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Ahava Rabba Iyyun

What does it mean to live a fully integrated life, when we are made up of so many different parts and sometimes these parts feel at odds with each other in our different environments? Sometimes we dismiss this tension and try to hide from others and from ourselves. We tell ourselves, “it’s just school, I don’t have to show that part of myself.” Or “It’s just a job, I don’t need to love the people I’m working with.”

There are many reasons we might choose to conceal aspects of ourselves. But we must make sure that this concealment is not coming from, or leading to, a sense of shame. Shame makes us isolate, rather than draw us closer to our loved ones and to God. How can we feel connected to God if we feel shame? The Ahava Rabba prayer teaches us that through our commitment to studying God’s Torah and fulfilling God’s Mitzvot, we can cleave to God, experiencing a deep oneness. This disciplined practice can help reveal to us the holy patterns that build bridges.

Maybe the way we love is not celebrated by the society we participate in. Maybe our convictions are not welcomed by the institutions we represent. Whatever the tension may be, I pray that we strive to live into our truth in all facets of our precious lives, so that we may never feel shame. V’lo nevosh v’lo nikalem. May we feel God’s love fully integrated into our souls always.