



## **SHEMOT**

**Ki Tissa**

Intimate Secrets

March 18, 2017

INTIMATE SECRETS:

TEN LESSONS FOR MENDING A BROKEN RELATIONSHIP

ABSTRACT

Is there anything we can do to repair a broken relationship? How can we make amends after a betrayal?

None of us are immune to challenges in our personal relationships. The old idiom goes that a marriage without an occasional argument is a bad sign. But what happens when the arguments dominate and overwhelm the bond? Sometimes relationship challenges can be quite serious. Betrayal or other severe transgressions can put a terrible strain on a marriage and even destroy the union. Can we mend a relationship that has been broken? Can we rediscover love after it has been compromised?

You may be surprised to learn that this week's Torah reading answers this question with an unequivocal yes! Moreover, it actually teaches us methods how to rebuild a shattered relationship

Barely 39 days after they heard the commandment not to worship false gods, the Jewish people built the Golden Calf. G-d was understandably unforgiving over this blatant betrayal. But then...

Enter Moses to offer us a rare – once in history – glimpse into the intimate secret of communicating with the Divine, as he beseeches that G-d forgive and reconcile with the people.

In a deeply moving and fascinating dialogue, Moses probes the inner workings of G-d. "Show me Your face," Moses implores. And G-d responds and ultimately forgives.

The dialogue between Moses and G-d contains many powerful lessons for forging an intimate relationship with G-d and for mending our human relationships that may have been inadvertently damaged or estranged.

This sermon explores ten (of many) such lessons, including: 1) why total disclosure is important, 2) how to see the face of your beloved, 3) what it takes to heal, and more...

[You can pick and choose among these lessons].

## 1. Quips about Relationships (Humor)

Since today we are going to be talking about how to cull from the encounter between G-d and Moses some important lessons for mending a broken relationship, I thought to begin with a bit of humor about relationships:

- Marriages are made in heaven. But, so are thunder and lightning.
- Married life is very frustrating. In the first year of marriage, the man speaks and the woman listens. In the second year, the woman speaks and the man listens. In the third year, they both speak and the neighbors listen.
- When a man opens the door of his car for his wife, you can be sure of one thing – either the car is new or the wife is.
- Marriage is when a man and woman become as one; the trouble starts when they try to decide which one.
- A man is incomplete until he is married. After that, he is finished.

Those of you who laughed ... this was a test, and you are in trouble now.

Okay, let's get serious...

## 2. Like a Close Friend

There is something about this week's Torah reading that has always touched me in a very powerful way.

It contains perhaps the most intimate description you will ever find of a human being's interaction with G-d, for we are told that "G-d would speak to Moses face to face, like a person speaks to a close friend."<sup>1</sup>

But, while this was happening atop Mount Sinai – where Moses had climbed to receive the divine mandate called the Torah – down below the Israelites were engaged in just the opposite. Down below, they were building the Golden Calf.

When, after 40 days, Moses finally descended with the Ten Commandments and saw this travesty, he shattered the two stone tablets which contained them.

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 33:11.

### 3. How to Mend All Broken Relationships

Moses then returned to the top of the mountain again to beg G-d's forgiveness.

And here is where a most fascinating conversation ensued – an intimate, deeply personal conversation.

Every aspect of this conversation contains myriad of lessons how to face difficult situations and how to connect with G-d – lessons that can be applied to mending all types of relationships. We will examine some of these lessons now.

### 4. Make Total Disclosure

#### Lesson One: Make Total Disclosure

Having returned to the top of Mount Sinai, Moses begins immediately with total acknowledgment of the crime: “The people have committed a terrible sin by making a golden idol.”<sup>2</sup>

This teaches us that trust is built not on perfection but on accountability. When you have made a mistake (or even committed a crime of betrayal), you can't go into denial or try to cover-up. You can't begin with excuses and explanations. You must state plainly and clearly that a wrong has been done, and you are responsible.

Once the sin has been fully acknowledged with no excuses, the wronged party is that much more likely to see that you are accountable, and thus worthy of forgiveness.

### 5. Have the Courage to Heal

#### Lesson Two: Have the Courage to Heal

Note that Moses does not shrink away with guilt or fear over the fact that the people had perpetrated such a serious transgression. Many others would have given up, feeling totally hopeless and not knowing how to make amends and win forgiveness.

It takes courage not to sink into resignation and to make an effort at healing the damage to the relationship, especially after a grave sin that leaves the offender overwhelmed with guilt and shame. (It is true that Moses did not commit the sin, but he so completely identified with the people that he carried their guilt and shame on his shoulders.)

So, after total disclosure must come the strength and conviction to heal.

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<sup>2</sup> Exodus 32:31.

We see that Moses has both, when he tells G-d: “Now, if You would, please forgive their sin.”<sup>3</sup> In the way he says it, he expects a positive response.

