

Big Questions in Jewish Spirituality

UNIT 5



UNIT 5

How Do I Build a Relationship with God? Part 2

Unit Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe the overall trajectory from egoism to altruism in relationships, both Divine and interpersonal.
- Explain that one of the purposes of *mitzvot* is to move humanity from selfishness to altruism, in order to allow connection to God.
- Explore the concept of *deveikut* and how it applies to relationships with both God and others.
- Reflect on the fact that our relationship with God mirrors other relationships we have, and what we can learn from that.
- Internalize that relationships take effort.

NOTES:

- This unit is one of two parts. Some of the objectives and ideas touched upon in this unit are more fully developed in the first part.
- This unit is about relationships and love. Some students may have trouble relating to or using the word “love,” while others may have experienced difficult or even unhealthy relationships. This may create tension for them in this unit. It is important to be sensitive to this reality and strike a balance between encouraging genuine reflection and maintaining generality in the discussions.



Introductory Essay

This essay, for the teacher, is meant to provide some context and walk the teacher through the main ideas in this unit.

In the previous unit (How Do I Build a Relationship with God? Part 1), we explored different types of relationships and the commonalities and differences between them. In this unit, we will delve into the way that meaningful relationships evolve over time, and how we as individuals evolve along with those relationships. Healthy relationships grow and deepen over time as the participants of those relationships evolve, grow, and influence each other.

Relationships often begin because of things we have in common. At first, I see myself in others—this can feel very exciting as I discover how much I have in common with someone else. In this stage, I am relating towards “the other” from a place of ego or selfishness. Our connection at this point might be based on what I get out of the relationship, or in other words, how the other person helps me.

As time goes on and relationships deepen, we are better able to appreciate not just the things we have in common, but what makes us different and unique. We move from relationships driven by selfish benefits to a more selfless dynamic that includes an appreciation of the other’s flaws. In learning to accept the flaws in others, we can learn to accept our own flaws, and practice a more complete self-love. Just

as our relationships with others help us to grow as individuals, they can also help us deepen our relationship with the Divine.

Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag developed the following framework to explain this evolution of relationships. He explains that there are 2 levels of love, which can each be divided into 2 sublevels, for a total of 4 levels. These 4 levels describe relationships between people, but can also be applied to our relationship with God. Ultimately, moving between these levels involves moving between a focus on ourselves to a focus on the other.

Level 1: Relationships that depend on how they make us feel

1a: At first, we connect with people because they make us feel good, or because they help us in some way. Still, there might be things that we dislike about a person, or things that we have strong disagreements about. In order to enjoy all of the benefits we receive from that relationship, we might need to look past these potential stumbling blocks.

1b: As the relationship deepens, the focus shifts from ignoring differences or disagreements, to working through those differences or disagreements. Similarly, as the ability to forgive each other grows, the pain of disagreement diminishes. This level is powerful, but ultimately conditional because it is still based primarily on what we get out of the relationship. *Pirkei Avot* 5:16 teaches:

כל אהבה שהיא תלויה בדבר, בטל דבר, בטלה אהבה. ושאינה תלויה בדבר, אינה בטלה לעולם.

Any love that depends on something, when that thing is gone, the love is gone. But a love that does not depend on anything will never disappear.

If our relationships depend only on the benefits we get from them, when those benefits diminish or go away, so does that love. Therefore, we must strive for the second level, where we move past our own benefit and move to love for its own sake.

Level 2: Love for its own sake and the sake of the other

This love grows endlessly as we see and admire the innate value of the other, rather than just their value to ourselves. This too has two sublevels:

2a: In the earlier stages of a relationship, it can seem complete, but before we fully know the other, the love is untested. There might still be aspects of their behavior that could disappoint us if we knew about them.

2b: The ultimate level of love is when we know everything about the other person. This is a love that sees all flaws, but chooses to love completely anyway. It's an eternal and absolute love. We strive for this ultimate level of love not only with our fellow man, but with God as well. This idea requires some more exploration. As it says in *Pirkei Avot*:

הוא הִיה אֹמֵר, אֵל תְּהִיו כְּעֹבְדִים הַמְשֻׁמְשִׁין אֶת הָרֵב עַל מְנַת לְקַבֵּל פְּרִס, אֵלֹא הוּוּ
כְּעֹבְדִים הַמְשֻׁמְשִׁין אֶת הָרֵב שְׂלֵא עַל מְנַת לְקַבֵּל פְּרִס

Do not be like the servant who serves his master with expectation of receiving a reward, but rather be like servants who serve their master without expectation of receiving a reward.

