

Love Letters to No One *Baseless Love Letters from Love*

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SUMMARY: Participants will engage in thought-provoking text discussion, prayerful meditation, and a written expression activity to engage in *Achivat Chinam*, or baseless love towards no one / everyone / themselves. The idea is to connect with oneself and, in doing so, connect to the world.

GOALS: Participants will feel connected and in love with themselves and the world, they will act out that love through written expression that they are not attached to the destination of out of fear or hope, but written in faith, and they will walk away knowing that love does not require an object to be loved, but can be manifested from love itself.

AUDIENCE: Adolescents (10-12+) to adults

TIMING: 45 minutes

MATERIALS: [Materials needed by anyone trying to replicate this program, including links and supplemental documents, handouts, attachments]

- Writing utensils (1 pp)
- Writing pads / papers (1 pp)
 - For a creative / cleansing feel: Flash paper, Dissolving paper, Seed paper, song / music sheets
- Copies of Appendix A: Source Sheet 1 per 1-2 participants
- Speaker/Stereo system
- Comfortable seating (cushions on the floor, a soft lawn, couches and chairs, etc.)

SET-UP:

Ideally, the program takes place in a comfortable, laidback, relaxed setting where everyone has room to sit in a full circle. Outside or inside is an option.

SESSION TIMELINE

- 00:00-00:05 – *Welcome, Norms setting*

- 00:05-00:20 – *Ahavat Chinam Text Study*
- 00:20-00:25 – *Loving Kindness Meditation*
- 00:25-00:40 – *Love Letters to No One*
- 00:40-00:45 – *Closing & Fruitful Invitation*

SESSION OUTLINE

00:00-00:05 – Welcome, Norms setting

Facilitator (FL) will welcome participants (Pps) into the room with songs about (or titled) *Ahavat Chinam* playing in the background (see Spotify playlist with the title or make one of your own!).

Once the group is settled, FL will share the purpose and outline of the session with Pps, and then guide Pps in the Five Finger Contract as a norms setting activity, and then ask for anything that Pps feel has been left out to include as well.

- Thumb: Assume positivity, and don't forget to check in with yourself (introduce 'thumb-o-meter', See Appendix D)
- Index: We agree not to point, blame, or shame others (three fingers point back at us, takes one to know one, etc.)
- Middle: We agree to choose respect, despite how easy disrespect is
- Ring: We agree to commit to being here, being present for the activity
- Pinkie: We agree to look out for the 'little one' (as we are all the little one physically, emotionally, socially, mentally, or spiritually at some point or another, including the little one makes the group stronger, etc.)
- (FL): Plus: *"This is only a hand, and only one hand at that, what reminders / norms are we leaving out that would be important to include for our session today?"*

00:05-00:20 – Ahavat Chinam Text Study

FL will hand out the source sheet (See Appendix A) to Pps and guide a discussion beginning with the temple destruction story and commentary (sinat chinam) and ending with discussion of the last text (loving all people, especially those that seek to humiliate you; ahavat chinam).

Some suggested prompts:

- *What strikes you about the temple story? Why not fight injustice (i.e., temple destruction), with revenge? Do you disagree with the call to respond to sinat chinam with ahavat chinam?*
- *What do you make of the commandment / mitzvah to love even those [non-jews] who humiliate you? Why not respond to this humiliation with humiliation? Why reach beyond one's obvious community to express goodwill and love, when so much goodwill and love is still needed within our community?*

00:20-00:25 – Loving Kindness Meditation

FL will guide a loving kindness meditation through Bhante Gunaratana's words (Sharon Salzberg is also a good source, as is Rabbi Jill Zimmerman: ravjill.com)

FL will invite Pps to bring to mind someone who helped them, supported them, made them feel loved and held and seen, to picture them in their mind's eye and feel them standing or sitting before them.

Then, beginning with 'you' (directed at that person), then proceeding to "I", "my parents", "my teachers", "my relatives", "my friends", "all indifferent persons", "all unfriendly persons", and "all living beings", repeat either the Numbers text (short) and / or Gunaratana's words below:

"May God bless [you] and protect [you], May the Holy One shine upon [you] and grant [you] grace, May the Eternal bless [you] with favor and peace."

Numbers 6:24-26

"May [you] be well, happy, and peaceful. May no harm come to [you]. May [you] always meet with spiritual success. May [you] also have patience, courage, understanding, and determination to meet and overcome inevitable difficulties, problems, and failures in life. May [you] always rise above them with morality, integrity, forgiveness, compassion, mindfulness, and wisdom."

Bhant Gunaratana, *Mindfulness in Plain English*

Once each of the subjects have been thought of in this way, FL will invite participants to take a deep breath and sit with those feelings of love and kindness for a moment.

00:25-00:40 – Love Letters to No One

FL will invite participants to maintain that feeling of outward love and kindness, and to embody it in a "Love Letter to No One" by writing from the perspective of 'Love' towards the world (i.e., 'all living beings', 'all beings', or 'no one'). FL will invite Pps to write from the prompt –

"Love, what will you have me know today?" OR (if easier to engage with)

"Love, what will you have me know today about _____?"

FL will also introduce the options for different kinds of paper to write on (as applicable) and provide quiet music to maintain a contemplative / reflective mode.

00:40-00:45 – Closing and Fruitful Invitation

FL will invite Pps to share their letters to the group if desired, or otherwise reflect on their experience writing the letter with the following prompts:

- *"How did writing from the perspective of 'Love' impact your thinking or feelings during the writing process?"*
- *"What does it mean to express ahavat chinam (baseless love) from the perspective of 'Love', rather than oneself? How are they different?"*
- *"Who hears or reads our letters when they are written to no one?"*

BRINGING IT TO YOUR CAMP

Have fun with the program! What strange twists can you bring into the types of paper you use for writing the letters? How can you write the letters to no one while also writing them to a larger audience?

Make sure to have a room protected and safe from outside intrusions, especially during more vulnerable parts of the program. Soft music helps with the mood, but so could a beautiful sunset. Get creative! Imagine how using seed paper, dissolving paper, or flash paper could each create unique experiences or prompts (i.e., something to plant, something to melt, something to burn/vanish, etc.).