## 6. Self Sacrifice

### Lesson Three: Accept that Forgiveness May Require Self Sacrifice

As a true selfless leader Moses does not disassociate himself from the sinful people – something that he could have easily done as he was not to blame for their sin.

And G-d gives him the chance to disown them. G-d even gives him the opportunity to build a new nation. However, in his great love for the people and total conviction that G-d loves them, Moses does not take the easy way out. He stands up to G-d and brazenly states: “If not [that is, if you don’t forgive them], You can erase me from the book that You have written.” In other words, “If You destroy them, destroy me as well!”

You might think that the conversation would end at that point. If someone tried to convince you to pardon your straying spouse in the way Moses tried to convince G-d to forgive the Jews’ betrayal, would you continue to listen?

But not only does the conversation continue, it intensifies into one of the (if not the) most intimate conversations you will ever hear in your life.

G-d at first refuses to forgive the people. But Moses continues the dialogue and raises the ante:

“You told me to bring these people [to the Promised Land] ... You also said that You know me by name and that I have found favor in Your eyes. Now if I have indeed found favor in Your eyes, allow me to know Your ways, so that I will know how to [continue] to find favor in Your eyes...”<sup>4</sup>

This elicits the following declaration from G-d: “Since you have found favor in My eyes and I know you by name, I will also fulfill this request of yours.”<sup>5</sup>

## 7. Seeing G-d

Moses then begs, “Please show me Your face.” To which G-d replies: “I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will reveal the Divine Name in your presence...”

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 32:32.

<sup>4</sup> Exodus 33:12-13.

<sup>5</sup> Exodus 33:17.

G-d then explains:

“You cannot see My Presence, because a man cannot see me and live. [But] I have a special place where you can stand on the rocky mountain. When My Glory passes by, I will place you in a crevice in the mountain, placing My hand over you until I pass by. I will then remove My hand and you will see My back, but My face you will not see.”<sup>6</sup>

G-d then tells Moses to carve another set of tablets and commands: “Be ready in the morning to climb Mount Sinai and stand waiting for Me on the mountain peak. No man may climb up with you, and no one else may appear on the entire mountain. Even the cattle and sheep may not graze near the mountain.”

There, G-d reveals Himself as He promised and Moses hears proclaimed the Thirteen Divine Attributes of Compassion:

HASHEM, HASHEM, Almighty, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in kindness and truth, keeper of kindness for thousands of generations, endurer of iniquity and transgression and sin, and cleanser [of those who repent].<sup>7</sup>

As he hears this, Moses bows down and says: “If You are indeed pleased with me, O G-d, please come among us ... Forgive our sins and errors and make us Your own.”

G-d then responds:

“I will make a covenant before all your people and will do miracles that have never before been brought into existence in all the universe, among any nation ... [But] be very careful... do not bow down to any other G-d, for G-d is known to demand exclusive worship.”<sup>8</sup>

The end of the story is that after 80 days of prayer Moses does prevail, and G-d grants complete pardon on Yom Kippur, which thereafter becomes the holiest day of the year.

## 8. Profound Intimacy

As cryptic as this conversation between Moses and G-d may seem, several things are clear:

Moses is not satisfied with just gaining divine pardon. Moses uses this challenge as an opportunity to uncover G-d’s mysterious ways. Because Moses wants to go as far as he can to experience G-d’s essence.

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<sup>6</sup> Exodus 33:18-23.

<sup>7</sup> Exodus 34:1-7.

<sup>8</sup> Exodus 34:10-14.

You would think that under the circumstances, with the people clearly guilty of a terrible crime, Moses would want to secure G-d's forgiveness and get "out of there" as soon as possible. But no. Moses is absolutely confident in G-d's love of the people, and is not satisfied with mere "damage control." He realizes that the betrayal offers an unprecedented opportunity to access the deepest dimensions of G-d's being so that human beings would forever after have an infinitely more profound relationship with G-d – a relationship that would never break, one that could transcend every difficulty and imbue us with hope and confidence.

Another thing that stands out about this exchange is the tone and language, which resounds with profound intimacy. If you did not know that this was a conversation between man and G-d, it could well read as a romantic dialogue of love.

From this dialogue we can glean several more vital lessons in relationship management.

## 9. Never Stop Growing

### Lesson Four: Never Stop Growing

Regaining trust after a betrayal is not enough. The experience must become a catalyst for deepening the relationship. Getting back to square one simply will not suffice, for that would not redeem the pain and loss.

Every challenge must lead us to a more profound love than the one we began with. We must use the opportunity to discover deeper bonds – bonds that could withstand a betrayal of trust, because they reflect a love deeper than the betrayal.

## 10. Never Give Up

### Lesson Five: Never Give Up

True love is unconditional and eternal. When you are sure that you love your beloved and your beloved loves you, you never stop trying to repair any rift between the two.

Obviously, this should not be confused with obsession or infatuation, which may not always reflect a healthy, unconditional love. One may need an objective voice to help determine if the love is of the healthy or unhealthy sort.