In Jewish life, our relationship with God is built through observance of the Torah and *mitzvot*. When we are young, we are often rewarded to encourage us in this direction (e.g. candy, honor, or recognition). The goal, however, is that through our observance of *mitzvot* we will come to recognize that the true reward for a mitzvah is the opportunity to do the *mitzvot* themselves which are our path towards connection with God.

We may initially invest in our relationship with God because of reward; it is natural for people to invest time and energy in something from which they derive benefit. However, we strive to reach a point where we desire to fulfill *mitzvot*, not because of an external reward, but because we desire *deveikut*, a profound and spiritual connection that results from those actions.



Key Ideas

These are the key ideas of the unit. This list can be used to ensure that all the key ideas are covered over the course of the lessons.

- Recognizing the *tzelem Elokim* in people, including yourself can transform relationships.
- Relationships, even those based in love, like any skill, demand practice and dedication to flourish.
- There is a trajectory in each relationship (with yourself, other people, and with God) where you move from egoism to altruism.
- There are four levels on this trajectory: conditional love with traces of conflict, conditional love with no traces of conflict, incomplete unconditional love, complete unconditional love.

Important Terms

These are terms that may come up in classroom discussions. It is important to have definitions on hand and to make sure that the teacher and students are talking about the same thing.

- ***Deveikut*** – literally, cleaving. A profound, spiritual, and intimate connection with God. *Deveikut* is the aspiration to achieve a close relationship with God and a constant awareness of the Divine presence.
- ***Tzelem Elokim*** – literally translated to “the image of God,” this term describes the belief that humans are created in the image of God and embody Divine qualities. The term *tzelem Elokim* underscores the inherent dignity and value of every

individual, highlighting the Divine spark within each person, the basis for meaningful relationships.

- **Chesed** – literally, loving kindness. Acts of *chesed* are acts of kindness and compassion performed without expectation of reward. In Jewish thought, *chesed* is considered one of the pillars upon which the world stands, emphasizing the importance of selfless generosity and assistance to others. *Chesed* is seen as a reflection of God's kindness toward humanity and a model for human behavior.
- **Gevurah** – literally, strength. This means strength but it is often interpreted as restraint of that strength. *Gevurah* represents the ability to control one's impulses and to act with justice and moral integrity. It is the counterbalance to *chesed*, ensuring that kindness and compassion are guided by wisdom and discernment.
- **Tochecha** – the term, meaning "rebuke," is related to the practice of constructively criticizing another person's behavior. The concept is deeply rooted in the idea that individuals have a responsibility to help guide one another towards correct behavior, following the principles of Torah. *Tochecha* should be delivered in a way that is sensitive to the receiver's feelings and conducive to positive change, embodying the principle of caring for one another's spiritual well-being.
- **Dan L'Kaf Zchut** – literally, judging as if one was innocent. Giving the benefit of the doubt is a term that encapsulates the ethical obligation to judge others favorably, assuming positive intent, and goodness unless proven otherwise. This principle encourages individuals to look for the good in others and to avoid harsh judgment without full understanding of their circumstances. It is a practice aimed at fostering a more compassionate and supportive community.
- **Mitzvah** – the traditional definition is commandment, while some Jewish thinkers have related it to the Aramaic word "*Tzavta*" which means connection or binding. The colloquial use of this word, even in English, is "good deed."



Classroom Activities

In order to get the most out of this unit, and to help students understand the key ideas, we suggest that teachers complete the classroom activities (unless otherwise indicated) in the order that they appear.

Trigger Activity - Question Generation

Ask the students, after our exploration in Relationships Part I, if they have additional questions about what Jewish tradition has to say about both interpersonal relationships and our relationships with God. Students should brainstorm a list. In this unit we will be focusing on how our relationships evolve and how we evolve within them. Make sure to explain that you will not necessarily answer all the questions.

