

READING FROMM: THE TEXT OF GOD'S LOVE

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Introduction

*The experience of separateness arouses anxiety; it is, indeed, the source of all anxiety...to be separate means to be helpless, unable to grasp the world - things and people - actively...the deepest need of man, then, is to overcome his separateness, to leave the prison of his aloneness.*¹

*[The] desire for interpersonal fusion is the most powerful striving in man. It is the most fundamental passion, it is the force which keeps the human race together... Without love, humanity could not exist for a day.*²

According to Erich Fromm in his book *The Art of Loving*, love is an essential element of life. He claims that none of us could survive without love. Love, he says

...is a power which breaks through the walls which separate man from his fellow men, which unites him with others; love makes him overcome the sense of isolation and separateness, yet it permits him to be himself, to retain his integrity.³

Just as Fromm asserts that love is crucial to life, I believe that love is crucial to Judaism. I see love as a pervasive theme throughout our liturgical and biblical tradition. In this paper, I intend to explore how Fromm's philosophy on love and love's importance to society can be applied to the love found in liturgy and *Tanach*. In this introduction I will outline the basic elements of Fromm's theory, as well as describe some of the texts to which I will be referring throughout this paper.

Erich Fromm and *The Art of Loving*

Erich Fromm, a psychologist and philosopher who was born into an Orthodox Jewish family wrote a groundbreaking work entitled *The Art of Loving*. This work is an interesting lens through which to explore Jewish expressions and manifestations of love.

¹ Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1956), 8

² Ibid, 18

³ Ibid, 20

Fromm classifies love in five categories - brotherly love, motherly love, erotic love, self-love, and love of God. He discusses each of them as separate entities and describes both the theories behind them and their active functions. In this paper, I will also explore each of these categories, although instead of looking at love of God as a separate type of love, I will attempt to show how love of God is related to the other four types of love. I believe that each type of love for humans is related to the love of God, since, in different stories and liturgies God acts as parent, lover, friend, and a mirror of the self. Each of these categories of love can be found in Jewish literature and liturgy. I will explore how each category of love is represented in selected passages from the *Tanach* and in our *Tefillah*, and I will use each of the examples to explore how we can understand and interpret love in a Jewish context.

Fromm calls brotherly love the most “fundamental kind of love, which underlies all types of love.”⁴ Brotherly love, he says, encompasses a sense of responsibility, care, and respect. While I recognize that the terms “brother” and “fellow” are dated, in order to stay true to Fromm’s work, I will continue to use them with the understanding that we would certainly think of them as referring to both males and females. Brotherly love can be summed up by the essential commandment found in Leviticus 19:18 to “love thy neighbor as thyself.” Fromm argues that “brother” does not mean a literal sibling, but any human being, as we are all “brothers” in the world. In the book of Genesis, the many stories about brothers encompass anger, fear, jealousy, and selfless love. From these stories we learn about the importance of respect, care and unity. In Psalm 133 we say “Behold how good and how pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity,” which

⁴ Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 47

also shows the beautiful nature of this kind of love when one overcomes rivalries.

Brotherly love, according to Fromm is about compassion, and this compassion “implies the element of knowledge and of identification.”⁵ We are reminded often in the Torah to identify with, and have compassion for strangers, for “you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” Brotherly love is a love of equality, of seeing the humanity in all people and finding a unity with them.

Motherly love, according to Fromm, is the “unconditional affirmation of the child’s life and his growth.”⁶ Again, I will be using “motherly” to mean any parent-child like relationship for most of this paper, although, as will be discussed later, Fromm makes a distinction between motherly and fatherly love. Motherly love has an “altruistic, unselfish character” and so is considered “the highest kind of love, the most sacred of all emotional bonds.”⁷ A parent creates life, and the love that they have for their child helps to nurture the child and allow it to grow. This love is easy to feel and provide when a child is young, yet gets more difficult to sustain as the child grows and becomes independent. Unlike brotherly love, this is a love in which there is an intrinsic power differential, which is what makes parental love more complex and difficult as the child grows and becomes autonomous. Fromm compares this to God’s love for the world that God created. God loved and nurtured the world and the people that God created, yet as humanity evolved and grew and became self-governing, even God struggled to stay “in love” with the world. This resulted in the near-destruction of the earth during the Flood. *Ahavah Rabbah* and *Ahavat Olam* are both prayers about God’s parental love for Israel,

⁵ Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 48

⁶ Ibid, 49

⁷ Ibid, 50

and our responsibility as God's children. We also very clearly refer to God as a parent multiple times during the High Holidays in *Avinu Malkeinu*.

Unlike brotherly and motherly love which, according to Fromm, are universalistic in nature, erotic love is exclusive, "...it is the craving for complete fusion, for union with one other person."⁸ Fromm also explains that erotic love is the most deceptive of all the types of love. It is the one most easily confused and convoluted.⁹ Erotic love, Fromm says, is more than just "falling in love," as this is only a momentary breaking down of barriers between relative strangers. Fromm explains that true erotic love happens once "the stranger becomes an intimately known person..." and "...there are no more barriers to be overcome."¹⁰ He says that while we can never know another person as well as we know ourselves, in erotic love it is the physical intimacy that helps people overcome separateness. Fromm explains that even though erotic love includes a physical component, without an element of brotherly love, this kind of relationship is merely lust or sexual conquest.¹¹ Fromm adds that erotic love has one main premise, "[t]hat I love from the essence of my being - and experience the other person in the essence of his or her being."¹² This kind of love, he says, "...is a decision, it is a judgment, it is a promise."¹³ Shir haShirim is a clear example of erotic love in Judaism. The love described in this text, whether between two people or between God and Israel, is exclusive and personal. Another clear example of erotic love in Judaism comes every Shabbat when we sing *L'cha Dodi*, which describes a holy union of erotic love.

⁸ Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 52

⁹ Ibid, 53

¹⁰ Ibid, 53

¹¹ Ibid, 54

¹² Ibid, 55

One need not be narcissistic in order to love oneself. Just as it is virtuous to love a stranger simply because he or she is a human being, then it must follow, according to Fromm, that it is also virtuous to love oneself simply because of that same humanity.¹⁴ Fromm states that the Biblical commandment to "Love thy neighbor as thyself"

...implies that respect for one's own integrity and uniqueness, love for and understanding of one's own self, cannot be separated from respect and love and understanding for another individual. The love for my own self is inseparably connected with the love for any other being.¹⁵

In the Torah, the Israelites struggle with the idea of self love. In their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, they must learn not only to reject their previous slave identity, but must also learn to foster a positive self identity. They struggle to accept their new-found freedom and even attempt to return to their former slave identities when their journey becomes difficult. They have to be reminded that they are no longer slaves, and to trust in their ability to care for themselves. In our *tefillah*, we are also reminded of the importance of self love. Every morning, we thank God for giving us bodies that work properly and for the ability to live and breath. These blessings show how fundamental self love is to our daily lives. As we recognize that we are created *b'tzelem Elohim*, then we must love ourselves just as we love God.

Love of God is also a search for unity and oneness. In all theistic religions, says Fromm, God "stands for the highest value, the most desirable good."¹⁶ The way in which one loves God is dependent upon how one conceives of God. In Judaism, God is referred to as a parent, a lover, an equal partner, and a reflection of the self. Throughout the

¹³ Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 56

¹⁴ Ibid, 58

¹⁵ Ibid, 59

Torah, the nature of God changes and evolves. God begins with a despotic phase, in the garden and with Noah, then goes through a covenantal phase, acting as a parent, and then evolves past the anthropomorphized ideals and becomes a concept, or a symbol of principals. According to Fromm, at this stage God *is* love.¹⁷

When God refused to destroy the people of Nineveh, Jonah learned the lesson, which is so aptly stated by Fromm, that the performance of love is the “active concern for the life and the growth of that which we love.”¹⁸ In the *V’ahavtah*, we are commanded to love *Adonai* our God, and so in order to do this we must have an active concern for God’s place in our lives and cultivate our relationship with God. Since love for God encompasses parental love, brotherly love, erotic love, and self love, I believe that it is important to explore and nourish all of these types of love in order to serve and love God to the best of our abilities.

¹⁶ Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 63

¹⁷ Ibid 69

¹⁸ Ibid, 26

Brotherly Love

*Oh, if you were my brother
Nursed at my mother's breast,
I'd kiss you in the street
And never suffer scorn.¹⁹*

In this quote from *Shir HaShirim* 8:1, the speaker wishes that her lover were indeed her brother, so that she could display her affection for him publicly. The love between siblings is so natural and healthy, that no one would question such displays of fondness. According to Erich Fromm, brotherly love is the "most fundamental type of love."²⁰ The ability to see the humanity in another person and love them as if they were you is the basis for all other types of love. Without this ability, one would never be able to enter into a respectful, mutually beneficial relationship. Brotherly love, as defined by Fromm is a sense of "responsibility, care, respect, knowledge of any other human being, the wish to further his life."²¹ He claims that the biblical dictum to "love thy neighbor as thyself" is the quintessential manifestation of brotherly love. This kind of love is inclusive, incorporates a love for all human beings, and is based on the experience that all are one. Fromm claims that if one has developed the capacity to love at all, then one has no choice but to love his fellow.

