

Rabbis have a wide variety of techniques, some reasonable, some crazy, to try to get our sermons just right. We go on retreat, we get just the right kind of coffee, we sit in just the right chair, at just the right time.

Ok, did some of that. But this year, I also tried something different. I began with asking Siri a question:

Siri, do you love me?

She says to me, "I am listening."

After getting over my initial sense of rejection, I say to myself, "Ok, let's try this again."

"Siri, do you love me?"

She says, "You are growing on me."

I try it again. "Siri, do you love me?"

She says, "Does Apple make I-phones?"

Ok, after that I didn't ask her again. Ok, has anyone else here ever asked her that question?

(I was just relieved she had two different answers – go Siri!)

So why did I do this? I was curious to see, if in real life, Apple would program Siri to answer this. And indeed, Apple does, because enough of us look for love on our phones.

Remember the movie, entitled Her? Theodore falls in love with Samantha, the voice of his computer's operating system. Even Hollywood knows we turn to our phones for love.

On this Yom Kippur, I want to talk to you about love. Rosh Hashanah can be all about judgment, but Yom Kippur is all about love. "God takes us back in love," the prophet Micah told us, just this last Shabbat. The prophet Micah's words are behind Tashlikh, when we hurled our sins, in the form of bread into Richardson Bay on Rosh Hashanah. *Yashuv Rahameinu* – God will take us back in love. If not on Yom Kippur, when?

Yet, love feels hard this year. The forces against love are strong. We look out into the world, we see fear, isolation, doubt, destruction and deception. We are often encouraged by leaders,

to look outside ourselves and to blame others, rather than reach inside to our own potential for wise discernment and compassionate action.

But it is futile to think that our hearts could truly separate from our world, our nation, our communities. The writer and thinker Terry Tempest Williams, says, "The human heart is the first home of democracy. It is where we embrace our questions. Can we be generous? Can we listen with our whole beings, not just our minds?" So the human heart and love is where we begin.

The researcher and storyteller, Brene Brown, in her groundbreaking work on the power of vulnerability, tells us there are two kinds of people: those who believe they are worthy of love and those who believe they aren't worthy of love.

According to Brown, those who believe they are worthy of love are "wholehearted." Becoming whole-hearted is what being Jewish is all about. It should be what we are trying to become on Yom Kippur: to be "wholehearted" and worthy of love.

Those who believe they are not worthy of love, feel that they are not enough: worthy enough, beautiful enough, smart enough, creative enough, patient enough. Try it for yourself right now. Take a moment and fill in the blank by saying, "I am not _____ enough." It is so easy to name the disconnection before we name a connection.

Love is not the first word that comes to mind when we think of Judaism, coming to shul or the High Holy Days. There is the self-judgment that Brene Brown talks about. We judge others in our head, thinking: "They are not quiet enough," or "They are not considerate enough" or "Or they are not here enough."

There's plenty of judging and assessing going on. Judgment, based on fear, blocks whole heartedness. Fear feeds shame: shame feeds the sense that we are not worthy.

Sometimes judgment works. We judge our behavior and we turn away from something because we know it is not good for us; we fear what it does to us. The book of psalms tells us, "turn away from destructive forces in our lives - *Sur me ra*. And so often we do.

But where is the love? How much time do we spend focusing on the second part of the psalmist's line: do good – "*v'aseh tov*"? That's love. Love doesn't require academic

knowledge. Love doesn't require religious commitment. But love needs an open heart so that we identify and access our loved and loving selves. That's *teshuvah* or returning. *Teshuvah* cajoles us to see ourselves as worthy of being loved, worthy of doing good.

Some may know the song "O, Lord, Prepare Me to Be A Sanctuary," that is sung in some of our services. The words tell us – "I'll be a living sanctuary for you – עשו לי מקדש בשכנתי בתוכם" – this is what Brene Brown means, when she talks about being worthy of love. You create a space where the beloved can be found in your life.

Once a Jewish atheist named Pearl came to the synagogue. She tells the rabbi, "My psychiatrist gave me a prescription to come to shul. [Ok, maybe this psychiatrist wasn't Jewish, but back to the story]. So, the psychiatrist told me that every time you mention, God or Adonai, or Judaism, I should just bracket those words and focus on what you're saying about life."

I think what the psychiatrist meant was that when we Jews say, "*Barukh Atah Adonai* – Praised are you God," take out the God part and feel the gratitude. When you read about Moses and God in conversation, struggling with each other, don't see this conversation as a litmus test as to whether there is a God or not, but rather ask, "What can I learn about life from this conversation between God and Moses?" And when the rabbi says, "Being in community is an essential part of Judaism," hear that as "Being in community is an essential part of life."

It is ultimately about life, rather than religion or even spirituality. That is why we seek the beloved inside – because it dwells in every human being and every human being dwells in the beloved.

Every time I bless a Bar or Bat Mitzvah here on Shabbat, I say the words, "May he or she be a person who is both loving and beloved – ולהיות בן אדם אוהב ואהוב." How extraordinary it is to bless a blossoming adolescent, a newly minted Jewish adults with the charge "to be both loving and beloved!"