Some questions may include:

- How can relationships help me grow as a person?
- How can I foster a close relationship or connection with God?
- How can I feel a strong connection with God if I do not really understand God?
- What does it mean to have a relationship with God?
- What kind of work do I need to do to be in a successful relationship?
- How do relationships grow and change over time?
- What are the components of a healthy relationship?
- What does Jewish tradition say about soulmates and romantic love?
- How do I know if a relationship is good for me or not?
- How do I deal with difficult relationships (with friends, peers, parents, siblings etc.)?

The Five Languages of Love – Though Exercise

This activity is meant to encourage students to begin to think about their relationship with God in different terms than they have done before. Often students think about their relationship with God as a parent/child or king/subject, but many have never considered the love aspect of their relationship with God.

Students will begin the activity by considering the five different ways we experience and give love in our interpersonal relationships. After reflecting on their own personal love languages, students will think about how this might apply to their relationship with God. While they may not be able to fully express this yet, this activity should trigger the thought process and help them begin to think about their relationship with God in different terms than they have before.

Explain to students that we all experience and give love in different ways, and there are some primary expressions of love that are common. When we love another as we love ourselves, we try to understand how the other person experiences love, and provide that for them, while hoping that they do the same for us.

Language	Explanation	What is hurtful
Words of Affirmation	Verbalization of affection—saying “I love you,” “I care about you,” or “I’m so glad you are my friend.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When people are insincere with their words • Criticism
Gifts	A visible, tangible symbol of love; anything from a cup of coffee to jewelry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When gifts are used as bribes or misused
Quality Time	Giving and being given undivided attention—can be active or passive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you are neglected or feel you do not have your loved one’s attention
Physical Touch	Showing love through physical touch—something even as basic as a high five	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being physically hurt is emotionally painful • Having your physical advances turned down

Acts of Service	Helping others and being helped	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being told no when you ask for help or being told that you are not helpful
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Each student should note what their primary and secondary “love languages” are. They should also note which love language is the hardest for them (“I have difficulty expressing love through: _____”)

Now that the class has explored this, facilitate a class discussion about how you experience love and connection in different relationships, bringing the conversation back to God.

Do those you are closest to know or appreciate your love language?

Do you know or appreciate the love language of those you are closest with?

How might the concept of love languages impact the way you think about your relationship with God?

Do you think there is a “best” way to connect with the Divine? Do you think this is different for different people?

Alternate Thought Exercise – *Deveikut* Meditation and Discussion

Meditation is one possible way to achieve deveikut. Blocking out the noise and focusing on ideas like love, caring, gratitude, relationships, closeness, and devotion (to others as well as to God) can help individuals feel a oneness and connection to God. If guided meditation would be appropriate with your students, you may want to search for a meditation video or transcript and try this out in your classroom. See the Belovedness Practice Guided Meditation at <https://www.lookstein.org/resources/jewish-spirituality/> for an example.

Lead a short meditation session focusing on caring and love, culminating in a focus on feelings of closeness, devotion, and attachment to others and to the Divine. Follow the meditation with a discussion on how this feeling of oneness and connection can be applied in students’ daily interactions and relationships. Ask students how this can influence or shape the way they relate to God.

Text Study – Relationships

In this text study, students will look at several verses from Bereshit as well as a passage from Masechet Sanhedrin. The two big ideas to emerge from this guided study are that relationships are a process and take effort, and that though we may initially be attracted to someone on the basis of our similarities, when we can acknowledge the differences and admire the qualities of the other, the relationship can evolve and deepen.

This text study can be done frontally, in chevruta, or in any other format that allows the students to explore the key concepts. By the end of the text study, students should begin to understand the evolution of relationships in general and how they might apply the same principles to their relationship with God in specific.

Recall that there are two separate accounts of creation in *Bereshit*—the first appears in *Bereshit* 1 where God creates the cosmos through speech (“**Let there be light**”) culminating in the simultaneous creation of man and woman, and the second appears in *Bereshit* 2-3 where God creates humanity through much more direct action.

In this text study we will compare the two accounts and try to understand how human relationships have evolved and continue to evolve since the very beginning of creation.