In order to experience this love for all people, Fromm explains that we must be able to look past differences and see that all people are basically the same. "The differences in talents, intelligence, knowledge" he says "are negligible in comparison

¹⁹ Marcia Falk ed., *The Song of Songs: Love Lyrics from the Bible*. (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 1973), 25

²⁰ Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1956), 47

²¹ *Ibid*, 47

with the identity of the human core common to all men."²²

In order to experience this identity it is necessary to penetrate from the periphery to the core. If I perceive in another person mainly the surface, I perceive mainly the differences, that which separates us. If I penetrate to the core, I perceive our identity, the fact of our brotherhood.²³

One of the basic elements of brotherly love is the need and desire to help the other. Even though brotherly love is a love that knows no rank or inequality of stature, the details of our everyday existence dictate that that we are not always equal. All people experience suffering at one point or another and the essence of brotherly love is the compassion for those in need and the longing to help. Taking this to a deeper level, Fromm explains that "love of the helpless one, love of the poor and the stranger, are the beginning of brotherly love."²⁴ He says that loving someone that can help us and upon whom we rely is easy. The real act of loving comes, he claims, when we can love those who do not serve a purpose for us. Fromm cites the bible as the archetypal example of this kind of brotherly love. In the bible, he says, the "central object of man's love is the poor, the stranger, the widow and the orphan, and eventually the national enemy, the Egyptian and the Edomite."²⁵ This notion of identity, of knowing the essence of the person to whom you extend this love, is an important aspect of brotherly love for Fromm,

By having compassion for the helpless one, man begins to develop love for his brother; and in his love for himself he also loves the one who is in need of help, the frail, insecure human being. Compassion implies the element of knowledge and of identification. "You know the heart of the stranger," says the Old Testament, "for you were strangers in the land of Egypt;...therefore love the stranger!"²⁶

²² Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 47

²³ Ibid, 47

²⁴ Ibid, 48

²⁵ Ibid, 48

²⁶ Ibid, 48

In the Tanach, brotherly love as defined by Fromm is a very common theme. The Tanach is full of relationships that speak to the idea of brotherly love or fellowship, both between actual siblings and those who behave with respect and kindness towards their fellow. Beginning with Cain and Abel, through Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Leah and Rachel, Joseph and his siblings, Ephraim and Menashe, and on and on to Moses, Miriam, and Aaron, siblings play a large role in the stories of the Torah. It is interesting to note that the first relationship - Cain and Abel - is a hate-filled, murderous one, and while each subsequent relationship is filled with trials, difficulties, and all of the vicissitudes of sibling interactions, we end up with Moses, Miriam, and Aaron, a sibling team who, despite their own rivalries and problems, led the Children of Israel in a most pivotal time. It seems that through each of the sibling relationships in the Torah, we learn more and more about the true nature of brotherly love, ending with a true fellowship of siblings. They did not always agree, but were able to treat each other with the respect and care that befits “brotherly love.” The relationship between siblings can be seen as a microcosm of the ideal relationship between all people. While one has to invest energy and attention in the relationship, it can be harmonious. Love for one’s neighbor or “fellow” should be based upon the respect and care that one has for one’s siblings. Throughout the Tanach, the verb *‘ahav*, which is most often translated as “love” is also used to denote affection and esteem, similar to the kind of love we equate with “love thy neighbor.” In addition, the participle *‘ohav*, which appears 62 times in the Tanach, is used to denote “friend” at least 17 of those times.²⁷ We can see from this simple linguistic note that our bible, like Fromm, wants us to understand that we can and should

²⁷ Encyclopedia Judaica, s.v. “Love”

strive to love all people like brothers and sisters.

A prime example of brotherly love towards the neighbor in the Torah occurs at the beginning of *Parshat Vayera* (Gen 18:1-5).

The Lord appeared to him (Abraham) by the terebinths of Mamre; he was sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot. Looking up, he saw three men standing near him. As soon as he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them and, bowing to the ground, he said, ‘My lords, if it please you, do not go on past your servant. Let a little water be brought; bathe your feet and recline under the tree. And let me fetch a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves...

The very beginning of this portion is somewhat confusing. Some commentators believe that God appeared followed by three strangers, while others believe that God appeared in the form of the three strangers. Either way, what Abraham did for these guests is the epitome of brotherly love. In Genesis 18:7, Abraham ran to greet them, bowed down to them, and practically begged them to allow him to welcome them into his home. He ran to the fields, slaughtered a calf, and prepared a meal for his guests. According to Nachmanides, who interpreted the story literally, meaning God appeared and then the strangers appeared, Abraham found the need to welcome and care for the strangers more important than the need to communicate with God.²⁸ In the Babylonian Talmud, this passage is also interpreted to mean that hospitality and the care and love for the stranger is more important than welcoming the Divine Presence.²⁹

A different interpretation of this passage comes from Maimonides and the Rashbam. They say that this text is speaking in general terms and then in more specific

²⁸ Evan Moffic, “Ethics Versus Ritual.” (Union for Reform Judaism - Reform Voices of Torah, 2009)

http://urj.org/learning/torah/archives/genesis/?syspage=article&item_id=27061

²⁹ Greenspan, Mark B Greenspan, “*Beyond the Divine: Abraham and Hospitality*” (

ones. The general terms announce that God appeared to Abraham, and the specific, that God appeared in the form of the three strangers.³⁰ In this interpretation, Abraham was extending not just brotherly love to the strangers, but was doing it with the motive of love of God, as well. I believe that the greater lesson in this portion is not just to treat all strangers with dignity and to “love thy neighbor as thyself,” but also to recognize the Divine in all people, and allow the love of God to motivate our treatment of all people. Martin Buber, in his famous “I-Thou” philosophy discussed this connection between the love of people and the love of God. Buber taught that without the ability to love another person, one can not possibly love God, who is the “eternal thou.”³¹

In his book *The Wisdom of Love; Man, Woman & God in Jewish Canonical Literature*, Rabbi Naftali Rothenberg explores this kind of brotherly love as it applies to Judaism, and more specifically to the life and teachings of Rabbi Akiva. Just as Fromm claims that “love the stranger” or “love thy neighbor” is the basis of brotherly love, so did Rabbi Akiva state that “Love thy fellow as thyself...[is the] ...greatest principle in the Torah”³² in his famous debate with Ben Azai. In this discussion, Ben Azai claimed that the idea that all men come from Adam and that Adam was created in the image of God is in fact the greatest principle in the Torah. Rothenberg argues that in essence, both Akiva and Ben Azai were arguing the same point. He says that all people, having been created in the image of God, are equal, leading to equality amongst all

Torah Table Talk, 2004) http://www.oceansidejc.org/tabletalk/5764/1_04_Vayera.pdf

³⁰ Evan Moffic, “Ethics Versus Ritual.” (Union for Reform Judaism - Reform Voices of Torah, 2009)

http://urj.org/learning/torah/archives/genesis/?syspage=article&item_id=27061

³¹ Encyclopedia Judaica, s.v. “Love”

³² Naftali Rothenberg, *The Wisdom of Love: Man, Woman and God in Jewish Canonical Literature*. (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009), 94

people, thus creating a “brotherhood of men,”

...all human beings were created equal, and humanity - of which each and every individual human being is a part - embodies the image of God. Each part of humanity therefore has its own worth, just as every limb in the body has a place and value of its own.³³

This idea of equality does not imply sameness. No two people contribute the same things to society nor are their ultimate purpose the same, but, just like the limbs of a body, “since none can be eliminated without diminishing God’s image, the principle of equality is upheld inasmuch as each has its proper place. They are equal in their right to exist, and every person is responsible for the existence of her/his fellow.”³⁴ This sentiment also appears in Pirkei Avot 4:3 “Treat no one lightly and think nothing is useless, for everyone has one’s moment and everything has its place.”

Rothenberg continues to explore the more specific details of, and basis for brotherly love. He reads into Rabbi Akiva’s lesson and states that “love for thy fellow as thyself” must first start with the self. He says that we must first be able to love ourselves in order to understand what love is, and then share that love with another. The second stage, according to Rothenberg’s understanding, is a love for those closest to the self. “Boundless, unreserved love,” he says “is limited to one’s immediate surroundings - family, friends, fellow townspeople, members of one’s people...”³⁵ From here, it becomes possible to love all people. “Just as love of one’s fellow depends on love of oneself, so moral responsibility toward humanity as a whole...depends first upon love for one’s own people.”³⁶ Brotherly love is thus a gradual process, beginning with the self

³³ Rothenberg, *The Wisdom of Love*, 94

³⁴ Ibid, 95

³⁵ Ibid, 96

³⁶ Ibid, 96

and slowly expanding out to encompass all people.

According to Rothenberg, the actual act of loving can be understood as “...show[ing] kindness.”³⁷ Rothenberg explains that Rabbi Akiva exemplified brotherly love in his daily life by showing kindness to those in need. By visiting the sick and helping the poor, Rabbi Akiva truly acted in love towards others.³⁸ Rothenberg states that “The commandment ‘love thy fellow as thyself’ comprises the duty to avoid doing others ill, as well as the duty to do them good.”³⁹ Just as Shmuel Ha-Katan taught in Pirkei Avot 4:19, “Rejoice not when your enemy falls. Let not your heart be glad when another stumbles...” Love stems from respect and equitable treatment of all people. This also means loving those who don’t know how to love themselves. Rabbi Akiva taught that even in the case of a person who has no love or respect for themselves, we are still obligated, Rothenberg explains, to love others as we love ourselves,

“Love thy neighbor” depends upon “as thyself” - love of self and self-preservation first - not upon “as himself.” It is therefore unrelated to the other’s love of herself/himself, but stands alone, as a categorical obligation towards one’s fellow man.⁴⁰

This love towards one’s fellow is a theme that also appears in our prayer services. The opening line of Psalm 133, “How good and how pleasant it is that brothers dwell together” has become a mainstay of Shabbat liturgy. It is often sung at the beginning of a service as a means of welcoming all in the congregation and as an invitation to pray together. I view these words as a liturgical representation of brotherly love. We must proclaim how wonderful it is that we are all “brothers” sitting and praying together, and

³⁷ Rothenberg, *The Wisdom of Love*, 99

³⁸ Ibid, 99

³⁹ Ibid, 100

this joy of fellowship allows us to enter into prayer together. In his commentary on Psalm 133, Rashi explains that God's presence will dwell amongst the people when they dwell together and treat each other as brothers.⁴¹ I believe that the frequent use of these words in our prayer services shows how important community and brotherly love is in Judaism. A community can not be built unless the members are able to treat each other with the kind of love and respect that is fundamental to brotherly love. As it says in the Talmud (*Berakhot 6b*): "The entire world was created only for the sake of fellowship." This sense of community is the core of serving and loving God, for without the brotherly love that is so crucial to a community, we would not be able to bring God into our midst. Leo Baeck taught that "In Judaism neighbor is inseparable from man... there is no 'man' without 'fellowman,' no faith in God without faith in neighbor..."⁴² In this sense, love for each other as fellow humans translates into the ability to love God.

