

The Aufruf of Jordan Black and Bar Mitzvah of Nathan Brook

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A number of years ago I read a Mike Royko column about a conversation he had with a male acquaintance. I'd like to begin my remarks today by sharing with you excerpts from that column. Royko wrote:

A young man I know told me that he was thinking seriously of getting married. He was married once before ...since his divorce, he had appeared happy and contented. At least he was happier than most of my other friends who aren't divorced. So I was surprised when he told me that he was once again going to take a step that could lead to so much heartache, misery, remorse and lawyers' fees. He said, "This time I'm almost sure it will work out."

"But are you absolutely sure? Remember, right now she is a pretty young thing. In 50 years, she will be a wrinkled old crone of 78 with one tooth, when you are still a vigorous, youthful buck of only 80. Do you want to be stuck with someone like that?"

He said he wasn't completely certain, so he was going to put himself and his lady friend to a test.

They are going off to a secluded little resort on the seashore together for a few days, maybe even a week.

"If we click, I'll be able to tell," he said.

I told him he was an idiot.

There is no worse way to determine if two people "click," whatever that means, than by going off together to some secluded resort on the seashore. What will happen is that she'll take his hand and they'll run on the beach, her long legs flashing in the sun, her hair bouncing on her shoulders, probably in slow motion. His mind will start going, "click, click, click, boyohboyohboy!"

Of course it will click, you dope. In that kind of setup, it would click if you were there with your favorite rubber duck. That's not the way to test yourself and her. If you want to know if it will click, spend a few days together and use some of these surefire tests:

-- Borrow or rent some small, whiny children with runny noses and a tendency toward car sickness. Put them in the back seat and go for a drive on a hot weekend. Pretend that the air conditioner is broke, and turn it off.

--- Get a really bad cold. Spend a weekend lying around on the couch, watching ballgames, wheezing, sneezing, coughing, complaining that you are miserable, asking her to bring you aspirin, soup, orange juice, to scratch your back, dry your brow and change channels on the TV. If she moves slowly, yell at her to snap it up. Watch closely to see if she appears grateful for the opportunity to take care of you.

After I suggested these simple click tests to the young man, he gasped: "If I ever did that before we got married, she'd never talk to me again."

Which just proves my point. She'd be revealing that she isn't sincere and is probably the flighty sort. Would he want to spend the rest of his days with someone who can run on the beach but is of little use when you ave a cold. There are many young men with problems of this kind -- love, marriage, lust and so on -- those of us who are experienced should try to help them muddle through. End of Mike Royko's insightful words!

"What is love" was the most searched phrase on Google in 2012. In an attempt to get to the bottom of the

question once and for all, the British *Guardian* gathered writers from the fields of science, psychotherapy, literature, religion and philosophy to give their definition of the much-pondered word. Here's what they had to say:

Physicist: Love is chemistry

Psychotherapist: Love has many guises

Philosopher: Love is a passionate commitment

Romantic novelist: depends on where you are in relation to it.

Nun: Love is more easily experienced than defined.

What is love? How do you define it? How would you explain 'love' to your children?

We've all been in love and love someone else. In the words of that great philosopher Dean Martin, "Everybody loves somebody sometime." But I think many of us feel like the Nun, in that love is hard to define. I'm reminded of the words of Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart in an obscenity case, who, when asked what the parameters of hard-core pornography were, said, "It's hard to define, but I know it when I see it."

Let us examine a Torah-based definition of love.

A Mishna in Pirkei Avos/Ethics of the Fathers (5:19) says: *Any love which is dependent on something, when the 'something' ceases, the love ceases. Any love which is not dependent on anything will never cease.*

Have you ever noticed how people throw the 'love' word around all the time? It's used so casually and imprecisely that *love* has almost lost its meaning. R' Yisrael Salanter once overheard someone say that he loved chicken. R' Yisrael said: "If you loved the chicken, you'd never *shecht* (slaughter) it. It's yourself you love. YOU love to eat chicken." That was 150 years ago!

Love, simply stated, is an emotion. One of the ways that emotion is produced within us is through the identification of a person's good qualities, character, and virtues. When love is based upon temporary, external factors -- lust, money or prestige -- it is self-love. Often when someone says "I love you", what they really mean is, "I love how you make me feel, and what I can get from you." Our mishna teaches that when the self-interest is no longer present, the love will be exposed as the empty act of selfishness it was all along.

This idea was expressed in a humorous letter to 'Dear Abby' that I read a number of years ago.

Dear Abby: I have the prettiest girlfriend in the world -- and the nicest, I thought, until I realized that "Gwen" does not understand or respect my favorite sport: hunting.

Yesterday, my hunting partner and I took Gwen with us hunting for wild turkeys, so she could understand the appeal. I explained everything to her the night before, but hunting day was a disaster. She wasn't up at 4:30 a.m. like I told her to be. Then she dressed and fixed her hair and did makeup the way she usually does. She absolutely refused to wear the face paint and camouflage I'd given her.

In the woods, she refused to whisper or walk quietly. Her hairspray attracted mosquitoes and bees, and she wouldn't stay where we told her to. To top it off, when we finally spotted a turkey and got close, Gwen threw up her arms and screamed, "Run, turkey! Run!"

My friend couldn't stop laughing. I am so angry I haven't been able to speak to her since. Abby, how could this woman be so insensitive to my feelings? Now I'm no longer sure this relationship is a good idea. Gwen is good-looking and can cook, but is this relationship worth salvaging? I'm not giving up my turkey hunts!