Let’s read the two accounts. As you read think about the following questions:

- Each story uses a different name to refer to God. Why do you think that is?
- What is different between the way in which God creates humanity in the two accounts? Does one process seem to be more “effortful?”
- Why do you think the Torah mentions the process God used to create man? If God could simply speak and bring the world into existence, what can we learn from the fact that the creation of man seems to have taken more “effort?”

בראשית א:

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים | אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצַלְמֵ אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּמְקַבָּה בָּרָא אֹתָם:

And **Elokim** created humankind in the Divine image, creating it in the image of God; creating them male and female.

בראשית ב:ז

וַיִּצְרֵהּ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם עֹפֶרֶת מִן־הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאָפְיוֹ נְשִׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה:

YKVK Elokim formed the Human from the dust of the earth, blowing into his nostrils the breath of life: the Human became a living being.

Consider: The account in Bereshit 2 goes out of its way to describe a process of creation, and not simply report on the creation. It was important for us to know how God created humanity. Perhaps this is to tell us that, even for God, human relationships are a process and require effort.

Now let's look at two *psukim* that talk about Chava and what she is called. As you read think about the following questions:

What is different between these two instances of "the Human" naming the new creation? Pay attention to the reasons given in each instance.

What did Adam realize or learn about Chava that caused him to name her differently? In which instance(s) do you think Adam was relating to Chava's Divine spark (tzelem Elokim) and why?

בראשית ב: כג

וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָדָם זֹאת הַפֶּעַם נֶעַם מֵעַצְמִי וּבָשָׂר מִבְּשָׂרִי לְזָאת יִקְרָא אִשָּׁה כִּי מֵאִישׁ לְקָחָהּ זָאת:

Then the Human said, "This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called "*isha*," for from "*ish*" (man) was she taken.

בראשית ג: כ

וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ חַוָּה כִּי הִיא הִיְתָה אִם כָּל־חַי

The Human called his wife Eve (Chava) because she was the mother of all the living.

Consider: When man first encountered woman, he was drawn to what was common between them. This allowed him to begin relating to her. As their relationship developed, he was able to see her qualities which were different from his own. She was able to have children, whereas he was not. This realization caused man to relate to her on a new level. She now had a name (and identity) totally separate from man. Only after this realization of difference are we told that Adam and Chava became true partners and realized full intimacy.

Let's read what the Talmud says about this.

תלמוד בבלי סנהדרין לז

ולהגיד גדולתו של הקב"ה שאדם טובע כמה מטבעות בחותם אחד כולן דומין זה לזה ומלך מלכי המלכים הקב"ה טבע כל אדם בחותמו של אדם הראשון ואין אחד מהן דומה לחבירו לפיכך כל אחד ואחד חייב לומר בשבילי נברא העולם

[Adam was created alone at first] to tell us about the greatness of God. When a person stamps several coins with the same seal, they are all identical to each other. God, however, stamped all of humanity with the seal of Adam the first and not a single one is identical to another. Each human can therefore say "the world was created just for me."

What do you think the Talmud means by "the seal of Adam the first?" In what way are all humans similar?

What do you think the Talmud means that no human is identical to another? Do you think it is talking about physical appearance, or something else?

What can we learn about the way we should relate to each other from this Talmudic excerpt?

What can we learn about the way we should relate to ourselves?

In small groups or as a class, students should discuss the following questions:

Can you think of someone that you connected with because of your similarities? Were you able to connect deeply with them based on those similarities?

Over time, have you discovered differences? Have those differences made you closer or more distant from this person? Why?

The Balance in and Evolution of Relationships – Facilitated Discussion

In this activity, students will continue to explore how relationships evolve over time. They will learn about the ideal shift from a relationship which is focused on the self to a relationship which is focused on the other. After studying a Rashi, students consider different scenarios and attributes of relationships and then will be asked to reflect on how those attributes come to play in their own relationships. Then students will learn about one framework for this process—the 4 levels of love of Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag.

Note: It is important for students to understand that while there is an ideal relationship, the earlier levels or stages of a relationship are important and are not “bad.” That is to say, many people are in relationships which are focused on the self and one’s own desires and needs. We are suggesting that it is a valuable process (which takes effort) to shift the focus of the relationship to the other—this enables deeper and more lasting relationships.