While brotherly love may be the most fundamental kind of love and the basis on which we learn how to treat others, the first kind of love that most people experience is Motherly love. In the next chapter I will be exploring how motherly love is the purest and most crucial kind of love.

⁴⁰ Rothenberg, *The Wisdom of Love*, 101

⁴¹ Mayer I. Gruber, *Rashi's Commentary on Psalms*. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2007), 721

⁴² Encyclopedia Judaica, s.v. "Love"

Motherly Love

*For this Child I prayed, and God has granted me my petition*⁴³

The first type of love that most people experience is Motherly love. This kind of love is described by Erich Fromm as an "...unconditional affirmation of the child's life and his needs."⁴⁴ It is this love, which is most often given and felt immediately at birth, which prevents a child from feeling the fear of dying. Without the warmth and food provided by the mother, the child would feel anxiety at the moment of separation from the womb. Not only does a mother's love for her child provide the child with comfort and security, but it also teaches the child the lesson "I am loved for what I am."⁴⁵ A mother's love, he says, needs not be acquired nor deserved. Fromm says that Motherly love is unconditional and can not be produced or controlled.⁴⁶ Unlike Brotherly love, this kind of love is inherently one of inequality.⁴⁷ The child, in most cases, has all of the needs and the mother does all of the providing. According to Fromm, "It is for this altruistic, unselfish character that Motherly love has been considered the highest kind of love, the most sacred of all emotional bonds."⁴⁸

Fromm claims that we can learn a great deal about the nature of love through understanding how a mother loves her child. We learn that love implies care, meaning that "love is the active concern for the life and growth of that which we love."⁴⁹ Fromm explains,

⁴³ 1 Sam 1:27

⁴⁴ Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1956), 49

⁴⁵ Ibid, 39

⁴⁶ Although there are obvious exceptions to this, i.e. in the case of unattached and unfit mothers, for the purposes of this paper I am considering only the "ideal" mother.

⁴⁷ Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 50

⁴⁸ Ibid, 50

No assurance of [a mother's] love would strike us as sincere if we saw her lacking in care for the infant, if she neglected to feed it, to bathe it, to give it physical comfort; and we are impressed by her love if we see her caring for the child... Where this active concern is lacking, there is no love.⁵⁰

Fromm uses the story of Jonah to further explain this point. He says that in this story, God's desire to spare the people of Nineveh is meant to teach Jonah the lesson that "the essence of love is to 'labor' for something and 'to make something grow,' that love and labor are inseparable."⁵¹ Fromm explains that "One loves that for which one labors, and one labors for that which one loves."⁵² This care and concern that is evident in Motherly love implies, according to Fromm, another aspect of the nature of love, that of responsibility.⁵³ The responsibility that a mother feels towards her child is an inherent part of her love. Responsibility, he says, is the voluntary act of responding to the needs of another human being. Jonah did not feel responsible towards the people of Nineveh, but God did. God loved the people as a mother loves a child - despite their sins and lost ways. A mother's love is forgiving and unaffected by circumstance.

In addition to the care, concern, and responsibility that are inherent to Motherly love, Fromm explains that this kind of love also includes the attempt to instill in the child a "love for living." This expression of love goes beyond simply trying to preserve and continue the child's survival, but also allows the child to believe that "...it is good to be alive, it is good to be a little boy or girl, it is good to be on this earth!"⁵⁴ Motherly love therefore encourages a child to feel as though it is good to have been born, and inspires in

⁴⁹ Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 26

⁵⁰ Ibid, 26

⁵¹ Ibid, 27

⁵² Ibid, 27

⁵³ Ibid, 28

⁵⁴ Ibid, 49

the child a “love for life.”⁵⁵ Fromm relates this to the Biblical story of creation, where God not only creates people and the world, but proclaims after each act of creation “It is good.”

Fromm’s notion of motherly love can be applied to the many stories of mothers in the Bible. It seems that many women in the Bible see it as their destiny and responsibility to be a mother, which was clearly a strong cultural norm of the time. They feel this motherly love that Fromm described even before conceiving a child at all. The desire to give birth to a child and be a mother is one of the strongest desires that women of the Bible feel. Sarah so badly wanted to have a child, that she succumbed to what she thought was her only option. Sarah arranged for her husband to impregnate her maidservant Hagar, so that she might be “built-up-with-sons through her.”⁵⁶ Sarah’s plan did not work, as Hagar’s son only caused conflict and strife for her, but Sarah’s motherly instinct did not abate. Even though she did not believe it when she was told that she would bear a son in her advanced age, when she finally did become a mother she rejoiced, “God has brought me laughter; all who hear will laugh with me.”⁵⁷ Sarah’s motherly instinct was so strong that she would do anything to protect Isaac and ensure he received all that was rightfully his. Sarah even banished Hagar and Ishmael, so that her son’s inheritance would be protected.⁵⁸ Sarah was already at an advanced age, and likely did not think that she would benefit from Isaac’s inheritance, and so she was acting only to protect her son and his future. In this example we see a mother whose love extended only to her own child. This may have been because of the difficulty that Sarah had in

⁵⁵ Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 49

⁵⁶ Gen 16:2

⁵⁷ Gen 21:6

conceiving and the length of time she had to wait before becoming a mother.

Another famous woman in the Bible who had an innate need to be a mother was Hannah. This woman prayed for a child, and so desperately wanted to become a mother that she promised to dedicate her son to God's service,

And she vowed a vow, and said; "O Lord of hosts, if Thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of Thy handmaid, and remember me, and not forget Thy handmaid, but will give unto Thy handmaid a man-child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life..."⁵⁹

Once Samuel was born, Hannah insisted on caring for him and ensuring his physical strength for several years before following through on her promise. Hannah's desire and instinct to be a mother was so strong that she was willing to forgo direct mothering of her child for many years, seeing him only once a year when she made the annual pilgrimage, just for the chance to care for him, and be a mother to him at all, "... [Eli's] mother made him a little robe, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice..."⁶⁰

Fromm argues that Motherly love, like the love we see displayed by Sarah and Hannah, while instinctual and natural when a child is an infant, becomes more difficult to enact as the child grows. In fact, he states that the most difficult love is the love for a growing child.⁶¹ As a child grows and moves away emotionally and physically from the completely dependant being that is inherent in infancy, a mother can begin to feel a rejection of her love. When the child no longer relies on her for every need, the purpose and necessity of a mother's love can be called into question. Fromm explains,

⁵⁸ Gen 21:10

⁵⁹ 1 Sam 1:11

⁶⁰ 1 Sam 2:19

⁶¹ Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 52

The very essence of motherly love is to care for the child's growth, and that means to want the child's separation from herself...The mother must not only tolerate, she must wish and support the child's separation....[a task which] requires unselfishness, the ability to give everything and to want nothing but the happiness of the loved one...Only the really loving woman, the woman who is happier in giving than in taking...can be a loving mother when the child is in the process of separation.⁶²

In her book "The Noah Paradox: Time as Burden, Time as Blessing" Carol Ochs also discusses this concept. She talks about how love is a transformative power for adults who have children. Becoming parents, she says, "...initiates a special journey of love."⁶³ She explains how parents can love a life before it is even born, and give love and care for a helpless being. As the child grows though, "...the deep, empathetic love we feel for the infant becomes inappropriate and restrictive when the child runs off after playmates. Soon, we discover what it is to love an adolescent who rejects us."⁶⁴ Ochs wonders if this is how God feels about the Jewish people. God has dealt with, she says, "...our infancy, childhood, adolescent rebellion, and egocentric early adulthood."⁶⁵ Ochs questions if God felt the same kind of rejection as the people of Israel grew that a parent can feel when a child grows and separates. It is this separation though, she argues, that allows us to feel such parental love more fully. Ochs explains that once a mother can see a child as he or she is, and not as a part of her own being, the child can then feel "whole and lovable."⁶⁶ It is only once we, as children or as the People of Israel, feel this complete love that we are able to grow, change, and transform.⁶⁷ One can only assume

⁶² Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 52

⁶³ Carol Ochs, *The Noah Paradox: Time as Burden, Time as Blessing*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 82

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 82

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 83

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 93

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 111

that the People of Israel felt God's love a number of times in Exodus, when God led them to safety through the Sea of Reeds, provided manna in their time of need, and gave them the commandments. God expressed this love in Exodus 19:4-6,

Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself. Now therefore, if ye will hearken unto My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be Mine own treasure from among all peoples; for all the earth is Mine; and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation...⁶⁸

Ochs develops Fromm's notion of motherly love by applying it to both parents and exploring the growth of that love. What Ochs does not do is distinguish between motherly and fatherly love. Hence, I must return to Fromm in order to explore this difference, as Fromm makes a clear distinction between the love given by a mother and the love given by a father. These distinctions are rather stereotypical, and I would argue that the parental roles in modern day have shifted dramatically, but Fromm was writing from a perspective of very clear male and female roles and attitudes. To Fromm, God acts as both mother and father when showing love. Fromm explains that while a mother's love is unconditional, a father loves a child for what the child can create and produce. Moreover, a father loves a child, according to Fromm, because the child is similar to the father. The nature of fatherly love, he says, is

...that he makes demands, establishes principles and laws, and that his love for the son depends on the obedience of the latter to these demands. He likes best the son who is most like him, who is most obedient and who is best fitted to become his successor, as the inheritor of his possessions.⁶⁹⁷⁰

This description of a father, to Fromm, is also the description of the God of the Bible.

