

Ninth Annual Semikha Ceremony

Rabbanit Yael Smooha

Core Semikha Class of 2021



One of the most famous words quoted from the Torah are to love our fellow as ourselves. "*Ve-ahavta le-reiakha kamokha.*" Yet, what precedes these famous words is just as important as the words themselves: not to hate our brother in our hearts, but instead, to speak to him directly. "*Lo tisna et akhikha bi-lvavekha. Hokheakh tokhiakh et amitekha.*" "Don't hate your brother in your heart." Don't harbor resentment, but rather confront him, and eventually, you will come to love him.

But how do we confront others in a way that brings us to love? How can we truly let the other person know how we feel without pushing them further away?

The Or ha-Chaim, the 18th century Moroccan commentator on the Torah, writes that in order for this to happen, it is essential that we approach our friend judgment-free, assuming that our friend had no intention to hurt us. Only through honest yet loving communication can true closeness exist. - Only then, can we love our fellow as we love ourselves.

Yes, we need to speak up about our hurt, but only if we let go of our judgment will our words lead to greater closeness.

In my pastoral training at Maharat, the art of navigating difficult conversations was a skill that was modeled again and again. In conversations with my fellow students, in studying the difficulties that arise across the human spectrum, and in our leadership class, Maharat has not only encouraged me to make my voice heard, but given me the sensitivity and language I need to treasure the humanity in others, no matter what their story, and model for others the generosity of spirit we all need to feel in order to be connected to each other.