Begin by explaining that in the *Bereshit* text study, we noticed that there are two distinct creation stories, and that the text uses a different name to refer to God in each story. The first text consistently refers to God as “Elokim” or “אלקים.” The second story refers to God as “YKVK Elokim” or “ה' אלקים.”

Rashi notices this difference and explains:

בְּרָא אֱלֹקִים: וְלֹא נֹאמַר בְּרָא ה', שֶׁבְּתַחֲלָה עָלָה בְּמַחְשָׁבָה לְבְרָאתוֹ בְּמִדַּת הַדִּין, רָאָה שֶׁאֵין הָעוֹלָם מְתַקֵּים, הַקְּדִים מִדַּת רַחֲמִים וְשִׁתְּפָה לְמִדַּת הַדִּין, וְהֵינּוּ דֹכְתִּיב בְּיוֹם עֲשׂוֹת ה' אֱלֹקִים אֶרֶץ וְשָׁמַיִם:

"Elokim created:" It does not state **"YKVK created"** because at first God intended to create the world to be placed under the attribute of Divine Justice, but He realized that the world could not thus endure and therefore gave precedence to Divine Mercy, partnering it with Divine Justice. That is why (in *Bereshit* 2:4) it says **"In the day that the YKVK Elokim made earth and heaven."**

Share that Rashi's explanation is a poignant reminder that just as God's relationship to the world and to humanity requires a balance of justice and mercy in order to endure, finding balance is essential in order for all relationships to last.

Rashi explains that initially, God intended to create the world from a place of strict justice (*din*). However, God realized that the world would not endure if it were governed solely by justice, as human beings, by their nature, are imperfect and would fail under such strict conditions. Therefore, God decided to precede the attribute of justice with the attribute of mercy (*rachamim*), effectively combining both attributes in the act of creation. This balance allows for a world where justice exists but is tempered by mercy, enabling human beings to strive, repent, and improve. It is important to note that in relationships, opposing attributes often need to be balanced.

Rashi reminds us that the second story of creation begins "On the day that the YKVK Elokim made the earth and the heavens." Throughout the second creation story both names, YKVK (mercy) and Elokim (justice) are used together, with mercy coming first. It is in this context that the first real relationships are made, both human and Divine.

You can now distribute the handout titled "The Balance and Evolution of Relationships" found on page 23. Students can work in partners/small groups or you may want to work through it as a class.

After completing the handout, explain that it is true that relationships require balance,

but it is also true that that balance shifts as relationships, and the people in them, evolve over time. As they do, we are able to move from relationships that focus on our own needs being met, to having an increased focus on the other as well as the relationship itself.

Explain Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag's levels of relationships, in which people move from self-centered, dependent love to a fully developed love that is not dependent on any precondition. (If you wish, you can share the text inside—see below).

Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag, Ba'al Hasulam, Introduction, *Talmud Eser HaSefirot* 70-74

The first is a love that is dependent on something (see *Avot* 5:16), which means that on account of the abundance of...benefit that one received from his friend, his soul cleaves to [the friend]...There are two versions...One before the pair recognized and loved one another they caused harm to each other [but now they do not]...The second...is that they always performed good and [provided] benefit to one another, and there has never been any trace....[conflict] between them at all. The second [broad type of love] is a love that is not dependent on something (see *Avot* 5:16)... Here too, there are two levels: One level is before he becomes familiar with all of his friend's manners and dealings with others. In this case, the love is considered a love that is not absolute, because his friend has some dealings with others.... [And] If the one who loves him were to see [this], all of his friend's virtue would be impaired [in his eyes], and the love between them would be spoiled. However, he has not yet seen these dealings, and therefore their love is still complete and great...The second level of a love that is not dependent on something is the fourth level of love overall...he is now familiar with all of [his friend's] manners and dealings with all people [and he is still loved]. None...have been left out, and he has examined and found that not only is there no trace of a flaw in them, but...[he] rises above any estimation and imagined worth. This is now an "eternal, absolute love."

If the students have a problem envisioning what this looks like, share the following fictional story which demonstrates the evolution of relationships. It begins by being drawn to the benefits of the relationship and evolves to a love that transcends personal desires—a selfless love that values the essence of the other person.