⁶⁸ Ex 19:4-6

⁶⁹ Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 65

⁷⁰ Fromm does not mention the relationship that fathers have with their daughters

In patriarchal religions, he says, one loves God as a father; “I assume he is just and strict, that he punishes and rewards; and eventually that he will elect me as his favorite son; as God elected Abraham-Israel, as Isaac elected Jacob, as God elects his favorites nation.”⁷¹ Fromm argues that while through the act of creation and through caring for people, God acted as a mother, as the people grew and evolved God became more of a father figure, by instituting rules, laws, rewards and punishments.

At times, those punishments became excessive. In his article “Divine Narcissism and Yahweh’s Parenting Style” Stuart Lasine argues that God is not just a father, but an abusive father. He claims that God is a parent “who may seek the loyalty and submission he needs from his children by breaking their spirit, by burdening them with feelings of guilt and inadequacy, or by keeping them cravenly dependent upon him.”⁷² He cites Deuteronomy 8:5 which states that “...the Lord your God disciplines you just as a man disciplines his son” saying that God’s attempts to discipline Israel in this fashion has caused the people of Israel to view God as “...the source of strength and life to whom they must submit and remain loyal, and whom they must worship.”⁷³ This argument is a helpful corrective to Fromm’s description of fatherly love, since as we explore God as a parent we will see both the punitive God and the God of all-encompassing and unconditional love.

Despite this patriarchal leaning of the biblical God, Fromm explains that people still desire the motherly God. People want to feel “...faith in her love, that no matter whether I am poor and powerless, no matter whether I have sinned, she will love me...

⁷¹ Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 67

⁷² Stuart Lasine. “Divine Narcissism and Yahweh’s Parenting Style.” In *Biblical Interpretation v. 10*, 36-56, Wichita State University; 2002

whatever happens to me, she will forgive me.”⁷⁴ This craving for a motherly God is often satisfied in Jewish mystical traditions, through the idea of the feminine *Shechinah*.⁷⁵

There are also a number of references in the biblical text to God as a motherly figure.

This occurs in the book of Isaiah when the people complain that God has forgotten them;

“Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, these may forget, yet will not I forget thee”⁷⁶ and again “As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem.”⁷⁷

While God is not specifically called a mother in the Bible, in his article “Parental Love as a Metaphor for Divine-Human Love,” Richard Patterson explains that “...as a mother bears a child, so it was God who gave birth to Israel (Deut 32:18), nourished him, and saw to his early training (Deut 32:11-14). Indeed, God's love for Israel is like that of a mother's love for her child.”⁷⁸

Rabbi Akiva used many of these references to God as a parent as a way of teaching why and how the People of Israel are loved,

Human beings are loved because they were made in God's image. That they were created in God's image was made known by a special love, as it is said, ‘For God made human beings in the divine image.’ [Gen 9:6] Israel is loved for they are called children of God. That they were called children of God was made known to them by a special love, as it is said, ‘You are children of *Adonai* your God.’ [Deut. 14:1] Israel is [even more] loved because to them was given a precious instrument. That such a precious instrument was given to them was made known to them by a special love, as it is said, ‘For I have given you a good doctrine, do not

⁷³ Lasine. *Divine Narcissism and Yahweh's Parenting Style*

⁷⁴ Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 67

⁷⁵ Ibid, 66

⁷⁶ Isaiah 49:15

⁷⁷ Isaiah 66:13

⁷⁸ Richard D. Patterson, “Parental Love as a Metaphor for the Divine-Human Love.” In *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* v. 46, 205-216, June 2003

forsake my Torah. [Prov. 4:2].⁷⁹

This exact teaching of Rabbi Akiva appears in our liturgy as well. On the High Holidays we sing “*Avinu Malkeinu*” referring to God as “Our Father, our King.” In our daily and Shabbat services, we recite the words of *Ahavat Olam* and *Ahavah Rabbah*, which talk about God’s parental love for us. *Ahavat Olam* and *Ahavah Rabbah* are considered to be parallel prayers, the former recited in the evening, and the latter in the morning. Both prayers talk about God’s love for the people of Israel, and refer to this love as being like that of a parent’s. In *Ahavah Rabbah* God is referred to as a father, and we plead with this father to teach us the laws of life, just as our ancestors were taught. We understand that God shows God’s love for us by teaching us the laws and giving us the Torah. Just as a parent shows a child love by offering guidance, structure, and rules, so does God give us the Torah as the greatest display of love.⁸⁰ While in *Ahavat Olam* God is not referred to as either parent or father, the parental imagery remains. God has loved us with an “eternal love” and this love manifested itself in the teaching of law and Torah. Here we learn that God’s love has abided throughout the generations, and so will continue to exist in our day. We affirm that since God has always loved and guided us, we will continue to study Torah and follow God’s laws. Just as a child has no reason to doubt a parent that has not yet led them astray, neither do we have any reason to question God’s love and best intentions for us. We reciprocate God’s love by engaging in Torah, and ensure that this love is eternal by transmitting the teachings through our children.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Pirkei Avot 3:14

⁸⁰ Elliot N. Dorff, “Birkat Hatorah: Blessing on Revelation.” In *The Sh’ma and its Blessings*, vol. 1, of *My People’s Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries*, 67-82. (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1997), 71

⁸¹ Ellen Frankel, “Blessing on Revelation: Ahavat Olam.” In *Welcoming the Night*:

The love that we feel from God then inspires us to love God in return, as is described in the *Sh'ma*, which immediately follows both *Ahavaḥ Rabbah* and *Ahavat Olam*. While the language of the text is masculine and conjures up images of a father, I would argue that the all-encompassing and nurturing quality of the love described in these prayers adds an element of the Motherly love that Fromm describes. In these prayers God acts both as mother and father, and we are grateful for the guidance and love that God provides.

As we can see, Fromm's categories of fatherly and motherly love, with further clarification from other scholars, give us a clear picture of parents and parental love. We can then see all of these characteristics in the God of Israel, and recognize God's parental acts of loving.

Minchah and Ma'ariv, vol. 9, of *My People's Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries*, 57-65. (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005) 62

Erotic Love

*Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh.*⁸²

Since the beginning of time, or more specifically, the sixth day of creation, Erotic love has been a fundamental aspect of human existence. Erich Fromm explains that this kind of love is the “craving for complete fusion, for union with one other person.”⁸³ Erotic love, he says, begins with a biological longing for the union between the masculine and feminine poles. I would agree that sexual desire is not exclusive to male-female relationships, but that homosexual urges are also included in this biological desire for union.

Fromm explains that the creation of Eve from Adam’s flesh is the perfect example of how male and female was once one, and ever since have yearned to be reunited. This, Fromm claims, is where the urge for sexual union originates, and this sexual desire is one of the elements of the general craving for fusion.⁸⁴ This view can also be found in the Zohar, where it states,

When G-d creates the human soul, He creates the male and female as one. But as the soul descends into this world, it divides into two - male and female. The complete soul is the combination of male and female. This is why males and females are so attracted to one another.⁸⁵

Just as Fromm suggests, the Zohar is explaining that sexual desire stems from a desire for union and wholeness.

Despite clear biological yearning, Fromm warns that erotic love is “perhaps the

⁸² Gen 2:24

⁸³ Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1956), 52

⁸⁴ Ibid, 33

⁸⁵ The Orthodox Union, “Love” from *The Orthodox Union Department of Education*
<http://www.ou.org/pardes/love.htm>

most deceptive form of love.”⁸⁶ Erotic love, he says, is often confused with the experience of “falling” in love. When two people fall in love, it is a “sudden collapse of barriers between two strangers“, a sudden intimacy, which is most often short-lived.⁸⁷ Fromm’s definition of erotic love goes beyond a purely sexual union. In fact he claims that the temporary state of falling in love is most typically a craving for a physical union, while erotic love is a craving for a more intimate emotional connection in addition to the physical.⁸⁸ Falling in love is not a sustainable emotion, but true erotic love is sustainable. While Fromm uses the word “erotic” in the sense of the Greek word “eros” which simply means marital or passionate love, I would be more apt to name it “romantic love,” which to me does not have the same sexual connotation as “erotic,” but I will continue to use Fromm’s label. Fromm explains that mere “falling in love” is seeking closeness with a stranger, which, once the closeness has been achieved typically leads to the desire to seek the same closeness with someone else. In contrast, true erotic love is exclusive.⁸⁹ It is a state of being completely and fully fused with only one person. Fromm warns that this exclusivity is not to be confused with possessive attachment. In the case of possessive attachment the two people merge into one being and separate themselves from the rest of human kind.

True erotic love is a love for the other as they are, not as an extension of the self. Being in an erotic love relationship still leaves a person able to partake in brotherly and motherly love for others. Fromm says that erotic love has only one premise: “That I love from the essence of my being - and experience the other person in the essence of his or

⁸⁶ Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 53

⁸⁷ Ibid, 53

⁸⁸ Ibid, 53

her being.”⁹⁰

Fromm explains that erotic love is beyond the emotional, it is also an act of will.

He explains life-long love by saying,

To love somebody is not just a strong feeling - it is a decision, it is a judgment, it is a promise. If love were only a feeling, there would be no basis for the promise to love each other forever. A feeling comes and it may go. How can I judge that it will stay forever, when my act does not involve judgment and decision?⁹¹

This is not to say that erotic love is only cerebral. What Fromm proposes is that the physical and emotional yearning for a union with another must be present in combination with the choice to maintain a relationship, in order for it to truly be erotic love;

Both views then, that of erotic love as completely individual attraction, unique between two specific persons, as well as the other view that erotic love is nothing but an act of will, are true - or, as it may be put more aptly, the truth is neither this nor that.⁹²

In this sense, Fromm disagrees with Freud, who claims that any kind of tenderness in an erotic relationship is simply a “sublimation of the sexual instinct.”⁹³ Fromm is very clear that true erotic love must also include brotherly love, or else it is simply lust.

