה וְנִשְׂמָחָה בִּישׁוּעָתְךָ, כִּי  
אֵל פּוֹעֵל יְשׁוּעוֹת אֲתָהּ, וּבָנוּ בְּחֶרֶת וְקִרְבָּנוּ לְשִׁמְךָ הַגָּדוֹל  
סֵלָה בְּאַמַּת, לְהוֹדוֹת לָךְ וּלְיַחֲדֶךָ בְּאַהֲבָה.  
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי, הַבּוֹחֵר בְּעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאַהֲבָה.

May the teachings of our ancestors live on in our minds, and their passion for righteousness retain its power to move our hearts.

Help us, O God, so to live that our daily conduct may reveal the beauty of our faith, and that the house of Israel may continue to bear witness to Your truth.

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שִׁמְעֵ יִשְׂרָאֵל: יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, יי אֶחָד!

Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord is One!

בְּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד!

Blessed is His glorious kingdom for ever and ever!

All are seated

This passage alludes to revelation with the sentence "You have spoken in a thousand tongues for all to hear," though the pray-er with average knowledge would not know such a reference was being made. This passage does not mention the word "Torah." It does offer a

particularly universalist message, thanking “the sages and teachers of all peoples” and in so doing validates understandings of other faith traditions including non-Jewish teachers and students among the “we” who are “Your children” who “have heard Your voice and imagined You in our separate ways.” It adds to the validation of multiple faiths within a context of an overarching unity appropriate to the *Sh’ma* and Jewish theology: “And yet, O God, You are One, though each may see You differently. You are the One God of all humanity.”

The following alternative to *Ahavah Rabah* found in *Mishkan T’filah*’s “Service for Shabbat Morning I”<sup>141</sup> is identified as an “alternative to *Ahavah Rabbah*” as opposed to an “interpretive reading” because of the presence of the *chatimah* to conclude the poem/blessing. Unlike *Gates of Prayer*, alternative readings in *Mishkan T’filah* are always on an opposite page from the prayer which has a translation beneath. This alternative prayer on page 231 stood out as having a unique theme among the passages analyzed.

*Bar’chu*

*Yotzeir*

***Ahavah Rabbah***

*Sh’ma*

*V’ahavta*

*L’maan tizk’ru*

*Vayomer Adonai*

*Emet v’Yatziv*

*Mi Chamochoh*

ONCE OR TWICE in a lifetime,

a man or woman may choose  
a radical leaving, having heard  
*Lech l’cha* — Go forth.

God disturbs us toward our destiny  
by hard events and by freedom’s now urgent voice  
which explode and confirm who we are.  
We don’t like leaving,  
but God loves becoming.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְיָ, הַבּוֹחֵר בְּעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאַהֲבָה.

Baruch atah, Adonai, habocheir b’amo Yisrael b’ahavah.

This selection makes a personal connection to God’s call to Abraham in Genesis 12:1, implying a connection to the P source version of the covenant which begins with Abraham and is renewed at Sinai. The notion that revelation comes in the form of a choice aligns with the

<sup>141</sup> *Mishkan T’filah: Weekdays, Shabbat Festivals and other occasions of public worship*, New York, 2007, pg. 231. I am inserting an image of the text as it appears in the prayer book for the sake of context.

Reform notion of “informed choice”<sup>142</sup> as an opportunity to be taken advantage of or lost. That it comes in the form of a disturbance by hard events suggests a connection with the ideas of Emmanuel Levinas, though the notion of the face is not referenced. The idea that “God loves becoming” in the last line before the *chatimah* connects it strongly with the notion of progressive revelation and Buber’s idea that revelation<sup>143</sup> is both personal and communal and that understanding of it as an individual precedes understanding it in a universal context.

Here, being “chosen in love” is related to being disturbed and being in the process of becoming. It is the sending off on a journey, trusted to make one’s own decisions and to hear one’s individual call. This idea that love means supporting another to become and to be independent is the idea of love that Tamara Eskenazi writes about in the essay “With the Song of Songs in Our Hearts” interpreting Song of Songs 2:10, and particularly the words *Lechi lach*, the same words as in the alternate reading only in feminine form.<sup>144</sup>

On the same page of *Mishkan T’filah*, a prayer leader and congregant find a second alternative to *Ahavah Rabbah*. The very fact that two alternatives to *Ahavah Rabbah* are presented on a page that share some theological elements but also distinct differences illustrates what editor Elyse Frishman indicated about the work of the editorial committee - that they were intentional about including multiple Jewish theologies so that as many people as possible could find themselves represented in the prayerbook.<sup>145</sup> The second selection which

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<sup>142</sup> Attributed to Eugene Borowitz in the Reform Statement of Principles and by Michael Meyer. See Article Commentary on the Principles of Reform Judaism.” <https://www.ccarnet.org/rabbinic-voice/platforms/article-commentary-principles-reform-judaism/> and note 8 in Daniel Kirzane,

The Meaning of Reform,” at <http://www.danielkirzane.com/sermons/the-meaning-of-reform>

<sup>143</sup> Buber said, for example that “From the point of view of the Bible, revelation is, as it were, focused in the ‘middle,’ creation in the ‘beginning,’ and redemption in the ‘end.’ But the living truth is they actually coincide, that ‘God every day renews the work of the Beginning,’# but also every day renews but also every day anticipates the work of the end. Certainly both creation and redemption are true only on the premise that revelation is a present experience. But if I did not feel creation and redemption happening to myself, I could never understand what creation and redemption are.” Martin Buber, “The Man of Today and the Jewish Bible,” in *Israel and the World: Essays in a Time of Crisis*, Schocken, 1963, pg. 96. Kimelman references this essay as well. I accessed the book here:

[https://archive.org/details/israelworldessay0000bube\\_f1g3/page/102/mode/2up?view=theater](https://archive.org/details/israelworldessay0000bube_f1g3/page/102/mode/2up?view=theater)

<sup>144</sup> Tamara Eskenazi, “With the Song of Songs in Our Hearts,” in *Chapters of the Heart: Jewish Women Sharing the Torah of Our Lives*, pgs. 176-185, especially page 179.