You meet someone at a mutual friend's party. You are drawn to them because they are smart, funny, and popular. You have a lot in common and you have a great time when you are together. You start becoming friends, and the initial joy and companionship you share overshadow any differences between you. Maybe you lean towards traditional values while they have a more liberal outlook. Initially, these differences seem trivial compared to the connection you feel.

Over time this relationship evolves to a deeper level. Cracks form, opinions clash, feelings get hurt. It is impossible to ignore. However, you tackle these challenges head-on, learn to communicate better, and work through your conflicts. Overcoming these obstacles together, your friendship becomes stronger, and you find yourself feeling closer than ever. At this stage your friendship continues to depend on what you each get out of the relationship.

At some point you reach a stage where you start to appreciate each other's inherent qualities, beyond the initial draw. You admire their strengths, accept their flaws, and love them for who they are, not just for how they make you feel. Despite not knowing every single thing about each other, the trust and love you share grow deeper.

Finally, you share everything with each other, including your deepest fears and secrets. As you do, you find out something about your friend that you have a really hard time with. Still, because you love this person and value your relationship, you are able to work through these issues. Your love becomes unconditional, accepting each other's pasts and imperfections without judgment.

Now that the students understand the different stages of relationships, ask them to think of examples that show this evolution. This can be something from their own life experience or a scenario they imagine (or even something they have seen in a movie). The important part is that this is a relationship which starts off in a very me centered place and then evolves into a relationship where they are focused on the other. This can be a relationship with a family member, a friend, a romantic partner, etc.

Tell the students to go back to their list of attributes and scenarios from the handout.

Ask the following questions:

How do you think the correct solution to the scenarios, and balance between the attributes, is different at different times in the relationship? Why do you think it changes?

Have there been any moments where you have had to overcome a significant disappointment in, or flaw of, someone important in your life? How were you able to work through it and maintain a loving relationship? Can forgiving the flaws in others teach us anything about loving ourselves unconditionally?

Finally, think about your connection with God.

How could this evolution apply to your relationship with God? Where do you think you are in that relationship? If there is a spectrum between me centered and God centered—where do you think you are on that spectrum? Is that where you want to be? What kinds of things could you do to deepen your connection with God?

Return to the four levels of relationships. Ask students to think about their relationship with God. How does this framework relate to their relationship? Where are they in that framework?

How *Mitzvot* Can be a Powerful Connection to God – Guided Discussion

After having started to consider their relationship with God in the previous activity, students will now think through the very practical question of how they relate to the performance of mitzvot.

Do they view mitzvot as a burden? An opportunity for connection? Something in between?

After considering a series of actions and how they relate to them, they will think about how they connect with others vs how others would like to be connected with. They will consider the same question with regard to God. Finally, they will learn several sources which explain mitzvot in a new light and then will create their own understanding or definition of “mitzvah.”

Step 1: In pairs, students should look at the following actions and think about how they relate to them (the teacher can choose to eliminate any which might not be appropriate):

- Doing the dishes after a family meal
- Driving a younger sibling to a birthday party
- Going to a movie (that you do not really want to see) with a friend
- Giving charity
- Praying in synagogue on Shabbat morning
- Saying a blessing before eating food
- Helping your friend shop for new clothes for an event, even though you will not be buying anything
- Spending time making a gift (e.g. preparing dinner, making something artistic) for a friend or family member that you know they will love, even though you do not enjoy the process
- Singing Jewish songs at camp or at a Shabbaton
- Lighting shabbat candles

Step 2: Once students have gone through this list and shared their thoughts/feelings about these activities, they should reflect on the following questions:

1. Choose a relative or friend that you are close with and think about the following:
 - a. How do you connect with them?
 - b. How do you think they want you to connect with them?
 - c. Is there a gap between these two? Do you ever do anything to connect with them that you do not want to do? If so, why do you do it? If not, why not?
2. Think about God and your relationship with God.
 - a. How do you connect with God?
 - b. How do you think God wants you to connect with God?
 - c. Is there a gap between these two? Do you ever do things to connect with God that you do not want to do? If so, why do you do it? If not, why not?

Step 3: Bring students together in a large group and ask if anyone would like to share

any of the ideas they discussed. Bring in some of the following ideas from these texts, or have the students learn the sources below.

