

Leviticus 19:1 - 21:27

Amos 9:7-15

John 10: 11-21

One of my favorite college courses that I took was a class on Pre-Revolutionary Colonial America. Not only was the content delivered in an engaging way... but the professor (professor Bell) did such a great job in getting his students to really analyze historical artifacts and to see what story they were telling. He would post a picture of a couple of homes and at first... we all would notice that obvious (house, no yard, yard, windows, small, etc...) ... but as time went on... and after a LOT of reading... we began to pick up on the small nuances in the photos... in the homes. We then later applied our newly found skills to deducing conversations from letters.

Up to that point in my life, I don't remember having put so much thought into a letter. I took it at face value. The person simply said what they wanted to and that was the end of it. Boy was I wrong! For our final project, we had to read the letters that Benjamin Franklin wrote his daughter and wife. Absolutely fascinating man! I'll be honest though... it was tough for me. But it taught me something that I have taken with me to this day... that there is always more going on than what we see on the surface.

I've recently been listening to an audio book (that's basically how I have time to "read"). And in this audiobook, the author has reminded me of how the Bible is basically a lot like those letters that Ben Franklin wrote to the women in his life. Obviously, the entire Bible isn't a letter (per say... though one might argue otherwise... but that's a conversation for another day)... there are poems, parables, and stories, histories, you name it. But much like Professor Bell taught me...and I try to teach my kids... there is much to be inferred from the text...much that isn't said...and that we (if we want to Really understand the text) need to be thinking about.

So this week when I read the verses... I knew that there was a lot there. My main question was... well... 2 questions really... but I'll start with my first one...

1. What was going on in the world that THIS was the response?

What was going on that it needed to be said that child sacrifice and prostitution, etc... weren't good...or rather... that they weren't holy. I don't think that it's a secret that there were many barbaric practices going on in the ancient world by most, if not all, civilizations. Many human rights that were being... actually, that weren't even a thought.

Then here comes this man Abraham and his descendants, like Moses, setting a new and better standard. Here comes a G-d that actually loves people... and wants the best for them. So, he does like any loving person would do... that any parent would do... he begins to show them. He tells them, yes... but more importantly he had already begun showing them. First when he didn't kill Abraham (cause I mean... who fights with a G-d and doesn't die for their audacity?!), then when he stopped Abraham from killing Isaac. Even centuries later, the Aztecs, Maya, and the Inca were performing these horrific rituals. It was normal for people to sacrifice children. *(which on a side note is also fascinating why Yeshua choose to liken the ability to get into the kingdom to that of a child... i mean... do you realize how much he was countering the norms of society? It still does! Children are so often looked down on and thought to add little to no value... Most don't think of them as complete people... but then there's this man who says that it's THEM...CHILDREN that get it! I mean wow! Ok...let's get back to it)*

G-d had... has a message though... he had (and has) something better for his people... for ALL people.

Love your neighbor as yourself.

Isn't that.. Well Love the L-rd your G-d with all your heart... and then Love your neighbor as yourself what Torah is really all about?

But what does that look like? What does it look like today? I really do feel like THIS is the question... that it's the question that we'll wrestle with forever. Society changes and as a result we must continually ask this question... we need to see G-d's heart.

Thankfully, we have a head start... The Bible gives us ideas of where to start... it's how you treat people. It's love. THE kingdom of G-d is about Love and

connection. I mean (this is where i get excited)... HaShem has been consistently trying to show us His love... and it culminated in a man dying to prove that point! If that doesn't blow your mind... i don't know what will!

So... how to we continue that legacy?

Love your neighbor as yourself.

To love our neighbors as ourselves we need to realize...thankfully that we as a people don't actually get what we deserve. We get LOVE. HaShem consistently since the beginning of time has been writing us letters, showing us signs and wonders of his love. So if He loves us... despite all that we've done... despite what the Israelites did (and did over and over again)... how can we not also love our neighbors?

Ok... let me put it differently. I know that in the past i've talked about self-talk, or at least I think I have. But if we speak down to ourselves...if we believe that we really aren't worthy... then we will put that onto others. We in our own merit and in our own eyes really aren't that great... but guess what... it doesn't matter. Why? Because HaShem loves us.. The flawed us...the person we are behind the mask.