<sup>145</sup> Elyse Frishman, visit to David Ellenson’s Class on Reform Prayer Books, Fall 2021.

appears on pages 63 and 231 reads as follows:

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR as yourself, You said.

And light-blinded we saw  
that inner and outer worlds are one  
as You are One.

You spoke and we wrote.  
We reached for You down the centuries,  
Your light moving before us  
as we climbed, fell back and climbed again  
Your Sinai of life.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְיָ, הַבּוֹחֵר בְּעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאַהֲבָה.

Baruch atah, Adonai, habocheir b'amo Yisrael b'ahavah.

The first-person plural in this prayer identifies revelation as a communal experience rather than individual as in the previous selection. The last four lines before the *chatimah* also speak to an ongoing process of revelation that is a midpoint between life (Creation) and death (redemption - in Buber's construct) in "Your Sinai of life." That "we climbed, fell back and climbed again" suggests that revelation does not come in a straight line. There are mistakes along the way. It is impossible to know what the author intended, but perhaps Sabbateanism and strict Creationism and vengeance at the end of the Purim story, racism, sexism, heteronormativity and xenophobia are all reasonable candidates. Another indication that this author allows for mistakes in revelation is a more direct allusion to potential mistakes in transmission in the line "You spoke and we wrote." This may also be an allusion to, and extrapolation from, *על פי ה ביד משה* - the word of God through the hand of Moses, which is part of the Torah service.

The beginning of this selection connects revelation and social justice. The opening with a translation of *אהבת לרעך כמוך* - Love your neighbor as yourself suggests that part of revelation is the caring for the other. Jakob Petuchowski made this connection when he wrote: "[The human], aware of the love of God, tries to capture to make concrete and permanent, this

experience of love in terms which will ultimately influence and govern the affairs of all [humans]. And so the experience of God's love for [the human] results in yet another commandment: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself - I am the Lord.'"<sup>146</sup> Reform Jews were not the first to insert this midpoint verse of the Torah, Leviticus 19:18 in the service. The Ari, according to R. Hayim Vital, instituted the practice of beginning every service by saying: I hereby accept the Creator's commandment: Love your neighbor as yourself.<sup>147</sup>

An additional idea is embedded in the second, third and fourth lines of this selection in the words "...we saw that inner and outer worlds are one as You are One." The "inner worlds" presumably refers to the metaphysical inside of individual people. The "outer worlds" presumably refers to everything outside of an individual and "as You are One" suggests that all is part of God (though not necessarily that God is limited to the all).<sup>148</sup> The idea of connection between inner and outer worlds and the unity of both with God will be further developed in commentary on the selections from *Lev Shalem*.

In this selection, being chosen in love is about loving our neighbor, and that love leading to a sense of oneness within ourselves and unity of self with a larger universe. It is a love that makes room for mistakes.

### *T'filat Ha'Adam*

The newly published Israeli Reform movement prayerbook, *T'filat Ha'Adam*, goes further than the North American Reform prayer book in presenting revelation as entirely personal by offering an alternate *Ahavah Rabbah*, that includes a personalizing *chatimah*. The alternate version appears on the page as follows:<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Petchowski, Kindle Location 1689

<sup>147</sup> Jeremy Kalmonofsky, "Love Your Neighbor as Yourself," <https://anschechesed.org/loveyourneighbor/>

<sup>148</sup> It does not tip its hand as to whether it is pantheistic or panentheistic.

<sup>149</sup> Many thanks to Professor Dalia Marx for making this available to me. Note also that this selection is from the service for shacharit l'chol, simply because the Shabbat morning service had no alternatives for *Ahavah Rabbah*.

"אהבה", הברכה השנייה שלפני קריאת שמע

**אֱהָבָה רַבָּה** אֶהְבֶּתְנוּ, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ  
חֲמִלָה גְדוֹלָה וַיִּתְּרָה חֲמִלַת עָלֵינוּ.  
אֲבִינוּ מִלִּפְנֵינוּ, בְּעֶבֶר אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאֲמוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁבִטְחוּ בָּהּ,  
וְתִלְמָדִים חֲקִי חַיִּים, כֵּן תִּחַנְּנוּ וְתִלְמְדוּ.  
אֲבִינוּ, הָאֵב הָרַחֲמָן הַמְּרַחֵם, רַחֵם עָלֵינוּ,  
וְתֵן בְּלִבֵּנוּ בִּינָה לְהִבִּין וּלְהַשְׁכִּיל, לְשִׁמְעַת,  
לְלַמֵּד וּלְלַמֵּד, לְשִׁמּוֹר וּלְעֲשׂוֹת, לְחַדֵּשׁ וּלְקַיֵּם  
אֶת כָּל דְּבָרֵי תִלְמוּד תּוֹרָתְךָ בְּאַהֲבָה.  
וְהָאֵר עֵינֵינוּ בְּתוֹרָתְךָ, וְדַבֵּק לִבֵּנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתֶיךָ,  
וַיַּחֲד לִבֵּנוּ לְאַהֲבָה וּלְיִרְאָה אֶת שְׁמֶךָ,  
וְלֹא נִבּוֹשׁ וְלֹא נִכָּלֵם וְלֹא נִפְשָׁל לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.  
כִּי בְשֵׁם קֹדֶשְׁךָ הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא בְּטַחְנוּ,  
נְגִילָה וְנִשְׁמָחָה בִּישׁוּעָתְךָ.

נהוג לאסוף את ארבע הציציות של הטלית ולכרוך אותן על האצבע

וְהִבֵּינָנוּ לְשִׁלּוּם מֵאַרְבַּע כִּנְפוֹת הָאֶרֶץ,  
וְתוֹלִיכֵנוּ קוֹמְמִיּוֹת בְּאַרְצֵנוּ.  
כִּי אֵל פּוֹעֵל יִשׁוּעוֹת אֲתָהּ, וּבָנוּ בְּחִרְתָּ [מְכַל עִם וְלִשׁוֹן],  
וְקִרְבָּתְנוּ לְשְׁמֶךָ הַגָּדוֹל סְלָה, בְּאַמֶּת,  
לְהוֹדוֹת לָךְ וּלְיַחְדְּךָ בְּאַהֲבָה.  
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, הַבוֹחֵר בְּעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאַהֲבָה.