Rav Nosson of Breslov, *Likutei Halakhot, Orach Chaim, Laws of Morning Hand Washing 4:11*

This source explains that while the word mitzvah is certainly defined as “commandment,” it can also be derived from the Aramic word “tzavta” which means connection or being bound.

זֶה לְשׁוֹן מִצְוָה שֶׁהוּא לְשׁוֹן הַתְּחַבְּרוּת, מְלִשׁוֹן צִוְתָא וְחִבּוּר, (יט) כִּי עַל-יְדֵי כָּל מִצְוָה וּמִצְוָה מִמִּצְוֹת הַתּוֹרָה מִצְוֹתֵינוּ וּמִקְשָׁרֵינוּ וּמְחַבְּרֵינוּ אֹר הַזְּרִיחָה שֶׁל הַרְשִׁימוֹ אֶל כָּלֵי הַמַּחִין, שֶׁעַל-יְדֵי זֶה מְקַשְּׁרֵינוּ בּו יִתְבָּרַךְ...

The term “mitzvah” can connote “relationship” as in “*tzavta*” and connection. Because through each mitzvah of the Torah, one connects, ties and forms bonds between the “light of the Divine glow” to ones own vessels of consciousness (or minds), in this way one becomes tied to God...

Bamidbar Rabbah 17:6

This midrash compares mitzvot to a lifeline—by grasping on tight to the mitzvot and cleaving to them, we connect to our life source.

לְמַעַן תִּזְכְּרוּ וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֶת כָּל מִצְוֹתַי, מִשָּׁל לְאַחַד מִשְׁלַךְ לַתּוֹךְ הַמַּיִם, הוֹשִׁיט הַקִּבְרָנִיט אֶת הַחֲבֵל וְאָמַר לוֹ תִפֹּס חֲבֵל זֶה בְּיָדְךָ וְאַל תִּנְיַחְהוּ, שֶׁאִם תִּנְיַחְהוּ אֵין לְךָ חַיִּים. אִךְ כִּן אָמַר לָהֶם הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, כָּל זְמַן שֶׁאַתֶּם מְדַבְּקִין בְּמִצְוֹת (דְּבָרִים ד, ד): וְאַתֶּם הַדְּבָקִים בְּה' אֱלֹקֵיכֶם חַיִּים כָּלְכֶם הַיּוֹם.

“So that you will remember and do all my *mitzvot*.” This is comparable to one who was thrown into the sea. The captain extended a rope to him and said: ‘Catch this rope in your hand and don’t let it go, for if you let it go, you will have no life.’ The Holy One (blessed be He) said to Israel: ‘The whole time that you cleave to the *mitzvot* - (*Devarim 4:4*) “And you who cleave to Hashem your God, you are all living today.”

Talmud Bavli Mesechet Pesachim 50b:

This source explains that even if we don't have the proper motivation when performing a mitzvah, we should still do them because we will eventually come to perform them for the right reason.

Even a mitzvah performed with ulterior motives garners reward, as Rav Yehuda said that Rav said: A person should always engage in Torah study and performance of mitzvot, even if he does so not for their own sake, as through the performance of mitzvot not for their own sake, one gains understanding and comes to perform them for their own sake.

Step 4: Ask students to write their own definition of mitzvah that includes the ideas they have learned and references the idea of connection. Their definitions should not be short, one-word answers, but rather should explain how they understand and relate to *mitzvot*.

Relationships Web Part 2

If your students worked on the relationship web activity in the Relationships 1 unit, ask them to refer back to that now. Ask them if they would change anything about their web after all of the learning they have done.

- Are there any relationships they would add to the web?
- Any lessons learned that they would add? Any new connections?

This activity can serve as a wrap up for the 2 relationships units and can highlight the interconnectedness of our relationships and how we evolve within those relationships.

Conclusion/Spirituality Journal

Ask students to read through all the prompts and choose 2 or 3 to respond to in their Journal.

Go back to your original questions from the beginning of this unit. Do you feel that you have answered or started to answer any of your questions? Which one or ones, and what ideas have you developed through this learning?