The Kotzker Rebbe once asked his students where God was found. His students quoted the psalms saying, "God fills all the world with glory." The rebbe shook his head and says, "No, I asked where is God to be found, not where God is." They were confused, saying to the rebbe, "We just said God is everywhere." The rebbe smiled and said, "No, God is found in the place that you open up your hearts and let God in."

I think the Kotzer Rebbe was talking about the beloved. Let the beloved in. The beloved is our core of sacredness. The beloved is the truth to which you return in teshuvah. The beloved is your imbued dignity. It is seeing the divine in yourself and in others. Your beloved is the ineffable force that compels us to connect, to care about life and the world. We need to feel it, we need to call upon it. How are we going to do this? Through our hearts, our souls and our minds:

1. **First, our hearts.** On this Yom Kippur we will beat our chests over and over and say "Al het she'atanu l'fanekha as we confess our sins. How about replacing the beating up on ourselves, with a little knocking on the door of our beloved? But what would happen, if instead of beating our chest, we knocked on our hearts? The Song on Songs (5:2) tells us "The voice of my beloved knocks, open for me." When we gently knock on our hearts, we make space for the beloved." That is the path to *teshuvah* that proclaims we are loved, we are worthy.
2. **And now for our souls.** What would happen if we were all able to call on the beloved inside ourselves, and to be more loving toward others? Let me explain.

Before we say the *Shma* and declare the one-ness and unity of God, we say a blessing about love. *Ahavah Rabbah Ahavtanu* – You have loved us with a great love. Rather than rattling off these lines a mile a minute, could we stop to experience this great love? How does it feel in our bodies, hearts and minds to receive this love?

Systems in our brain respond to love and to loving others. Our mental health, our immune system, the maturation of the frontal cortex, capacities for empathy, creativity and lower stress – all facets of our being, function best while feeling love and being loving, in contrast to feeling unloved, anxious or angry.

I invite you into the spiritual practice of focusing on a caring moment. Think back on your life, choose a moment when you felt truly cared for, seen in your worthiness, your infinite potential and goodness. In this moment, there were no conditions of who you were, or who you were supposed to be.

It could be when a kind stranger opened a door for you. It could be a memory with a beloved teacher or friend. It does not have to be “the perfect person,” who loved you “unconditionally.” You can even choose a moment with a pet who cared for you. You could choose a place when you felt this love and care.

Recall this moment, hold it in your heart and in your mind. The next time you say the *Shma*, see if you can recall this memory of receiving love and caring. Being able to recall when we felt loved and cared for, helps us be more loving towards others.

3. **And now for our minds.** Over the course of the next three months, I invite you to join us in a journey of love with a communal read of the book: [8 Habits of Love](#). In this incredible book, author Ed Bacon lays out these eight habits: Generosity, Stillness, Truth, Candor, Play, Forgiveness, Compassion and Community.

Don't worry if you don't remember them all because I have bought you your own copy. When you leave the sanctuary today, please take one for your household, read it and join Rabbi Steinberg and me as we explore these habits together as a community over the next several months. We will devote one Shabbat sermon to each of the habits.

Together, as a community we will have a framework for an experiential, trial-and-error practice of the habits expressed in this book to help us live a life grounded in the energy of love. It is a tool to leave behind reactive and fear-basing thinking that leads to destructive choices. In every moment, some element of our loving self is at stake.

So, just for the heck of it, I asked, “Siri, where is the beloved?”

She says, “I have some information for you.”

Ok, so I take a look. She is pointing me to Louis XV, known as the Beloved.

I was, as the country song goes, “looking for love in all the wrong places,” I think to myself.

Ok, after that I didn't ask her again. But thanks, Siri, for reminding me to spend more time this year looking for the beloved within, vs. the beloved on my phone. Thanks for reminding me that what I need most is already inside myself and my community.

Thanks for reminding me of the words we say over and over on Yom Kippur, "the Beloved loves us and wants us - *ahavta otanu v'ratzita banu.*"

Let the beloved in. Let your core of sacredness in. Let the beloved help you to us connect, to care about life and the world. Let the beloved take you back with compassion and forgiveness.

G'mar Hatimah Tovah – may you be blessed with a year of letting the beloved in.

[Click here to purchase the book online](#)

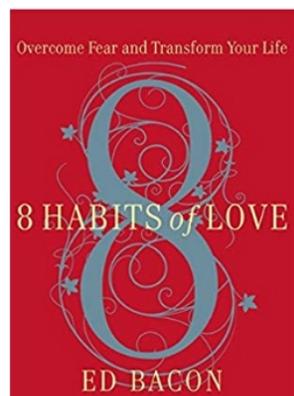
שופר KOL שופר SHOFAR

8 HABITS OF LOVE

BY ED BACON

This personal and universal book models the habits -very much in reach -by which we can ground our lives in love.

Join us at Shabbat services, as we delve into these 8 habits, bringing their wisdom to bear on Judaism. Rabbis Leider or Steinberg will deliver sermons on each of the following dates:



October 20 - Generosity
 October 27 - Stillness
 November 3 - Truth
 November 10 - Candor
 November 17 - Play
 December 1 - Forgiveness
 December 8 - Compassion
 December 15 - Community

Take the first steps on a life-changing journey toward self-discovery, creativity and healing.