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלִּפְנֵיךָ הוֹיָה אֱלֹהֵי וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵי וְאֲמוֹתֵי, שֶׁתַּמְצִיאוּ  
מִנוּחָה נְכוֹנָה בְּחַיֵּי שְׁלָא אֲדָאג וְלֹא אֲפַסְדָּה, וְאֲדַע שְׁאֲתָה עֲמָדִי  
תְּמִיד. כִּי לְכָל דְּבַר יֵשׁ תַּכְלִית וְכָל קִשִּׁי הוּא פְתִיחָה, וְהַעֲקֹר  
בְּשִׁמְחָה תְּמִיד בְּאַמוּנָה בְּשִׁבְחָה וְהוֹדָיָה בְּרַגְעָה בְּעֶנְג וּבְאַהֲבָה.  
לְהִבִּין וּלְהַשְׁכִּיל לְשִׁמְעַת לְלַמֵּד וּלְלַמֵּד, לְשִׁמּוֹר וּלְעֲשׂוֹת וּלְקַיֵּם אֶת  
כָּל דְּבָרֵי תּוֹרָתְךָ בְּאַהֲבָה. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, הַבוֹחֵר בִּי בְּאַהֲבָה.

(דברי מידות)

May it be Your will, Presence, *my* God and God of *my* fathers and God of *my* mothers, that you find for *me* a proper rest in *my* lifetime that I will not worry and I will not fear, and I will know that you are with *me* always. For to everything there is a purpose and every difficulty is an opening, and the main thing is everlasting joy in faith and praise and calm gratitude in happiness and love. To understand and make sense of, to hear, to learn and to teach, to protect and to make, to bring into being all the words of Your teaching, Your Torah, in love. Blessed are you, God, Who chooses *me* in love.

The italics in the English are meant to illustrate the emphasis felt by the person used to the traditional Hebrew. The personal is expanded to the communal only in the pluralizing of “my mothers” and “my fathers.” The words, “that you invent for me a proper rest in my lifetime that I will not worry and I will not fear and I will know that You are with me always...” express a yearning for closeness and perhaps relief in a deeply personal way. The words “For to everything there is a purpose and every difficulty is an opening” is an affirmation of worthiness and heartening of self to persevere through challenge. Some may find this comforting and encouraging while some who suffer unexplainable pain may not. The connection of these to the traditional words “to understand and make sense of, to hear, to learn and to teach...” enhances the sense to which this is intended as a replacement of the traditional prayer and an integration of the traditional with a new sensibility, especially in its original Hebrew. It is a prayer of faith and a seeking of faith. The *chatimah* is the most startling element of this prayer. Instead of the traditional communal “Blessed are You, God, Who chooses Your people in love,” this blessing says “Who chooses *me* in love.” At the same time, it is extremely relatable for the individual who yearns for individual connection with the One but has yet to find their community.

Here love is very personal. It is a love borne of finding one’s true self, comfort in one’s surroundings and also a love of nurturance and protection.

A second selection from *T’filat Ha’Adam* is an alternative to the traditional *Ahavat Olam* found in a section called תוספתא לקבלת שבת ולערבית לשבת - Additions for Kabbalat Shabbat and Evening Service.



### הברכות שלפני קריאת שמע

**ברוכה אתָּה, עוֹשֶׂה נִפְלְאוֹת**  
גְּדוֹלוֹת בְּעוֹלָמָה, אֲשֶׁר בַּדְּבָרָה  
מַעֲרִיבָה עַרְבִים, בְּחִכְמָה פּוֹתַחַת  
שְׁעֵרִים, בְּתַבּוּנָה מְשֻׁנָּה עֵתִים  
וּמַחְלִיפָה אֶת הַזְּמָנִים, גְּדוֹל עַד  
שָׁמַיִם חֲסָדָה. בּוֹרֵאת יוֹמָם וּלְיָלָה,  
גּוֹלְלֶת אוֹר מִפְּנֵי חֹשֶׁךְ וְחֹשֶׁךְ מִפְּנֵי  
אוֹר. הַמַּעֲבִירָה יוֹם וּמַבִּיאָה לַיְלָה,  
בִּידָה מַחְקֶרֶת שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ.  
יְהוָה מְצוֹדֵתֵנוּ שְׁמָה.  
**ברוכה אתָּה, הַמַּעֲרִיבָה עַרְבִים.**

**אַהֲבַת עוֹלָם** בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל עִמָּךְ  
אַהֲבָת. תּוֹרַת חַיִּים, מְצוֹת אַהֲבָה  
וַיִּרְאֶה הַנִּחְלָתָ לָנוּ יְהוָה כִּי לְעוֹלָם  
חֲסָדָךְ. עַל כֵּן, יְהוָה פּוֹעֵלֶת יְשׁוּעוֹת,  
בְּשִׁכְבֵּנוּ וּבִקְוֵמָנוּ נְשִׁיחַ בְּחֻקֶּיךָ  
וְנִשְׁמַח בַּדְּבָרִי תִלְמוּד תּוֹרָתְךָ  
וּבְמִצְוֹתֶיךָ וּדְרָכֶיךָ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.  
כִּי הֵם חַיֵּינוּ וָאֶרֶץ יְמִינוּ, וּבָהֶם נִהְיָה  
יוֹמָם וּלְיָלָה. וְאַהֲבָתְךָ לֹא תִסּוֹר מִמֶּנּוּ  
לְעוֹלָמִים, וְאֵנוּ קִרְבַּת יְהוָה לָנוּ טוֹב.  
**ברוכה אתָּה, אוֹהֶבֶת עַמָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל.**

הרב יהודע עמיר

### ניגונים

שְׁתַּלְתֶּם נְגוּנִים בִּי, אֲמִי וְאָבִי,  
נְגוּנִים מִזְמוֹרִים שְׂכוּחִים.  
גִּרְעִינִים; גִּרְעִינִים נִשְׁאָם לִבִּי –  
עֲתָה הֵם עוֹלִים וְצוֹמְחִים.  
עֲתָה הֵם שׁוֹלְחִים פְּאוֹרוֹת בְּדָמִי,  
שֶׁרְשִׁיָּהֶם בְּעוֹרְקֵי שְׁלֹבִים,  
נְגוּנֶיךָ, אָבִי, וְשִׁירְךָ אֲמִי,  
בְּדַפְקֵי נְעוּרִים וְשָׁבִים.