The choice that needs to be made in order for true erotic love to be maintained can be better understood in instances of arranged marriages. In such cases two people who may not be in love initially can foster an erotic love relationship once they have decided to commit to the relationship. Erotic love, in its purest form, can grow from passion, or it can grow from a well considered choice. Two people may have the potential to love one

⁸⁹ Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 55

⁹⁰ Ibid, 55

⁹¹ Ibid, 56

⁹² Ibid, 57

⁹³ Ibid, 55

another, but it is not until they decide to pursue and commit to this love that erotic love can grow. Traditionally, Jewish marriages were arranged by a matchmaker or *shadkhan*. These were highly trained individuals who chose matches based upon "...qualities of character, piety, intelligence and competence that would lend permanence to a marriage..."⁹⁴ The couple had to agree to the match before a marriage took place, and so there was an element of affection needed, but couples were not formed on the basis of immediate love. This was because "Judaism is suspicious of powerful drives that cannot be disciplined, regarding "blind" decisions as non-ethical. It considers ecstasy temporary and undependable in terms of long commitment, unless it can be transformed into everyday acts of love."⁹⁵ Lamm, unknowingly picking up on Fromm, recognizes that love is more than a purely physical or purely emotional attraction. While I like the idea of allowing rationality to have a role in choosing a mate, I also believe that physical and emotional attraction matters. I agree with Lamm that a clear-minded choice is necessary in true erotic love, but I also believe that there are irrational, inexplicable forces at work as well.

The very first *shadkhan* in the Bible was Eliezer, Abraham's servant. Eliezer was sent by Abraham to "go to my country, to my people, and take a wife for my son, for Isaac."⁹⁶ Eliezer was charged with finding a woman whom he deemed to be suitable for Isaac. In order to find this woman, he planned a test. He took his camels to the well, waited for the women to appear and said,

So let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say: Let down thy

⁹⁴ Maurice Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Love and Marriage*. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), 6

⁹⁵ Ibid, 13

⁹⁶ Gen 24:4

pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say: Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also; let the same be she that Thou hast appointed for Thy servant, even for Isaac⁹⁷

Rebecca appeared and promptly fulfilled these requirements. Eliezer realized that she was "...generous, extraordinarily hospitable, and selfless, kind to total strangers and even animals."⁹⁸ Eliezer brought Rebecca back to Isaac, and when they met, Isaac "...brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebecca, and she became his wife and he loved her."⁹⁹ According to Rabbi Yaakov Haber, the fact that "love" is listed as the last step in their relationship shows that "...the longer Isaac and Rebecca were married, the more they grew to love each other."¹⁰⁰

Another example of erotic love in the Bible is the love that Jacob has for Rachel. This love had a more romantic beginning than that of Isaac and Rebecca, yet it also entailed the clear decision on the part of Jacob to commit wholeheartedly to his growing love. He was sent out specifically by his parents to look for a wife from among his relatives, so that she would have morals and values akin to his own, and once he found her he was willing to "... spend seven years heroically doing menial work in order to marry his beloved, and he never argues with his father-in-law about the exorbitant cost of that love."¹⁰¹ Jacob's erotic love for Rachel is a combination of romance and a practical, reasonable selection.

The union described by Fromm that is attained in erotic love relationships such as

⁹⁷ Gen 24:14

⁹⁸ Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Love and Marriage*, 4

⁹⁹ Gen 24:67

¹⁰⁰ The Orthodox Union, "Love" from *The Orthodox Union Department of Education*
<http://www.ou.org/pardes/love.htm>

¹⁰¹ Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Love and Marriage*, 15

the couples in the Bible, has been compared to the oneness that Jewish mystics seek to attain with God. This oneness is referred to as *Dveikut* or cleaving. This is the same verb that describes how man and woman unite and “become one flesh” in Genesis 2:24. Jewish mystics seek this oneness with God through meditation, prayer and emulating God’s attributes.¹⁰² This oneness with God is considered to be the highest possible spiritual attainment. The spiritual connection that people can feel for their beloved is the ultimate goal in the spiritual connection to God. As Fromm states, “... the love of God is neither the knowledge of God in thought, nor the thought of one’s love of God, but the act of experiencing the oneness with God.”¹⁰³ On this point of the oneness of God, Rabbi Yaakov Haber, the National Director of Jewish Education for the Orthodox Union, offers us insight. He says that when we read in the Bible that “God created the human in His image, in the image of G-d He created them, male and female He created them,”¹⁰⁴ we are to understand that this means that neither man nor woman alone exist in the image of God. Only “[w]hen a man and a woman are united in perfect harmony,” he says, “together they form the "image of God.”¹⁰⁵

Carol Ochs opens up this discussion. She begins with a discussion of Baruch Spinoza, who said that the only proper object of love is God. Ochs explains that Spinoza does not mean that people should turn away from each other and only towards God, but that people should strive to “perceive our beloved deeply enough to penetrate to where

¹⁰² Encyclopedia Judaica, s.v. “Love”

¹⁰³ Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 78

¹⁰⁴ Gen 1:27

¹⁰⁵ The Orthodox Union, “Love” from *The Orthodox Union Department of Education* <http://www.ou.org/pardes/love.htm>

we can find God's presence in our beloved."¹⁰⁶ This leads me to believe God can be found in the most true and deeply loving erotic relationships. Ochs continues to explain how *Shir HaShirim*, which Jacob Neusner calls "...a sequence of statements of urgent love between God and Israel..."¹⁰⁷ teaches us both about erotic love for people and erotic love for God. One of the lines that she focuses on specifically is in chapter 1 verse 3 "Your name is like finest oil." Ochs explains that when we are first in love, we want to repeat the name of our beloved as much as possible. "To speak our beloved's name is an experience that is thrilling, embarrassing, and filled with memories and intimate associations."¹⁰⁸ She compares this to the mystics who combined the letters of God's names and used this as an ecstatic mantra as part of their attempt to attain holy *Dvekut*.

Another verse that Ochs explores is chapter 2 verse 14, "...O my dove, in the cranny of the rocks, hidden by the cliff, let me see your face." This verse evokes thoughts of Moses' desire to see God's face. Ochs explains that Moses' love for God was so much like erotic love that he needed to see all of God, to experience God as a whole entity. Ochs draws this idea out to say that when we deeply love our beloved, and desire to experience them in all of their forms, it is the same as loving God completely.¹⁰⁹ From this I can conclude that by experiencing a deep and complete love for another, we can learn how to properly and completely love God. A recent translation of this same verse by Ariel Bloch and Chana Bloch serves to further illustrate this point when they emphasize how the speaker desires to see all of the beloved,

¹⁰⁶ Carol Ochs, *The Noah Paradox: Time as Burden, Time as Blessing*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 85

¹⁰⁷ Jacob Neusner, "The Passionate Love Affair of God and Israel." In *Israel's Love Affair with God: Song of Songs*, 1-13. (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1993), 1

¹⁰⁸ Ochs, *The Noah Paradox*, 89

My dove in the clefts of the rock,
In the shadow of the cliff,
Let me see you, all of you!
Let me hear your voice,
Your delicious song.
I love to look at you¹¹⁰

This lover is overwhelmed with the desire to delight in the entirety of her beloved, just as Moses felt the desperate need to experience all of God.

Chapter 5 of *Shir HaShirim* describes a woman who frantically searches for her love, but can not find him.

“I opened to my love but he had slipped away. How I wanted him when he spoke! I sought him everywhere but could not find him. I called his name but he did not answer.”¹¹¹

This can easily be understood as both a search for a human lover and for God, as suggested by Neusner. Seeking God is a constant endeavor that must be undertaken in order to achieve unity. Just as a person must seek out their beloved, so must we all seek out God, if a union with God is what we desire. In this sense, *Shir HaShirim* is a perfect example of Fromm’s idea of erotic love being both physical and spiritual.

In various other places in the Bible, God acts as lover of Israel. In her article “Hosea? Yes! A God Who Makes Alive” Diane Jacobson points out that in chapter 2 verse 18, God declares that Israel shall no longer call God “my Master,” but rather “my Husband” or “my Man.” Jacobson explains that this change of title denotes a shift in the relationship between God and Israel,

The relationship transformed is a relationship of man and woman, husband

¹⁰⁹ Ochs, *The Noah Paradox*, 91

¹¹⁰ Ariel Bloch and Chana Bloch. *The Song of Songs: A New Translation*. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 61

¹¹¹ Bloch, *The Song of Songs*, 85

and wife, *not* master and servant. This relationship is marked by righteousness, justice, love, mercy, and mostly faithfulness born of true and deep knowledge of the Lord.¹¹²

This erotic connection between God and the People of Israel is also expressed in our Shabbat liturgy. During the *Kabbalat Shabbat* service, we sing the words of *Lecha Dodi*. This is a mystical text written by Shlomo Alkabetz in the 1500s in the city of Safed.¹¹³ On one level, the poem is about the love between Israel and God, and their shared love for the Sabbath, while on another level it is about the love between a bride and groom.¹¹⁴ According to the Talmud, in late antiquity the rabbis would dress in white, the traditional garb of a groom, take to the field on Friday evening and shout “come my beloved, let us greet the Sabbath bride!”¹¹⁵ It is believed that this is the basis for the chorus of *Lecha Dodi*. In the mystical tradition, Shabbat was associated with the feminine aspects of God, the *Shechinah*, and the Sabbath was thought of as “...a day of mystical union between the Jewish people and God.”¹¹⁶ The *Lecha Dodi* poem urges the Sabbath bride to come forth and unite with God and the Jewish people. The word *dodi*, while literally meaning “beloved” is also a mystical acrostic for God’s name. When the

¹¹² Diane, L Jacobson, “Hosea? Yes! A God Who Makes Alive.” In *Currents in Theology and Mission*. V. 23, June, 1996

¹¹³ Lawrence Hoffman, “L’khah Dodi: The Divine Union of Bride and Groom.” In *Kabbalat Shabbat: Welcoming Shabbat in the Synagogue*, vol. 8, of *My People’s Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries*, 115-138. (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005), 134

¹¹⁴ Reuven Kimelman, “L’khah Dodi: The Divine Union of Bride and Groom.” In *Kabbalat Shabbat: Welcoming Shabbat in the Synagogue*, vol. 8, of *My People’s Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries*, 115-138. (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005), 128

¹¹⁵ My Jewish Learning. “Shabbat Themes and Theology”, http://www.myjewishlearning.com/practices/Ritual/Shabbat_The_Sabbath/Themes_and_Theology.shtml?PRRI

¹¹⁶ My Jewish Learning. “Shabbat Themes and Theology”, http://www.myjewishlearning.com/practices/Ritual/Shabbat_The_Sabbath/Themes_and_Theology.shtml?PRRI

word “*dodi*” is written backwards and the *dalet* is replaced by the next letter in the alphabet, *hey*, the result is God’s name YHVH. According to the mystics, this can be interpreted to mean that God is our beloved.¹¹⁷

I believe that, just as Fromm states, erotic love must include physical, spiritual, and rational elements. In order to be fully united with another person, there must also be an element of the Divine in that relationship. When we love another person completely, we love the sparks of God that are within them. In this way, we are uniting not just with that person, but also with God. We can not love another person fully without recognizing the divinity within them, and as such God really is, as the mystics claim, at least a part of our beloved.