- **Divine Spark and Empathy:** Reflect on a time when you saw the *tzelem Elokim*, the Divine spark, in someone you typically find challenging or disagree with. How did this recognition change your interaction or feelings towards them?
- **Effort in Relationships:** Consider a relationship (with a family member, friend, or God) that has required significant effort to maintain or improve. What steps did you take, and how did the process impact your understanding of love and connection?
- **Recognizing Self-Worth:** Reflect on your journey towards recognizing your own *tzelem Elokim*. How has a stronger sense of self-worth impacted your ability to form meaningful relationships with others?
- **Challenges as Opportunities:** Think of a difficult period in a relationship and how you navigated it. How did facing and overcoming this challenge together strengthen the relationship?
- **Love and Forgiveness:** Forgiveness is often a crucial element in healing and deepening relationships. Reflect on a time when forgiveness played a key role in your relationship with someone else or with yourself.

Handout

The Balance and Evolution of Relationships

1. Relationship Attributes

Here is a list of some of the attributes essential to healthy, meaningful relationships. The list has been divided into two—*chesed* (loving kindness) and *gevura* (strength and restraint). Add any other things you think are missing.

<i>Chesed</i>	<i>Gevura</i>
Love	Fear
Mercy	Judgement
Intimacy	Boundaries
Admiration	Respect
Generosity to the other	Making sure your needs are met
Empathy & Kindness	Self-care
Forgiveness	Accountability
<i>Dan L'Kaf Zchut</i>	<i>Tochecha</i>

2. Scenario exercise

Pick one of the scenarios below and answer the following questions. Use the graphic organizer to list the values that are in conflict and explain how you might resolve the issue(s) at play.

Scenarios:

- After much anticipation, you finally get your driver's license. Your parents agree to let you use the family car as long as you follow certain rules, including curfews and not texting while driving. One night, after going to a movie with some friends, one of your friends, who lives out of the way, asks you for a ride. On the way home you are further delayed by road construction on a road you would have avoided if you had gone straight home. As a result, you return home past curfew. Your parents text asking where you are, but you do not respond because you are driving.
- Micah's parents are planning on paying for his education. Micah is passionate about art and dreams of going to art school, but Micah's parents are concerned about job security in the art field. They would prefer Micah choose a more traditional career path, and suggest that he study something art related but more practical, like architecture, but Micah has no interest in this.
- A teacher mistakenly accuses a student of cheating by using AI on an assignment. The student has always received good grades, but the teacher does not know how often, if at all, cheating has happened in the past. The student denies the allegation and the evidence is circumstantial.
- Sam is an ambitious student with a clear goal of attending a top university. Sam's close friends feels that Sam's dedication to studying is putting a strain on their friendships, wishing they would spend more time together. Sam values the friendships but also doesn't want to compromise his future aspirations.

- Consider the situation from the perspective of each person in your scenario. How do you think each of the different players would feel?
- How does the importance of communication impact how they might address their concerns or needs with the other?
- Which of the attributes from your lists are in play in each situation, and what balance between the two might represent the best resolution?
- Have you ever experienced a similar situation in one of your relationships?
- How does the concept of compromise come into play? Is there a way to find a balance that respects both individuals' feelings and needs?
- How can the principles of *chesed* (kindness) and *gevurah* (strength/restraint) be applied to finding healthy solutions in romantic relationships?

3. Graphic Organizer:

Section 1: Identifying the Scenario

Scenario Description	In your own words briefly describe the dilemma.
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Section 2: Emotional Exploration

Feelings of Player 1	How might they feel? Why?
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Feelings of Player 2	How might they feel? Why?
Personal Connection	Have you experienced a similar situation? Briefly describe.

Section 3: Communication and Attributes

Importance of Communication	What role does communication play in this scenario?
Addressing Concerns	How might each player effectively communicate their needs?
Attributes in Play	List the attributes from the list that are relevant.
Balancing Attributes	What balance between these attributes might lead to the best resolution?

Section 4: Applying Jewish Values

<i>Chesed</i> in Action	How can kindness lead to a healthy resolution?
<i>Gevurah</i> in Action	How can strength/restraint lead to a healthy resolution?
Concept of Compromise	Discuss how these values can be balanced in this scenario for a healthy solution that respects both partners' feelings and needs.

Section 5: Reflection

Insights Gained	What did you learn about handling relationship dynamics?
Applying this Knowledge	How can you apply these insights to your own relationships or future relationships?