הִנֵּה אֶאֱזִין שִׁיר עֶרְשִׁי הָרְחוֹק  
הַבִּיעַ פִּי אִם אֵלֵי בֵּת.  
הִנֵּה לִי תִזְהַרְנָה בְּדָמַע וּשְׁחוֹק  
"אֵיכָה" וְזִמְרֹת שֶׁל שַׁבָּת.

כָּל הֶגֶה יִתֵּם וְכָל צָלִיל יֵאֱלֵם  
בִּי קוֹלְכֶם הָרְחוֹק כִּי יְהוָה.  
עֵינֵי אֶעְצֹם וְהִרֵּנִי אֶתְכֶם  
מֵעַל לַחֲשֻׁכַת הַתְּהוֹם.

פניה ברגשטיין



A translation:

With eternal love, You loved the house of Israel, Your people. You passed on to us a Torah of life, commandments of love and awe, God, for Your grace is eternal. For that reason, God is an Agent of salvation, as we lie down and as we rise up, we will discuss Your laws, and rejoice in the words of study of Your Torah and Your commandments and Your paths forever. For they are our lives and the length of our days, and we will rejoice in them day and night. And You will not turn Your love from us forever, and for us, drawing near God is good. Blessed are You, God, Who loves Her people Israel.

It immediately strikes the reader that the pronomial suffixes are in the feminine singular, not the habitual male. God is addressed in the *chatimah* in second person singular feminine. In other words, the default for God is female. This reflects an effort to use gendered language in a way that is inviting to a population marginalized by the typical default to male language. It also serves to expand our concept of Who we address when we address God and reminds us that at Sinai we experienced God in a way that we perceived no form, neither male nor female (Deuteronomy 4:16).

Some key insertions alter the meanings of key phrases. The insertion of *chayim* and the change to the construct form *torat chayim* (as appears in the prayer, *Sim Shalom*) combined with the insertion of *ahavah* to create the construct form *mitzvot ahavah* and the change from *limad'ta* to *hinchalt lanu* changes the meaning from the traditional "You have taught us Torah and commandments..." to "You have passed on to us a Torah of life, commandments of love and awe." These changes may be understood to reflect a Torah that comes from living life rather than the supernatural gift of a physical book and written laws. It also emphasizes the notion that Torah is in our hands and is "not in heaven," (Deuteronomy 30:12) an important part of Reform understanding with textual and classical rabbinic support.<sup>150</sup>

The insertion of the word *talmud* before *Torah* in the phrase that traditionally reads *v'nismach b'divrei Torat'cha*, so that it now reads *v'nismach b'divrei talmud Torateich*, changes the meaning such that the pledge is to rejoice in the study of Torah, commandments and paths rather than rejoicing in the Torah and performing mitzvot. This seems to reflect a Reform

<sup>150</sup> See for example, Moshe Halbertal on Nachmanides, the Ritba and the Ran, particularly with regard to the explication of Bava Metzia 59a-b - the story of the oven of Achnai in Moshe Halbertal, "Authority, Controversy and Tradition," *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning, and Authority*, pgs. 63-65.

movement orientation to consider deeply our teachings and make informed choices rather than follow rules and then seek to understand them.<sup>151</sup>

In this selection, love is the gift of living life, learning from our experience, working through the lessons in conversation, and perhaps the role of sacred text in helping us derive those lessons. We love God by recognizing the vitality our discussions and study engender and by trying to draw near God.

## The Conservative Movement

Unlike the siddurim of the Reform Movement, the Conservative Movements siddurim repeatedly and unmistakably emphasize the connection between *Ahavah Rabbah/Ahavat Olam* with Torah as a sign of God's love and that humans show God love by following God's laws and performing mitzvot.

### *Siddur Sim Shalom*

*Siddur Sim Shalom*, initially published in 1985 and updated in 1998 includes the following lines before the translation to *Ahavat Olam* "In this *b'rakhah*, we extol God for giving us the Torah, testimony to God's love for Israel." While most selections of *Ahavah Rabbah* and *Ahavat Olam* include no alternative readings, one page offers three interpretive poems, all by editor Jules Harlow and one explanatory paragraph. These reinforce that Torah is the focus of this section of prayer and that Torah is a sign of God's love. These readings also set forth Torah as something demanding. The notion of revelation as renewed is limited as follows, "Torah is given each day; each day we can choose to reject or accept it."<sup>152</sup> One selection includes lines such as "Your love has embraced us always...Night and day Your Torah sustains us...we shall embrace Torah night

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<sup>151</sup> There are likely other observations to be made, but I need to check my translation. I am particularly wary of my translation of ואנו קרבת יה לנו טוב.

<sup>152</sup> *Sim Shalom*, pg. 29.

and day.”<sup>153</sup> Another selection suggests “The Torah is a tapestry that can adorn the days in which we dwell...It is as close to us as we allow it - on our lips, in our heart, integral to our deeds. Let us study its words, fulfill its commands, and make its instruction our second nature.” These passages suggest the life of Torah is not so much about being sparked to creativity but habituating oneself to a set of rules. This is reinforced further by the fourth reading on page 29 of *Sim Shalom* which includes “Revelation does not deal with the mystery of God, but with a person’s life as it should be lived in the presence of that mystery.”<sup>154</sup> *Ahavah Rabbah* has no accompanying poems or prose other than a translation which is preceded by the following explanation similar to that for *Ahavat Olam* with an important difference that it includes not just that Torah is a sign of God’s love but also that in this *b’rakhah* we commit ourselves to its study.<sup>155</sup>

### *Siddur Lev Shalem*

*Siddur Lev Shalem* has been the prayer book of the North American Conservative movement since its publication in 2016. As in *Siddur Sim Shalom*, *Siddur Lev Shalem* repeatedly emphasizes the connection between *Ahavah Rabbah/Ahavat Olam* and Torah as a sign of God’s love. This prayerbook has a series of unattributed commentary on the right side and attributed poems, aphorisms or prose on the left of the prayers. As Associate Editor Jan Uhrbach put it, “commentary, history and intellectual content appears on the right hand side” and the left hand side contains “inspirational [texts], kavanot, poetry.”<sup>156</sup>

In the commentary on *Ahavat Olam*, one can see a stark difference in emphasis from *Siddur Sim Shalom*. The opening comment on page 40 next to *Ahavat Olam* reads in part “The rabbis understood love as the essential quality of the divine-human relationship, and they understood love to be primarily defined by behavior. God’s love is expressed in giving the Torah, instruction

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<sup>153</sup> *Sim Shalom*, pg. 29.

