

**Temple Aliyah**  
**Shavuot 2016 Sermon Slam**  
**Lori Resnick**

**“Torah Commentary on Caring for Oneself while Caring for Others”**

Hi, I'm Lori and I'd like to share some reflections with you on caring for oneself, while caring for others based on personal, as well as my professional experience as a geriatric Social Worker. I will explore how the Torah provides insights into my own experiences.

The Torah contains several dictates about the treatment of others. One of the 10 Commandments states, "Honor thy Mother & thy Father." Also, one is to "love thy neighbor as thyself." One is to care for the sick and be hospitable to the stranger. All these commandments involve our relationship with others both in our own family, with our neighbors, and with the stranger. As part of the sandwich generation I have had to deal with an elderly mother, as well as an adult child, in helping them through health/ physical issues. It is clear according to my Jewish upbringing what I must do to care for these family members. The sacrifices I must make in terms of time commitment in caring for these loved ones has never been in question. However, in my professional work as a Social Worker at a nursing home I have seen time and again how caregivers have given of themselves to the point of them having health problems. Years ago I witnessed how my mother-in-law had cared for my father-in-law, who was suffering from dementia. No one in the family realized the extent of how her care giving affected her own health until she had to be hospitalized and then sent to a rehab, where she died within a few months. Even the extent of my father-in-law's dementia did not become apparent until my mother-in-law was hospitalized. Because of my own personal observations and experiences, as well as my professional observations, I decided to look further into what the Torah says about caring for oneself, while caring for others.

One of the most important dictums in the Torah is to save a life, including your own life. In fact, one can forego any of the other Mitzvot in order to fulfill this Mitzvah. However, when does caring for others at the expense of one's own health

become a choice between saving one's own life or the life of another? It is important to take care of one's own body as it is a gift from G-d. In the commandment, "Love thy neighbor as thy self", it presupposes that a person must care for one's own needs. How can one take care of another if one becomes sick? On an airplane when the crew reviews the safety devices on the plane, they always say to put the oxygen mask on yourself, prior to helping others with their oxygen masks. Thus, it is common sense that you cannot help others with the mask if you have become depleted of oxygen.

Hillel taught, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?" (Avot 1:14) Therefore, one needs to find a balance between assisting and caring for those around us and allowing time to care for ourselves. Although caring for others on a time-limited basis, such as visiting the sick, preparing a meal for someone in mourning or recovering from an illness, or making a shiva call can give us moral and emotional strength, providing care on an ongoing basis for long periods of time, can deplete us emotionally and physically. At these times it is important to reach out to those in the community for emotional sustenance and support. We have been given a finite amount of time to live our life on this Earth and we need to value our time here. Tikun Olam "repairing the world" must begin with our own lives. In dealing with family crises recently, I have come to the conclusion that I can best care for those around me if I allow myself time to attend to my own emotional and physical needs.