Turkeyless in Arkansas

Turkeyless was not only turkeyless, but clueless! Don't confuse love and infatuation. Infatuation comes and goes. When one is infatuated, a bad hair day can end the relationship. Infatuation can be caused by a variety of factors -- looks, money, lifestyle, power, career, reputation -- all stemming from one's desires and separate from who the person really is. These things often attract us to the relationship but ultimately distract us from the person. That's why so many people 'fall' for people who they eventually discover are completely wrong for them. And if you can 'fall in love', you can just as easily 'fall out of love'.

Our mishna gives us instructions for the heart: Love is an emotion based upon the identification of virtues and good character. THAT is a love that will endure.

A second factor that triggers the emotion of love can be seen from a story told by Ruchoma Shain in the moving biography of her father R. Yaakov Yosef Herman. In *All for the Boss*, Mrs. Shain relates that when she was engaged, she and her fiancé were together somewhere with her parents. She commented with amusement that she and her fiancé were not yet married yet were sitting next to each other, while her parents, married for many years, were sitting farther apart.

Mrs. Shain's father responded to this observation that she and her fiancé had not yet become so close -- and so, needed physical closeness to reinforce their sense of unity. They had to be reminded that they were close and in love. He and her mother, however, who had lived and shared so many years together and had bonded so much more deeply, did not need physical proximity to feel united. Distance could in no way interfere with their closeness. Mrs. Shain writes how she saw her parents exchange a knowing glance at that moment -- the type only husband and wife can share. And she wrote that she experienced a deep longing that she and her future husband would one day feel that same closeness and oneness her elderly parents had merited.

Certainly, people initially form a bond because of some type of attraction. But true love occurs over time, through repetitive acts of giving. The word for love in Hebrew is *ahava*. *Ahava* has as its root the letters *hay* and *beis*, which spell the word *hav*, which means *to give*. This insight from the Holy Language, Hebrew, teaches us that there exists a conceptual connection between loving and giving: love is an emotion created in proportion to the extent that we give. Like Ruchoma Shain's parents who performed thousands of acts of selfless giving during their many years of marriage, a bond of love was created between them that no longer required external prodding or stimulation.

That doesn't mean, though, that even in the best relationships there won't be difficult moments.

Myrtle went to the police station with her next-door neighbor, Myra, to report that her husband was missing. The policeman asked for a description.

Myrtle said, "He's 35 years old, 6 foot 4, has dreamy brown eyes, dark wavy hair, an athletic build, a cute dimple in his chin, weighs 185 pounds, is soft-spoken, and is good to the children."

Myra the next-door-neighbor protested. "Myrtle, what are you talking about? Your husband is 5 foot 4, chubby, bald, has a big mouth and is mean to your children."

Myrtle said, "Yes, Myra, I know. But who wants HIM back?"

But true love will never disappear. By sharing their lives and experiences and by giving to each other and growing together, a couple merges into a single entity, caring more about the other -- and about the whole -- than the individual. This idea is beautifully expressed in the words of Clint Black's song, *Something That We Do*:

*There's no request too big or small
We give ourselves, we give our all*

*The way we work together is what sets our love apart
So closely that you can't tell where I end and where you start*

This is the bond we must aspire to in our relationships; The creation of love through identification of virtues, and repetitive acts of giving.

And look at the living role models of this ideal that we can appreciate on this special Shabbos. As we celebrate Jordan's aufruf and the forthcoming marriage of Jordan & Carly, there is so much to learn from Don and Julie, Carly's parents.

Looking at the huge number of people who have joined us today, we see a room filled with synagogue members and guests who consider themselves friends of Don and Julie. I believe that Don and Julie have so many dear friends for two reasons. First, they have so much to share with others; they are a pleasant, intelligent, warm, generous couple who are deeply dedicated to Judaism, the Jewish people, and our shul. Speaking both for my family and on behalf of our shul, I will say that when Don & Julie came to NHBZ, it was one of the best things that ever happened to us. A second reason why Don and Julie have so many friends and admirers is because they understand the secret of friendship: to have friends, you have to focus on BEING a friend to others. The Eisenbergs are selfless givers, which is why they have so many friends, and so many of you are here today to celebrate with them.

Jordan and Carly -- your parents and extended family are wonderful role models, and we have no doubt that you'll continually be inspired during what we pray will be a long and wonderful marriage, to be inspired by their lessons for living.

Today we also rejoice in celebrating Nathan's upcoming Bar Mitzvah with his dear parents Alan, Marcie and family. We so appreciate Alan and Marcie and admire how such accomplished people walk in such a humble, modest way, and are so grateful and gracious. Alan and Marcie exemplify the practice of unconditional giving to their children, which we discussed this morning.

I recall the first time I met with Alan and Marcie to discuss ideas for Nathan's Bar Mitzvah. Upon learning that Nathan loved dogs, I suggested that it would be good for Nathan to engage in a dog-related project, and that Alan and Marcie might consider getting a dog for the family. Well, as Alan & Marcie were leaving the shul, something took place that had never previously happened at the shul; at that very moment, someone walked in with a dog, asking if anyone wanted it! But while that 'sign from Heaven' was certainly stunning -- what was truly impressive to me was that soon after, Alan and Marcie decided to get a dog for their family, and for their son. Your loving commitment to your children, Alan and Marcie, is inspiring.

Good relationships take many years and much effort. The true closeness and bonds of love we strive for are created through the thoughtful actions of identifying the good qualities and character of our dear ones, and repetitive selfless acts of giving. Mazal tov to the extended Eisenberg and Brook families, and may we all merit to give and to see the good, in the ones we love.