Theology.shtml?PRRI

¹¹⁷ Reuven Kimelman, “L’khah Dodi: The Divine Union of Bride and Groom.” In *Kabbalat Shabbat: Welcoming Shabbat in the Synagogue*, vol. 8, of *My People’s Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries*, 115-138. (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing,, 2005), 128

Self-Love

*“I am dark, daughters of Jerusalem, and I am beautiful!... Do not see me only as dark:
the sun has stared at me”*¹¹⁸

The most complicated and difficult love to describe and explore is the love of self. Very often self love is confused with narcissism or egocentrism. One who has a healthy love for oneself is one who takes care of his or her body, spirit, and mind. Erich Fromm believed that the ability to love any one else stems from the ability to love oneself. Fromm explains,

...my own self must be as much an object of my love as another person.
The affirmation of one's own life, happiness, growth, freedom is rooted in one's capacity to love... If an individual is able to love productively, he loves himself, too; if he can love *only* others, he cannot love at all.¹¹⁹

Fromm continues to explain that the desire to know oneself is the basic premise of all psychology.¹²⁰ Carol Ochs explains that while in Western society knowledge is associated with power and love with a loss of control, the opposite of knowledge, the biblical view of knowledge is “not distinct from love.”¹²¹ While Ochs does not explain this point in much detail, I understand that she is referring to the use of the word “know” in the bible as a euphemism for sex or love, as in Genesis 4:1; “And the man knew Eve his wife, and she conceived...” In the bible, she says, knowledge entails vulnerability, and opens the “knower” up to the possibility of being transformed by that which is known.¹²² Fromm similarly explains that all of the self exploration in the world can not teach us

¹¹⁸ Shir HaShirim 1:5

¹¹⁹ Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1956), 60

¹²⁰ Ibid, 31

¹²¹ Carol Ochs, *The Noah Paradox: Time as Burden, Time as Blessing*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 83

¹²² Ibid, 83

everything that we want to know about ourselves, and that the only path to true self knowledge is through the act of loving oneself. Just like love for others requires care, responsibility, respect and knowledge, so does a love for the self require all of those elements.

Fromm recognizes that a self-love that includes care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge can easily be confused with selfishness. He explains that both Calvin and Freud believed self-love to be sinful.¹²³ He explains that Freud described self-love as the same as narcissism, which is the “turning of the libido toward oneself.”¹²⁴ Narcissism is the first stage of human development, and Freud believed that a person who loves his or herself is someone who has reverted back to this primary stage. Freud said that anyone who has reverted back to the narcissistic stage is incapable of loving anyone other than the self and is thus considered “insane.”¹²⁵ Freud believed love to be simply a “manifestation of the libido” and that this libido can only be turned towards others or towards the self, not both.

Love and self-love are thus mutually exclusive in the sense that the more there is of one, the less there is of the other. If self-love is bad, it follows that unselfishness is virtuous.¹²⁶

In contrast, Fromm argues that self-love and love for others are not mutually exclusive.

Fromm states that if it is indeed virtuous to love another simply because the other is human - as discussed in the chapter on Brotherly Love - then it must follow that it is also

¹²³ Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 57

¹²⁴ Ibid, 58

¹²⁵ Ibid, 58

¹²⁶ Ibid, 58

a virtue to love oneself, since “I am a human being, too.”¹²⁷ Further, Fromm claims that without the ability to love oneself, one can not possibly love another, for “loving thy neighbor” relies upon “as thyself.”

The idea expressed in the Biblical “Love thy neighbor as thyself!” implies that respect for one’s own integrity and uniqueness, love for and understanding of one’s own self, cannot be separated from respect and love and understanding for another individual. The love for my own self is inseparably connected with the love for any other being.¹²⁸

This idea was also discussed by Naftali Rothenberg, who wrote that Rabbi Akiva explained that in order to “love thy neighbor as thyself” love of the self must come first - it is a precondition to the ability to love another.¹²⁹ Rothenberg also explains how Hillel was eluding to self-love when he explained that the basic principal of Judaism is “What is hateful to you do not do unto your fellow.” Rothenberg says that even before we can know what is hateful to us, we must first have a “basic sense of self worth.”¹³⁰ Without valuing and respecting ourselves, we can not value, respect and love others.

The ability to love oneself before one can love others is a vital step in understanding the importance of self worth, and yet many people believe that self-love can lead to selfishness. Fromm continues to explain that selfishness in fact comes from a lack of self-love. Fromm says that it is a lack of fondness and care for the self that leaves people feeling empty and frustrated. This in turn causes a lack of interest in the needs of others and an interest only in the self. Selfish people may seem to care too much about themselves, but they are only trying to fill the void and compensate for their failure to

¹²⁷ Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 58

¹²⁸ Ibid, 59

¹²⁹ Naftali Rothenberg, *The Wisdom of Love: Man, Woman and God in Jewish Canonical Literature*. (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009), 96

truly care for themselves. The selfish person, says Fromm “[is] incapable of loving others, [and is] not capable of loving themselves either.”¹³¹ Fromm concludes his explanation of self-love by quoting the theologian and philosopher Meister Eckhart who said,

If you love yourself, you love everybody else as you do yourself. As long as you love another person less than you love yourself, you will not really succeed in loving yourself, but if you love all alike, including yourself, you will love them as one person and that person is both God and man.¹³² Thus he is a great and righteous person who, loving himself, loves all others equally.¹³³

I believe that both Fromm and Eckhart are echoing the sentiment that one can not give fully of his or herself to others if one has not learned to also focus on oneself. Just as we learn that we can not care for our congregants if we do not practice good self-care, neither can we know how to love others if we do not first love ourselves.

Carol Ochs, similar to Eckhart, discusses how a true love for the self can be inspired by the knowledge and feeling of God’s love for us. Since God loves us simply because we exist and not for any specific characteristics, this unconditional love can teach us to love ourselves despite our flaws. Two examples from Exodus of this need for self-love come to mind, that of Moses and of the Children of Israel. Ochs shows how both Moses and the Israelites needed to learn how to love themselves and rely on God’s love for them in order to inspire this self-love. She looks at Moses’ life from a different perspective than we’re used to, namely Moses’ own perspective. We know that Moses

¹³⁰ Rothenberg, *The Wisdom of Love*, 96

¹³¹ Fromm *The Art of Loving*, 61

¹³² Eckhart believed that by knowing and loving God, a person penetrates God and God and the self become one. Eckhart did not believe in a true distinction between God and “man”

was a Hebrew raised by Pharaoh's daughter, but what we don't tend to think about is how Moses must have felt about himself, knowing that he was related to the slaves that were so disliked by his adoptive family. Ochs believes that this may have caused Moses to feel deep shame over his true identity and this was why he was not willing to respond to God's call.¹³⁴ When God first called to Moses, Moses was so ashamed that he "...hid his face."¹³⁵ God continued to appeal to Moses, and Moses showed how little he thought of himself, "...Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?"¹³⁶ It was not until God promised to remain with Moses that he was able to, albeit timidly, accept the assignment. As God continued to support and unconditionally love Moses, Moses himself grew in his confidence and self-love to eventually become a great leader of the Children of Israel.¹³⁷

The Children of Israel too had to overcome their lack of self-love and change their self-image in order to survive their trek through the desert and enter the Land of Israel. Ochs explains that even though enslavement was brought upon the Hebrew by others, they eventually took the slave mentality upon themselves. They felt victimized and had very little self-love.¹³⁸ When God answered their cries, the Israelites needed to learn how to love both God and themselves in order to survive. Ochs explains that "It is not enough to reject the identity of a slave. Some positive identity must emerge."¹³⁹ Exodus, she says, is the story of the deepening love between God and the Israelites, and in turn, of the

¹³³ Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 63

¹³⁴ Ochs, *The Noah Paradox*, 107

¹³⁵ Exodus 3:6

¹³⁶ Exodus 3:11

¹³⁷ Ochs, *The Noah Paradox*, 108

¹³⁸ Ibid, 110

¹³⁹ Ibid, 110

deepening of the love of the Israelites for themselves. The Israelites eventually grew to understand that God loved them, and “[b]ecause we feel loved, we are willing to be transformed.”¹⁴⁰

Rabbinic Judaism also believed in the importance of self-love, and believed that we all must love ourselves because we are created in the Divine Image. As described in the story of Creation; “So God created the human beings in [the divine] image, creating [them] in the image of God, creating them male and female.”¹⁴¹ Rabbi Akiva explained that God loves us because we were made in the Divine image, and so we must also love each other.¹⁴² This must inevitably include loving ourselves, since we must love all of God’s children equally. We are taught in our tradition that caring for ourselves must always be a priority. We are told that even the most highly observed of laws, such as fasting on Yom Kippur, must be broken if following them puts a person at any personal risk. Surprisingly, though Judaism places such a strong emphasis on “loving the neighbor,” even this is to be overlooked if the self is at risk. There is a famous debate in the Talmud between Rabbi Akiva and Ben Petura in which they discuss saving the life of another versus preserving one’s own life.