<sup>154</sup> *Sim Shalom*, pg. 29.

<sup>155</sup> *Sim Shalom*, pg. 111.

<sup>156</sup> Jan Uhrbach in presentation to Reform Prayer Books class taught by David Ellenson, Fall 2021. In her presentation R. Uhrbach noted that many congregants responded to the commentary and poetry in a way that reminded her of the Patsy Cline movie line “I was starving and I didn’t even know it.”

on how to live; our love is expressed in the performance of mitzvot, our behavior in the world. In this way, the human and the Divine are bound together.”<sup>157</sup> This passage makes more space for love as an emotion expressed through action and suggests a closeness between God and human that can be felt. On the right side of the page, before a passage entitled “Loving Humanity,” the siddur gives italicized guidance, “Before reciting the *Sh’ma*, we may choose to think about how we need to prepare ourselves to make room for the listening that the *Sh’ma* demands.” The ambiguousness of the type of listening allows the pray-er to understand this as they will. The passage that follows is a prayer to God to “teach me how to deal with people to show them how to convert the evil within the good.” It includes the line “At the circus, I saw a man tame a tiger, defang a snake; would You make me so skilled?”<sup>158</sup> The passage focuses the pray-er not here on one’s own growth, but on changing others. The following passage entitled “To Love the World” quotes Franz Rosenzweig in a way that may help open a pray-er to prayer: “When we act with love, Franz Rosenzweig remarks, ‘the neighbor represents all the world and thus distorts the eye’s view. Prayer, however, pleads for enlightenment and thereby, without overlooking the neighbor, sees beyond the neighbor, sees the whole world...’”

At the beginning of the *Sh’ma* rubric as a whole during the morning service, *Siddur Lev Shalem*, places a relevant interpretive offering:

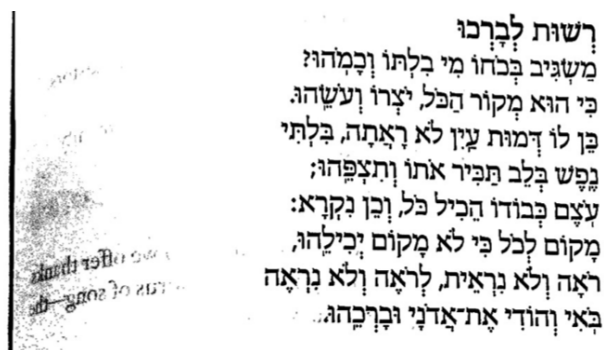
*A MEDITATION FOR BAR’KHU*

Almighty no thing exists  
without You and none  
can be like You the source  
of all maker and creator

You have no image eyes  
observe but the soul  
lodged in the heart  
recognizes You and sees

Your glory’s breadth  
encompassing all  
for in You all finds its place  
but You occupy no place

my soul seeing  
but unseen come thank  
the seeing but unseen  
and bless



Setting this meditation, written by eleventh century philosopher Yehuda Halevi at the opening of the rubric suggests a framing for the rubric as a whole. It suggests a conception of God that is panentheistic - “...in You all finds its place but You occupy no place.” This is

<sup>157</sup> Siddur Lev Shalem, pg. 40.

<sup>158</sup> Siddur Lev Shalem, pg. 40

consistent with the notion that God is both transcendent and immanent. Elliot Dorff comments on this duality, noting that the transition from *Yotser* to *Ahavah Rabbah* is a juxtaposition of an impression of God as transcendent with one of God as immanent. Dorff writes “God is both for us, and no view of God that ignores either one is adequate to our experience, or to Jewish belief about, the Holy One.”<sup>159</sup>

This selection suggests a connection between unity of the individual and unity with the One: “my soul seeing but unseen come thank the Seeing but Unseen and bless.” Lawrence Kushner and Nehemia Polen, in *My People’s Prayer Book*<sup>160</sup> quote a text by Ze’ev Wolf of Zhitomir that *Mahzor Lev Shalem* also quotes in reference to *Ahavah Rabbah*<sup>161</sup> which contains a Bachya ibn Pakuda story about a man who prayed to be saved from *pizzur hanefesh*, “scattering of soul” - uncenteredness and fragmentedness. *Mahzor Lev Shalem* notes that meditating on God’s unity helps us find unity within ourselves. Kushner and Polen write, “Before we can utter God’s unity, then, we must recover our own. What more appropriate introduction to the *Sh’ma*, the declaration of God’s unity, could we hope to find?”<sup>162</sup>

Where *Ahavah Rabbah* appears, commentary on the right side includes a note about *avinu malkeinu* in *Ahavah Rabbah* referencing the nearness and distanced-ness of God in the Jewish understanding. The commentary “Laws of Life” refers to *Leviticus Rabbah* 22:1 suggesting Torah includes even what “the student of wisdom might impart until the end of time.”<sup>163</sup> It even suggests that Torah goes beyond just *Jewish* learning to include “all those teachings that instruct us concerning a full ethical and religious life.” This is much more expansive view of Torah and hence revelation than presented in *Siddur Sim Shalom*.

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<sup>159</sup> Elliot Dorff in MPPB, pg. 71.

<sup>160</sup> Lawrence Kushner and Nehemia Polen in MPPB, pgs. 69, 73-74.

<sup>161</sup> Mahzor Lev Shalem, The Rabbinical Assembly, 2010, pg. 76

<sup>162</sup> Kushner and Polen, MPPB, pg. 74.