We can be sure and certain that we are loved... despite what we've done... despite what's in our hearts...

Because you see... "The father's love cannot be earned...it just is." (paraphrased from Rob Bell) Thankfully, it isn't dependent on us... it has been given. It is done.

Aren't you just filled with gratitude? I mean.. I know that I am.

And what can we do... what is the natural desire to do when we are loved and shown how to love? Love back!

Liev has learned that hugging, kissing, words can be ways of showing love. And they do show such a deep love. I know children and have known children that have not been shown love and how to love and who have been through unimaginable trauma... and their ability to then reproduce love... to love and soft diminished (not that they can never do it... but they must work to rewire their brain

at some point in the future so as to be able to access love and demonstrate in a healthy manner).

So... you see... how can you love your neighbor as yourself...if you don't first accept the love of the Father... and actually love yourself? This is something that i've been working on for the last couple of years as well. Hear me... I am not saying that i'm perfect. I am not saying that i'm the most awesome person in the world... I have my flaws... and because I know that I am loved... I feel a freedom to work on them. It isn't demanded... in love there is a space given... a knowing that when I am able to deal with... heck... even just face my flaws...that HaShem will be there waiting with me... and helping me to work through them.

Sometimes it's easier to love than other times. But it's no excuse. Despite all that Israel did... despite the world that they lived in... G-d loved them and actively worked to connect with them. So despite me just being me... G-d loves me.. And that allows me the grace and freedom to love and love on other people.

It's about Empathy. I love because He first loved me. I know what it's like. I can feel it or have felt it. So as I begin to reflect inwardly and begin to work to love and accept myself (just as HaShem has done with me) ... I grow in my ability to love my neighbor because out of that flows a love for other people because it creates empathy...

Yeshua... came to the world... and experienced it AS A HUMAN... why? Why didn't he just come as a divine being...divine/supernatural being alone? Why even go through the pain of humanity? I'm sure that there are many reasons... but one of them, I believe, is that because in experiencing what we do... he was able/is able to empathize. This empathy was the antidote to shame. IT was the key that allowed us to enter in... to be shepherded into the gate. It's how we know his voice. Because in Him, we see that we are loved and we can see the part of ourselves that is being called to more.

Empathy is a choice... "I have to connect with something inside myself that knows that feeling" (Brene Brown)

Sometimes loving your neighbor like yourself requires you to allow space for their emotions... for their experience.

I know that this is something that I need to work on. And I have been working on it over the last couple of years... but more so this past year. It's tough... I heard it said that Americans (and most definitely the Latinx community as well) don't like to give space to the negative emotions. We try to "silver line" it... we try to point out the positive. The problem with that... is that though you're trying to be encouraging... it's not quite loving. It's not acknowledging a person's pain and hurt...

Play Video (Brene Brown clip on Empathy)

As you know, Jonathan has been in the midst of a severe depression for the last couple of years. Thankfully, he is doing well... really well actually! But in that time, we've also been going to couples therapy. Let me tell you... it's been tough at times... but it's also been so rewarding. I have a difficult time talking about my emotions... and an even more difficult time allowing space for others' negative (non-happy) emotions. It's something that I'm working on... but it's a struggle. Thankfully, through therapy I've begun to learn how to create space for Jonathan and others (including my students). I've been learning how to sit with him through the tough, dark times and connect.

According to the Baal Shem Tov, the love of one's fellow is like a gateway into the palace of G-d. Yeshua is the good shepherd because he sacrificially loved all. He saw the poor, the weak, the disenfranchised, the outcast and loved them. He accepted them. He saw the good in them, their faith, you name it. He hung out with the tough crowd...the rowdy drunk guys, the rich women socialites... Yeshua was about people and loving on them. He connected with them right where they were and accepted them.

So if HE can do THAT... if he has already shown us what it means to love our neighbor and shown us what a good shepherd does, how can we not follow suit? How can we not love and accept those around us?

How are we failing at it? For me... over the last few years, i have felt more and more called to those who are more "rough around the edges". Some do know G-d and some don't... but i feel this deep call to show them the love of HaShem... to sit with them in their dark periods... to listen... to connect.

Kedoshim... holy ones... the Bible... this whole thing... what we're doing isn't exclusively about following some set of rules...

it's not about us being better or having some insight that others don't...

it's not about us and them...