Two men are journeying through the desert and one of them has a single jug of water. If one of them drinks it, he alone will get back to civilization. But if both of them drink it, both of them will die. Ben Petura taught that they should both drink and die, rather than one of them should behold his companion's death, as it is said, "That thy brother may live with thee." Until Rabbi Akiva came and taught . . . "that thy brother may live with thee"; your own life comes before the life of your fellow man.¹⁴³

In this debate, Rabbi Akiva explains that your brother can not live with you, if you

¹⁴⁰ Ochs, *The Noah Paradox*, 111

¹⁴¹ Gen 1:27

¹⁴² Rothenberg, *The Wisdom of Love*, 97

yourself are not alive. He shows that we must first take care of ourselves before taking care of others. In Pirkei Avot 1:14 we are taught “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And, if I am for myself alone, then what am I?” This is exactly the point that Fromm made - we must be able to love ourselves in order to receive love from others, and we must be able to love ourselves and others in order to be wholly loving individuals.

God’s love for us and our love for ourselves is expressed every morning in our daily prayer service. In the *Birkot HaShachar* we take a few opportunities to express how wondrous our bodies and souls are, and thank God for making us in the Divine image. In the preliminary blessings, we say *Asher Yatzar* which blesses God for forming humans with “...wisdom and created a system of ducts and conduits in them.”¹⁴⁴ This blessing is meant to be said after one uses the bathroom, but has been adopted into our daily service. I believe that this may be partly because it is so important to be reminded of God’s love for us and thus our love for ourselves not only at a time when we are acutely aware of our bodily functions, but at all times. According to Elliot Dorff this blessing,

...articulates our dependence on the intricate functioning of our body, warning us not to take bodily operations for granted: rather, we are to see in our very bodies a wondrous sign of God’s providence, which extends beyond our prayers; before we ever learned to pray, we were created with the miraculous ability to flourish.¹⁴⁵

Every morning we recognize how well our bodies work and we recognize how difficult

¹⁴³ Bava Metzia 62a

¹⁴⁴ Lawrence Hoffman, “Preliminary Blessings” In *Birkot HaShachar*, vol. 5, of *My People’s Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries*, 107-117. (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001), 107

¹⁴⁵ Elliot N. Dorff, “Preliminary Blessings” In *Birkot HaShachar*, vol. 5, of *My People’s Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries*, 107-117. (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001), 111

our lives would be if our bodies stopped working. We love the Creator of such a glorious bodily system, and love the bodies that function so mysteriously.

Our morning service continues with *Elohai N'shama* which moves from talking about how wonderful our bodies are to how wonderful our souls are,

My God, the soul You have put within me is a pure one. You created it; You formed it; You breathed it into me; You keep it within me; and You will take it from me and return it to me in the hereafter. So long as my soul is within me, I gratefully acknowledge You, Adonai my God and my ancestors' God, Master of all creatures, Lord of all souls.¹⁴⁶

This blessing acknowledges that humans possess an inner beauty that is to be loved and cherished. Our souls, which belong to God, return to their Source every night, and we are grateful that this part of God is bestowed upon us each morning.

It seems to me that these two blessings are strongly connected. In *Asher Yatzar* we acknowledge what is to be loved about our bodies, and in *Elohai Neshama* we acknowledge what is to be loved about our souls. In both cases, it is God's wisdom and the fact that we are created in God's image that is the basis for our need to love ourselves. The Kabbalists believe that every person has within them a Divine spark, and these blessings show us that our souls and our bodies have Divine properties. If we are to "Love Adonai your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might"¹⁴⁷ then it follows that we must also love the Divine in ourselves in order to love God fully. As Rabbi Akiva said in Pirkei Avot 3:14

Human beings are loved because they were made in God's image. That they were created in God's image was made known by a special love, as it is said "for God made human beings in the divine image."

¹⁴⁶ Lawrence Hoffman, "Preliminary Blessings" In *Birkot HaShachar*, vol. 5, of *My People's Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries*, 107-117. (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001), 119

¹⁴⁷ Deut 6:5

Just as the woman in *Shir HaShirim* can recognize that she is beautiful as she is, “I am dark, daughters of Jerusalem, and I am beautiful” because the love that she feels has taught her to see her own beauty¹⁴⁸, so too should we see our own beauty and love ourselves, if for no other reason than God loves us.

¹⁴⁸ Ochs, *The Noah Paradox*, 89

Conclusion

*Of all pleasure, how sweet is the taste of love?*¹⁴⁹

Rabbi Akiva taught that love is the source and the explanation of all phenomena of positive human behavior.¹⁵⁰ Throughout our tradition we see that love is often the solution to our problems, and the ultimate goal of fulfillment in our lives. This is exemplified in the famous story of the Baal Shem Tov,

A father once came to the Baal Shem Tov with a problem concerning his son. He complained that his son was forsaking Judaism and morality and asked the rabbi what he could do. The Baal Shem Tov answered: “Love him more.”¹⁵¹

The Baal Shem Tov understood the power of love and its ability to connect people. The sages, as seen in Pirkei Avot 2:9 also understood the importance of love in all of its forms,

He [Rabbi Yochanan] said to them: “Go and see which way one should follow.” Rabbi Eliezer said, “[One should have] a good eye.” Rabbi Yehoshua said, “[One should be] a good friend.” Rabbi Yose said, “[One should be] a good neighbor.” Rabbi Shimon said, “[One should] anticipate the future.” Rabbi Elazar said, “[One should have] a good heart.” Rabbi Yochanan responded, “I prefer Rabbi Elazar’s answer to all of the other answers because it contains all of the others.”

Rabbi Elazar understood that the ability to love and be loved was the most important path that someone could take. Love is the source of all of our meaningful connections and relationships, with other people, and with God. As Erich Fromm explains,

...the basis for our need to love lies in the experience of separateness and the resulting need to overcome the anxiety of separateness by the

¹⁴⁹ Marcia Falk ed., *The Song of Songs: Love Lyrics from the Bible*. (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 1973), 23

¹⁵⁰ Naftali Rothenberg, *The Wisdom of Love: Man, Woman and God in Jewish Canonical Literature*. (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009), 94

¹⁵¹ Ron Isaacs, “What Parents ‘Owe’ Their Children.” From *The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism*. 2010, http://www.uscj.org/What_Parents_Owe_The5462.html

experience of union. The religious form of love, that which is called the love of God, is, psychologically speaking, not different. It springs from the need to overcome separateness and to achieve union. In fact, the love of God has as many different qualities and aspects as the love of man has...¹⁵²

The love of God, according to Fromm, is the "...totality of what we strive for in love."¹⁵³ Throughout our tradition, God loves the Jewish people as a parent, lover, fellow, and even acts as aspects of the self. We, in turn, return God's love in those same forms. As Fromm explains, when God loves us unconditionally, God loves us as a mother, and when God gives us laws and restrictions, God loves us as a father.¹⁵⁴ As we seek God's approval and obey, or even rebel against God's laws, we are acting as God's children. Eventually, God no longer sends us rules and regulations, and ceases to act as a parent, but becomes a symbol for equality and justice. In this sense, God is acting as a fellow, as the ultimate good and most equal love we can strive for. God becomes "...the symbol of the principal of unity..."¹⁵⁵

God also longs for a union with and commitment from the People of Israel, just as a lover seeks such an attachment to a partner. God calls the people a lover and a wife, and feels scorned when the people stray. Finally, as Fromm explains, to love God fully is to find fusion with God so that "...there is no distinction between I and God..."¹⁵⁶ God becomes a part of the self, and we must acknowledge the Divine within us, and love ourselves in order to fully love God. This is the most complete form of love, as "to love

¹⁵²Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1956), 63

¹⁵³ Ibid, 71

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 65

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 69

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 80

God,” Fromm states “would mean to long for the attainment of the full capacity to love, for the realization of that which God stands for in oneself.”¹⁵⁷

As we have seen, love between people appears in many forms. Fromm claims that the love of God is a category separate from parental, brotherly, romantic and self love. I have found though, that the love of God actually encompasses all of the other categories, and we can only fully love God when we know how to love in all of the possible ways. Throughout the *Tanach* and our liturgy, we see that God’s love is manifested in many ways, and yet, though God’s love takes many forms, it is always constant and present. David Blumenthal, professor of Judaic Studies at Emory University, sums up this idea in his paper entitled “Tselem: Toward an Anthropopathic Theology of Image”

There are many ways to love. There is erotic love, virtuous love, and parental love. Love can be unilateral or dialogic. Sometimes love is sacrificial; sometimes it is commanding, imperial. Love can be open, articulated clearly; love can be hidden. Love is a glance into another's eyes, the embrace of a child, the gratitude of an elderly person not forgotten. Love is the affirmation of the other, given and received in wholeness. And forgiveness. Love is the presence of moral truth and goodness. Love is commitment to lead a life dedicated to truth and goodness. It is stubborn perseverance on the way, no matter what the temptation. Love does not tolerate injustice; it impels one to action. Love frustrates; it causes deep anger...Love is exclusive, dedicated to special persons in special ways. And love is inclusive, reaching from one to another, seeking to embrace the stranger...God loves all humanity, and individual human beings, in all these ways -- just as human beings love others and seek to be loved, in all these ways. Human beings touch the text of God's love and of human love. We enter it. We read it and ponder it. And it touches us, permeates us, puzzles and pains us, gives us life and demands death. Love, in all its complexity, makes us blossom and become that which we are destined to be.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 71

¹⁵⁸ Blumenthal, David Blumenthal, “Tselem: Toward an Anthropopathic Theology of Image” From, <http://www.js.emory.edu/BLUMENTHAL/image2.html>

Love is not just a feeling, but it is an action and an intention. We don't just love other people in our thoughts, but we show our love through words and deeds. Similarly, the love of God "...is neither the knowledge of God in thought, nor the thought of one's love of God, but the act of experiencing the oneness with God."¹⁵⁹ There are many ways in which we can express and show our love, and, as Fromm states "...the nature of [men's] love for God corresponds to the nature of his love for man..."¹⁶⁰ I believe that when we learn to love each other in every way, as a parent, sibling, lover, self, and friend, we can more completely and wholly love God. The love of God, Fromm says, "...leads to the right way of living,"¹⁶¹ and since we can only know how to love God fully when we understand the nature of love for others, I must conclude that in order to begin on the path towards this right way of living, we must first love our selves, our families, friends, neighbors, and strangers.