<sup>163</sup> Y. Chagigah 1:8:11 manages to use this idea in a limiting way, saying no one can come up with something new for it all already has been forever. See [https://www.sefaria.org/Vayikra\\_Rabbah.22.1?lang=bi&p2=Jerusalem\\_Talmud\\_Chagigah.1.8.11&lang2=bi](https://www.sefaria.org/Vayikra_Rabbah.22.1?lang=bi&p2=Jerusalem_Talmud_Chagigah.1.8.11&lang2=bi)

## Patterns and Observations

A few themes emerge in the analysis of these modern prayer books' interpretations of the relationship between God, the people Israel, and the understanding of love and revelation in their alternative offerings to and commentary on *Ahavah Rabbah/Ahavat Olam*.

### Comparing Conservative Movement Prayerbooks Treatment of Revelation

The Conservative prayerbook *Sim Shalom*, repeatedly presents Revelation as Torah and Torah as the token of God's love. It repeatedly uses language associating Torah with law that one can choose each day to "reject or accept" and encourages the reader to "weave its text into the texture of our lives" by "study[ing] its words and fulfill[ing] its commands."<sup>164</sup> It repeatedly rejects the idea of entering into mystery with phrases like "It is not a mystery, far beyond reach; it is not in heaven beyond our grasp" and "Revelation does not deal with the mystery of God, but with a person's life as it should be lived in the presence of that mystery."<sup>165</sup> The former of these expressions interprets Deuteronomy 30:12 not as inviting the seeker to participate in bringing forth Torah but in understanding a fixed and unchangeable Torah whose fixed laws one should follow. In this way, it adheres to what Benjamin Sommer calls a stenographic theory of revelation rather than a participatory theory of revelation. The second quoted phrase above regarding mystery corresponds to an understanding of God as unknowable, suggesting - without declaring - that God is unchanging. *Lev Shalem* expands the notion of revelation, for example by writing on the right side of the prayer that the Oral Torah refers "to the teachings of the Midrash, Mishnah and Talmud - and even to 'whatever new teaching a student of wisdom might impart until the end of time'" (Leviticus Rabbah 22:1. In this prayer, 'Torah' embraces the widest meaning: the laws of life - all those teachings that instruct us concerning a full ethical and

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<sup>164</sup> *Sim Shalom*, pg. 29.

<sup>165</sup> *Sim Shalom*, pg. 29.

religious life.”<sup>166</sup> *Siddur Lev Shalem*, in this way, offers the prayer a place as participant in - not simply witness to - revelation. In Sommer’s terms, it promotes the participatory theory of revelation. *Siddur Lev Shalem* folds in layers of complexity and implicitly invites consideration of the mystery of God with statements such as “God is at once both intimate as a close relation and distant as a monarch.”<sup>167</sup> In commentary on V’ahavta, it offers a poem by Marcia Falk, inviting us to love “life and its mysterious source.”<sup>168</sup> *Siddur Lev Shalem* imbues the same ancient prayers with revolutionary meaning relative to its predecessor, *Siddur Sim Shalom*, regarding human relationship with God, the nature of revelation and Torah and as we will see, love.

### Comparing Reform Prayer books Treatment of Revelation

An important caveat must be stated before discussing the Reform prayerbooks treatment of love and revelation in the *Sh’ma* rubric. Whereas the Conservative prayerbooks explicitly explain that this rubric alludes to revelation and the love of and for God, the Reform prayerbooks do not do this. In *Mishkan T’filah*, there are always direct translations of the Hebrew unlike in *Gates of Prayer* where a layperson can easily mistake an alternate translation for a translation. While we can be fairly confident that the editors of the Reform prayerbooks understood themselves to be commenting on God’s love and the nature of revelation in every alternative reading, we cannot be sure as we would with the Conservative prayerbooks that the layperson would understand alternative readings as commenting on God’s love and revelation. In *Mishkan T’filah*, the alternative readings more often refer explicitly to revelation, at least to the eyes of a student of Jewish texts. It may be, therefore, that the patterns noticed must be limited to analysis of prayerbook editors’ evolving understanding of loving relationship with God and less an analysis of the prayerbook as diary of the people with regard to this subject.

### Personal and Communal Revelation and Struggle

Both Reform prayerbooks fall firmly in the camp of those that promote a participatory theory of revelation. This should not be surprising since every statement of principles issued by the Reform Movement dating back to the Pittsburgh Platform in 1885 professes belief in progressive

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<sup>166</sup> *Siddur Lev Shalem*, pg. 154.

<sup>167</sup> *Siddur Lev Shalem*, pg. 154.

<sup>168</sup> *Siddur Lev Shalem*, pg. 41

revelation as a central tenet.<sup>169</sup> *Mishkan T'filah*, though, more frequently refers explicitly to revelation and Jews' involvement in it, as for example in this passage:

Wisdom and wonder, passion and instruction, story and symbol. All these things Your Torah gives to us. **And the more we devote ourselves to it, the more it grows and gives.** What could be a truer token of Your abiding love than the holiest of Your works, and the living language that gives it form?<sup>170</sup>

In each age we receive and transmit Torah. At each moment we are addressed by the World...**In each age we add our wisdom to that which has gone before...In each age the children of Torah become its builders and** seek to set the world firm on a foundation of Truth.<sup>171</sup>

Another significant shift from Gates of Prayer in 1975 to *Mishkan T'filah* in 2007 is toward expression of a personal revelation and connection to God based on personal struggle. Gates of Prayer is not without the notion of personal struggle. It is beautifully expressed, for example in the lines:

Lord, You give meaning to our hopes, to our struggles and our strivings. Without You, we are lost, our lives empty. And so when all else fails us, we turn to You! In the stillness of night, when the outer darkness enters the soul; in the press of the crowd, when we walk alone though yearning for companionship; and when in agony we are bystanders to our own confusion, we look to You for hope and peace.<sup>172</sup>

More often, however, when Gates of Prayer speaks of God's Presence as a form of love, it refers to a more universal and less intimately personal Presence. For example, in the following passage:

You are our God, the Source of life and its blessings. Wherever we turn our gaze we behold signs of Your goodness and love. The whole universe proclaims Your glory. Your loving spirit hovers over all Your works, guiding and sustaining them.

<sup>169</sup> <https://www.ccarnet.org/rabbinic-voice/platforms/article-declaration-principles/>,  
<https://www.ccarnet.org/rabbinic-voice/platforms/>.

<sup>170</sup> *Mishkan T'filah* pg. 151.