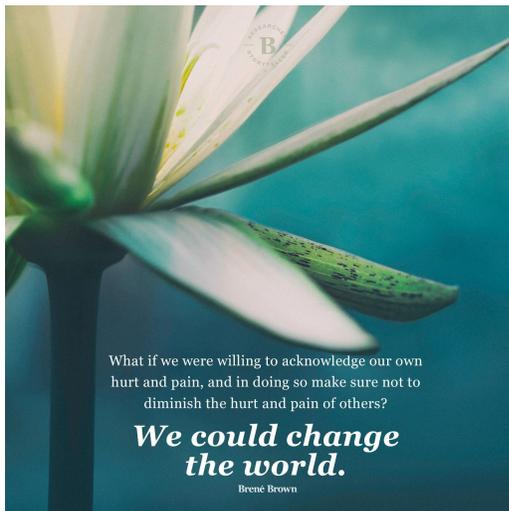
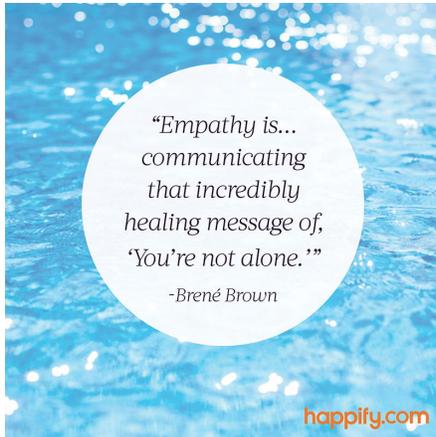
### **IT'S JUST US.**

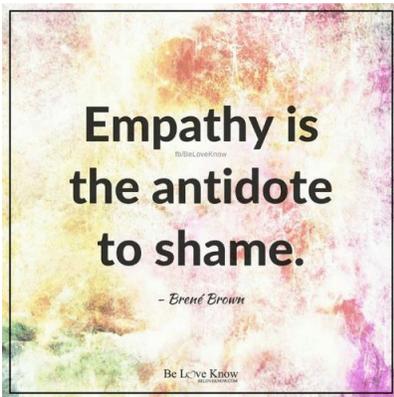
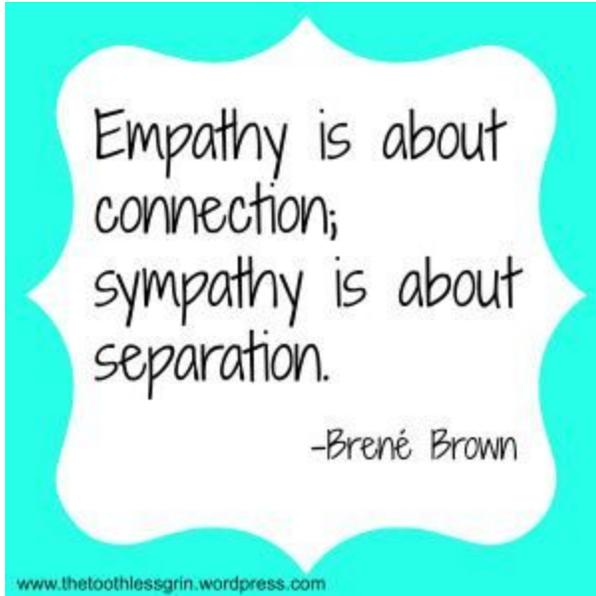
Some of us have seen... no... some of us have experienced HaShem's love in such a way that it has transformed our hearts and others are still waiting... but it's just us. Our neighbor? That's us.

I think it was Ben Parker (You know, Peter Parker, aka Spiderman) that said, "With great power comes great responsibility". What greater power is there than Love? And what better responsibility can there be to spread HaShem's love?

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## Resources & Inspiration





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Brene Brown:

1. Perspective taking
2. Staying out of judgment
3. Recognizing emotion in other people
4. Communicating that

Feeling WITH people

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ewgu369Jw>

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/2917029/jewish/How-In-the-World-Can-I-Really-Love-Another-as-Myself.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2917029/jewish/How-In-the-World-Can-I-Really-Love-Another-as-Myself.htm)