¹⁵⁹ Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 78

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 82

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 78

Appendix A

One of the best ways to experience and express the love discussed in this paper is through music. In my recital, I will be exploring musical representations of the different categories of love that Fromm discussed, using both biblical and liturgical texts. The connection between love and music, and the impact that love songs in general can have on people is important to understand in order to explore the opportunity that love songs provide for a richer engagement with the Jewish textual and liturgical tradition. In his book *Music and the Mind*, Anthony Storr proposes that music actually originated as a verbal exchange between mothers and babies. He talks about music as the primary expression of love between mother and child, and that the melody being sung is more important in cementing the relationship between them than the words themselves.¹⁶² This is most important in the child's pre-verbal stage, as the melody itself becomes the language. This is similar to Chassidic Niggunim, where it is the melody and emotion with which the tune is sung that is most important. In these niggunim, the words are nonsense syllables, such as "lai lai" or "ya ba bim bam" and yet the melody and the fervor with which it is sung expresses a great deal of emotion, and the melody itself becomes the language.

In a similar vein, Storr reviews the debate as to which came first, speech or music. He quotes Darwin, who claims that music preceded speech and arose as "an elaboration of mating calls." Géza Révész and Carl Stumpf also suggest that music came about because the singing voice was more powerful than the speaking voice, and so people used

¹⁶² Anthony Storr, *Music and the Mind*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), 9

song to express their feelings to others more effectively.¹⁶³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau's theory was slightly different, stating that there was no distinction between early speech and song. He claims that all earliest languages were chanted, and people only communicated with each other in order to express passion and love,

...it was men's passions rather than their needs which prompted their first utterances, for passions would drive men towards others, whereas the necessities of life would impel each to seek his satisfaction alone. It is not hunger or thirst, but love...which drew from men their first vocal utterances. Primitive men sing to one another in order to express their feelings before they come to speak to one another in order to express their thoughts.¹⁶⁴

Whether these passions were erotic, familial, or religious, it was love nonetheless, according to Rousseau, which first prompted people to communicate at all. Igor Stravinsky also believed that the essence of musical expression is about love. During a lecture that he gave in 1940 Stravinsky stated, "The profound meaning of music and its essential aim...is to promote a communion, a union of man with his fellow man and with the Supreme Being."¹⁶⁵

In his book *The World in Six Songs* Daniel Levitin claims that all known music can be classified into six categories, Friendship, Joy, Comfort, Knowledge, Religion, and Love. He states that many people learn about love and how love "should be" from the love songs that they hear.¹⁶⁶ Levitin says that even beyond romantic love, "...love in its larger sense - the sweeping, selfless commitment to another person, group or idea - is the

¹⁶³ Storr, *Music and the Mind*, 11

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 12

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 17

¹⁶⁶ Daniel J. Levitin, *The World in Six Songs: How the Musical Brain Created Human Nature*. (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 230

most important cornerstone of a civilized society.”¹⁶⁷ It is love songs, he says, that allow us to express this most important element of life,

Love songs, like all art, help us to articulate our feelings. They often use metaphorical language... to help us see our emotions from a different perspective. They stick in our heads and remind us, as the emotions ebb and flow, of what we once felt. And above all, they raise the feelings to the level of artistic expression - imbuing them with an elegance and sophistication that helps us strive for them...¹⁶⁸

Levitin continues to explain that there are love songs that reflect the four stages of romantic love - labeled by him “I want you,” “I got you,” “I miss you,” and “It’s-over-and-I’m-heartbroken.” He also says that love songs reflect the different kinds of love - also labeled by him “the Romeo-and-Juliet love,” “the more mature love of being together for decades and looking back,” and “the love of ideals, such as of country.”¹⁶⁹

Levitin says that love songs originated as lust songs. In fact, he says that one of the oldest songs known includes “sexually charged lyric[s].”¹⁷⁰ He dates this song back six thousand years and attributes it to a set of “extraordinarily graphic...songs written by Inanna, queen of Sumeria, about her beloved Dumuzi.”¹⁷¹ As noted previously, Storr says that music started as a verbal exchange between mother and baby, but he also agrees with Levitin that song may have begun as a sexual invitation. He cites Charles Darwin, explaining that human song evolved from bird-song, which functions primarily as a mating call. “Birds in search of a mate...” Storr says, “...sing more vigorously than those who are already mated, thus supporting Darwin’s notion that song was originally a

¹⁶⁷ Levitin, *The World in Six Songs*, 241

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 242

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 274

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 277

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 277

sexual invitation.”¹⁷²

One of the pieces that I will be singing that demonstrates this combination of love and lust and sexual invitation is Srul Irving Glick’s setting of “O, Let Him Kiss Me” from *Shir HaShirim* 1:1-3. Glick begins the piece in F Major, keeping this bright, cheerful sounding key throughout the first phrase “O, let him kiss me for his love is sweeter than wine, the sound of his sweet name echoes in my heart.” The melody moves forward, and creates a hopeful, excited sound that matches the hopeful and excited tone of the lyrics. The speaker is looking forward to a kiss from her love. As the text continues into a more wistful, dream-like theme where the speaker recalls that the scent of her lover lingers in her soul, the key briefly changes to a slightly darker, more dream-like minor key. The tempo also slows, and the word “linger” which is repeated twice is sung on a short run that lingers over half a bar. The final section returns to the bright major key for the final statement, “How surpassingly wonderful is love!” This is also the highest pitched and most elaborate section of the piece, which I think serves to highlight the text and truly express the joy that the speaker feels about her love. Even though the melody of this piece is an original composition, Glick creatively weaves the *Shir HaShirim* chant melody in the piano part, which serves as a musical reminder of the origins and authenticity of this text.

In addition to lust, Levitin says that music taps into a “primitive motivational system” that “promotes feelings of comfort, fidelity and trust” as well as “balances between fears of abandonment and comfort in togetherness, between love and lust...and stimulates the higher cognitive system with a sense of play, order and reorder, figure and

¹⁷² Storr, *Music and the Mind*, 4

reconfiguration.”¹⁷³ Love songs, Levitin explains,

...imprint themselves in our brains like no others. They speak of our greatest human aspirations and loftiest qualities. They speak of setting aside our ego and desires in the service of something great - of caring about someone or something more than we care about ourselves.¹⁷⁴

According to Levitin, the expression of love is also one of the main functions of religious music.¹⁷⁵ It is love of fellow human and love of God that is most often expressed in religious songs. Without the ability to express love musically, we obviously would not have the vast cannon of religious music that exists today.

Levitin also explains how music is able to convey these messages of love so strongly. He says that music is able to imprint emotions on our memory because of its “internal structure.” “Music” he says,

...is highly structured, organized, and hierarchical. Although the details of musical syntax remain to be worked out, there exist multiple redundant cues in music that constrain the possible notes that can occur in a well-formed melody. The human brain is an exquisitely sensitive change detector, and to be such, it has to register minute details of the physical environment in order to notice any violations of sameness, any deviations from the ordinary.¹⁷⁶

There are different sounds and emotions that are expressed by this highly organized structure. One example is the Phrygian mode¹⁷⁷ which, according to Aristotle, has an “orgiastic and emotional’ quality.¹⁷⁸ Other modes and other sounds convey different messages and emotions, such as the cry and despair often associated with the Ashkenazic Ahavah Rabba mode. This mode uses an

¹⁷³ Levitin, *The World in Six Songs*, 280

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 280

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 222

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 223

¹⁷⁷ While the term “Phrygian” was unknown to Aristotle, it was the sound of this mode that he objected to

augmented 2nd in between the second and third degrees of the scale, and this creates a plaintive sound that can be exaggerated to sound like a cry. One piece that I will be presenting in my recital that clearly uses the musical mode to express the text is “La Bendicion de Madre” which is a traditional melody from Sarajevo. The text of this piece is a prayer said by women on Yom Kippur thanking God for blessing them with children and asking God to protect them. This piece demonstrates the deep love that a mother has for her child and the sense of responsibility and care that comes with motherhood. The augmented seconds¹⁷⁹ that occur frequently throughout the piece create a sound of a cry, the sound of a desperate desire of a mother pleading with God to protect her children.

The music in my recital is going to be an eclectic mix of modes, styles and sounds. I have chosen to do this in order to show the depth and breadth of the types of love that exist in Jewish tradition, including both Bible stories and liturgy. Love songs have existed since before biblical times and have continued to be a large part of our musical tradition, from lullabies, to songs of lust, to music expressing kinship amongst people. My recital will show how music has been used to express a number of the different kinds of love that appear in our Jewish texts.

¹⁷⁸ Storr, *Music and the Mind*, 43

¹⁷⁹ Since this is not an Ashkenazic piece, I can not claim that it is in Ahavah Rabbah, but it does use the augmented 2nds in a similar fashion.

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