<sup>171</sup> *Mishkan T'filah*, pg. 266.

<sup>172</sup> Gates of Prayer, pg. 92. This passage is in advance of the rubric as a whole and in this service Ahavah Rabbah/Ahavat Olam does not appear, but is replaced by an alternative set of Hebrew and English where one would expect to find it.



The harmony and grandeur of nature speak to us of You; the beauty and truth of Torah reveal Your will to us. You are the One and Eternal God of time and space!<sup>173</sup>

And

There lives a God: His [*sic*]<sup>174</sup> presence is the glow in the human heart. There lives a God: We meet Him in the joys of human love. We see Him in our vision of a better world: when we choose life and blessing, and turn from death and destruction./ We hear Him in the still, small voice of conscience. We sense Him in our unending search for truth. There lives a God, and in love we unite with Him as we call Him One.<sup>175</sup>

The last three sentences are more personal than the earlier ones in this passage. Nonetheless it does not have the quality of intimate connection with God as found in the following from *Mishkan T'filah*.

As You taught Torah to those whose names I bear, teach me Torah, too. Its mystery beckons, yet I struggle with its truth. You meant Torah for me: did You mean the struggle for me, too? Don't let me struggle alone; help me to understand, to be wise, to discern, to know...Lead me into the mystery.<sup>176</sup>

The notion of God's Presence with the community also speaks to struggle such as in the passage that begins "Love your neighbor as yourself, You said.." shared in full elsewhere in this capstone. That reading includes the words "We reached for You down the centuries, Your light moving before us as we climbed, fell back and climbed again Your Sinai of life."<sup>177</sup> In addition to highlighting the theme of struggle presented as communal and personal in *Mishkan T'filah* as compared to universal more often in *Gates of Prayer*, these words also exemplify the shift

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<sup>173</sup> Gates of Prayer, pg. 74.

<sup>174</sup> I will not insert "*sic*" at every instance of masculine God language, but I do this first time and note here that I transcribe the reading as it is presented in the prayerbook and note that gendered God language is not appropriate though it was considered to be at the time Gates of Prayer was published.

<sup>175</sup> Gates of Prayer, pg. 224.

<sup>176</sup> Mishkan T'filah, pgs. 9 and 151,

<sup>177</sup> Mishkan T'filah, pg. 63.

toward revelation explicitly and Jews' involvement in it. In *Mishkan T'filah*, the text beginning "Once or Twice" spoke of an individual man or woman hearing a call of "*Lech L'cha*" hearkening back to the call to Abraham as an individual, and included the words "God loves becoming" which can be applied both personally and globally. In *T'filat Ha'Adam*, even the *chatima* of the alternative *Ahavah Rabbah* was changed to the singular while those in *Mishkan T'filah* maintain the traditional *chatimah*.

	Theory of Revelation promulgated	Type of Love emphasized
Gates of Prayer (Reform) 1975	Participatory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Creation/ Nature</li> <li>● Presence</li> <li>● Learning/ study</li> <li>● Connectedness/ loneliness</li> <li>● Responsibility</li> <li>● Oneness</li> </ul>
Sim Shalom (Conservative) 1985	Stenographic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Torah as token of love</li> </ul>
Mishkan T'filah (Reform) 2007	Participatory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Revelation as reciprocal</li> <li>● Learning/study</li> <li>● Personal struggle</li> </ul>
Lev Shalem (Conservative) 2016	Participatory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reciprocity</li> <li>● Personal struggle</li> <li>● Learning</li> <li>● Mystical union</li> <li>● nature</li> </ul>

### Comparing the prayerbooks presentation of love

The shift toward emphasis on the reciprocity of revelation in both Reform and Conservative movements should also be understood as commentary on the nature of love between God and Israel. In modern terms, we might say that revealing oneself or Oneself

demonstrates vulnerability that invites an other<sup>178</sup> close. While neither the Conservative nor Reform movement delve deeply into notions of romantic love in any of the prayerbooks examined, the Conservative movement made a major move in this direction notable particularly because its earlier prayerbook was the most limited in its range of understandings of love between God and Israel. *Siddur Lev Shalem* goes as far as to mention the notion of mystical union,<sup>179</sup> something *Mishkan T'filah* does not address. *Lev Shalem* also precedes the rubric with Judah HaLevi's poem, which includes the notion of our souls connecting with God, which is certainly intimate though not explicitly romantic. In *Mishkan T'filah*, the prayer "Once or twice" on page 64 expresses the notion of love as romantic in the sense Tamara Eskenazi wrote about - the coaxing of another to become what they might become. This is explicit, though the connection to romantic love would have been clearer if the feminine form had been used, *Lechi lach*, as it appears in the Song of Songs. As it is, it leads one to think more immediately of God's call to Abraham which is far better known and related to romance only in its association with the version in Song of Songs. The Israeli Reform Movement's *T'filat Ha'Adam*, expresses a love felt in living life, making sense of life through conversation and study, seeking of self, wholeness, self-knowledge and the protectiveness it brings.

The themes of learning and ongoing revelation have much in common in that both suggest growth of the body of knowledge and the individual through study and this growth provides a sense of connection with God. Three of the four American prayerbooks include notions of learning as love. The very first words of the passage "As You taught..." in *Mishkan T'filah* convey this idea. The footnote on page 9 about the meaning of the word Torah is expansive in its definition of Torah and indicative of a sense of ongoing discernment. It reads:

Torah is what God has revealed to us, and what we discern of God: ideas and ideals, laws and mitzvot, our religious heritage. It unfolds our memories of Abraham and Sarah, of Moses and Miriam and the Prophets. It is legislation and explanation, allowing questions that challenge, answers which inspire: all a quest for meaning. It is our way of life, a path for our souls, and the design for a better

<sup>178</sup> Or "Other." Either evokes Levinas as "Thou" would have evoked Buber. For Levinas God is in the Other as a call to responsibility. For Buber a Thou relationship is holy in the sense of felt connectedness.

<sup>179</sup> *Siddur Lev Shalem*, pg. 155. Interestingly this note comes in commentary on the *Sh'ma* in reference to the notion of unity and Oneness.

world. *John Raymer*<sup>180</sup>

In summary, the major shift in the Conservative Movement is from presentation of revelation as stenographic in Siddur Sim Shalom to participatory in Siddur Lev Shalem, from Torah as fixed to a more expansive definition. In the Reform Movement, the context of relationship between God and Israel is more firmly rooted in the traditional language of revelation. Both movements most recent prayerbooks emphasize a personal relationship with God as part of spiritual quests, both personal and communal.

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<sup>180</sup> Gates of Prayer, pg. 9.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

In the first two sections of this thesis I sought to identify what tradition indicates we should say about the love between God and Israel and what twentieth and twenty-first century Reform and Conservative prayerbooks indicate we can say. In this final section, I offer a few thoughts about what I must say about the love between God and Israel.

We are loved by a great and eternal love. We are meant to feel loved. Only when we feel loved are we able to extend love to others. God's love is an emotion and beyond words. We feel it in amazement at the daily renewal of Creation, in the smiles of those we love, and in being disturbed to respond to the need of neighbors near and far.

We love God by listening to the voice of our soul and the voices of those who cry out to us. God calls to us to grow just as God calls to each blade of grass to grow. We respond by smiling at the feel of the wind and the people around us for whom we might be God's agent in expressing love if only we can discern how we might call them to grow in ways to which they can respond. Martin Luther King Jr.'s words describe how our individual work as agents of God's love results in communal justice when he writes that "I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be."<sup>181</sup>

We may not have any right to the privileges we have been granted, but we have nevertheless been granted them. We can choose to use our limited time to build the world we want to inhabit, a harmonious, peaceful, just and compassionate world in which all people are fully redeemed and able to contribute to ongoing revelation and creation to their fullest potential.

In Deuteronomy 4:29 we are told that if we seek God with all our heart and all our soul

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<sup>181</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., *Strength to Love*, 1963. Pg. 7. A similar quote appears in "Letter From a Birmingham Jail." A somewhat different connection between personal love and communal justice was expressed by Cornel West when he wrote that "Justice is what love looks like in public, just like tenderness is what love feels like in private." <https://pridefoundation.org/2017/02/justice-is-what-love-looks-like-in-public/>

,then we will find God. When we reach with “the last full measure of selfless devotion” we feel God reaching to us. If we go as far as we can, God will meet us there. God hears our words, too. It is not a one way street. What we say and do affects the nature of reality. All produced from that place of reaching with all we have is Torah, is love.

Yet, often we err. If Lawrence Kushner is correct that the letters of the Tetragrammaton produce the sound of breath,<sup>182</sup> then we who live are all constantly saying the name of God, including when we sin. Ruth Langer teaches that the phrase *Baruch shem k’vod malchuto l’olam va’ed* allows the renunciation of an oath.<sup>183</sup> Perhaps we say this formula after the *Sh’ma*’s first six words to remind us that we can revoke our missteps, and begin again to climb our personal Sinai, aflame unto the very heavens.

Through mitzvot, through study, through prayer, we reach for the spark that lights our internal eternal flame. Like physical exercise, spiritual exercise comes to us more easily when a habit, because the feeling of being enlivened is nearer the surface, more available to tap into, and our thirst for it remains kinetic.

Arthur Green, citing Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev and b. Shabbat 146a, wrote that “the central event at Sinai...was not the giving or receiving of Torah, but the preparation of the people - the spiritual elevation of an entire people to the point where they can turn deeply enough within themselves to discover the will of God.”<sup>184</sup> All of Torah is in us, but corporeal beings that we are, we are distracted by the material world.<sup>185</sup> We notice ongoing revelation when something outside of us sparks the Torah within us and when we are able to draw out the Torah in us and light the torch in another. Love is the liminal vehicle that brings outside what is in and inside what is outside. As a result of this love, we accept *ol malchut shamayim*<sup>186</sup> - a

<sup>182</sup> Lawrence Kushner, *Eyes Remade For Wonder*, Kindle Edition, loc 1775-1784.

<sup>183</sup> Ruth Langer, “The Creation of a Valid Non-Sacrificial Liturgy” in *To Worship God Properly*, pg. 28, n. 115. Langer writes “Of course, one might inadvertently make the wrong blessing or say the same prayer twice. P. Berakhot 6:1, 10a, in discussing various food benedictions, provides a remedy for such a mistake: one can nullify a benediction by reciting the line *ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד*.” She offers Tosafot Berakhot 39a and Shulhan Aruch OH 206:6 as “examples of the integration of this concept into the mainstream tradition.”

<sup>184</sup> Arthur Green, “The Experience of Sinai,” *Variant*, vol. 4, no. 3 (Ordination 1964): 31-35

<sup>185</sup> Green, “The Experience of Sinai”.

<sup>186</sup> See, for example, Max Kadushin, *Worship and Ethics*, pgs. 78-89 on the acceptance of *ol malchut shamayim* and *ol malchut mitzvot* in the *Sh’ma u’Birchotecha* rubric.

sense of being commanded by heaven - such that we know we must work to make what is wrong right; that we must learn, individually and collectively, how to live ethically and take care of one another. We love God by choosing to grow in our learning of how to do so and acting based on what we have learned. In that case, a purpose of love, a goal of revelation and an unchanging element of our evolving covenantal responsibility is

לקיים את כל דברי תלמוד תורתך באהבה

[that we] establish all that would be if we lovingly study all the words of Your Torah.

## Appendix: Further Research

There is more to be explored through the analysis of alternative translations, alternative readings and commentary in prayer books. Analysis that includes widely used Orthodox and Reconstructionist prayer books can offer opportunity to compare the theological emphases of major Jewish Movements in the United States and across the world and how they have changed over time. Inclusion of alternative readings and commentary on V'Ahavta would offer more thorough understanding of the changing perspective regarding the reciprocity of the relationship with God. Analysis of such texts related to the other prayers within Sh'ma u'Birchotecha would provide a fuller understanding of how Jewish communities have related to the related themes of Creation and Redemption relative to Revelation and may reveal additional insight regarding the rubric as a whole. Such analysis might also be used to explore other rubrics in the prayer service, especially the Amidah. In addition, a thorough analysis of theological, philosophical and popular self-help literature outside of prayer books would allow an analysis of the ways in which changes in prayer books respond to, lead or remain unrelated to such literatures and the cultures they represent.



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