Moses knew that G-d is not bound by any rules that would limit His love for the people. He knew that if he was absolutely honest in his plea for forgiveness, he would prevail.

## 11. Build on Your Connection

### Lesson Six: Build on Your Connection

When a relationship is challenged, it is critical to access the deep connection that exists between you and your beloved. Moses therefore tells G-d “You know me by name ... You know and recognize me like no one else does. Therefore, you know that I am here with my full sincerity and vulnerability, at your mercy. Please don’t forsake me.”

Knowledge of the other implies intimacy. Indeed, a form of the Hebrew word da’at is used throughout the Torah to imply that very thing. When you see that your beloved intimately knows you, you can ask in return: “Allow me to know you as well, so that I will know how to continue to please you.”

## 12. Story from the Midrash (Optional)

This lesson about connection reminds me of an inspirational story from the Midrash.

The Midrash tells a story of a man and woman who had no children after ten years of marriage. As this was long before fertility clinics and in-vitro fertilization, they decided that they should divorce. They had no quarrel with each other; each just wanted the other to have a better chance of starting a family with someone else. They came to the famed 2nd century sage, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, to prepare the writ of divorce. But being a truly wise man, he decided to delay them. He said, “When you were married, you had a feast. Now that you are about to divorce, you should have a feast also.”

So that is what they did. During the feast, the husband – who was feeling quite sad that this was happening – had a lot of wine to drink. Under the influence, he told his wife, “Anything of value that I own, you can take with you when you return to your parents’ home. Anything at all.” Shortly thereafter he fell asleep. While he was asleep she had their servants pick up the bed he was sleeping on and carry it together with him to her parents’ home.

In the morning he woke up. Surprised, he asked her, “Where am I?” She said, “You are in my parents’ home.” He didn’t understand. “What am I doing here?” She said, “Don’t you remember? Last night you told me that I could take anything of value. Anything at all. And that’s what I did. There is nothing more valuable to me in life than you.”

The husband realized that they could not divorce. So they went back to Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai to cancel the writ of divorce. And soon thereafter the wife became pregnant.<sup>9</sup>

How is that for accessing a deep connection when a relationship is challenged?

<sup>9</sup> Midrash Rabbah, Song of Songs 1:4.



## 13. Be Present

### Lesson Seven: Be Present

A relationship is about being present. Being present doesn't just mean showing up. It means that you are there with your complete self – invested entirely in your spouse, more than anything else you may be involved in.

At work, for instance, part of you should be present, but it's not healthy if all of you is immersed. You must always reserve part of your essence for a higher purpose. But in a loving relationship your entire presence is necessary.

## 14. See the Face of Your Beloved

### Lesson Eight: See the Face of Your Beloved

The fullest expression of love is when you see the “face” of your beloved. The word for face in Hebrew is *panim*, which also means “inside.” Moses, therefore, in his great longing for G-d, asks to see His face.

Yet, no one can see G-d's face and live.

Commentaries explain that G-d's reply to Moses, “You will see My back but My face you will not see” should be read as follows: “You will see My back but My face you will see by not seeing.”<sup>10</sup>

The intimate essence of G-d can only be experienced or seen by not looking, by not allowing your “self” – your ego – to get in the way. The same is true for all intimate relationships. When you see your spouse as an extension of yourself, you do not truly see him or her.

Only by suspending yourself and becoming a transparent channel, can you truly “see” G-d and your beloved.

## 15. Value Your Private Moment

### Lesson Nine: Value Your Private Moments

Presence also includes the need, at times, for total privacy, without any distractions.

As G-d tells Moses: “Stand waiting for Me on the mountain peak. No man may climb up with you, and no one else may appear on the entire mountain. Even the cattle and sheep may not graze near the mountain.”

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<sup>10</sup> Panim Yafot (lit. “Beautiful Faces”), a commentary on Chumash, based on both Halachah and Kabbalah, by Rabbi Pinchas HaLevy Horowitz of Frankfurt (c. 1730-1805), a disciple of the Maggid of Mezritch.

At this moment you need to seclude yourself with Me in an oasis that frees you from all social and environmental forces, with no other people or even nature around.

## 16. Treasure Exclusivity

### Lesson Ten: Treasure Exclusivity

Finally, a true relationship is about exclusivity. This is why G-d declared: “Do not bow down to any other G-d, for G-d demands exclusive worship.”

This is not because of jealousy or control, but because love is all-encompassing, indivisible, and it cannot be compartmentalized. A relationship with G-d must embrace G-d on His terms, not on ours.

The Golden Calf is about worshipping a G-d on subjective, human terms. A G-d created by man in the human image, rather than G-d who created man in His Divine Image.

## 17. A Blessing

We were blessed to overhear the intimate conversation between Moses and G-d. We may not fully understand all its dimensions, but we can glean many lessons from their exchange.

Some of the lessons we have already mentioned. Many more remain to be explored. Lessons can also be gleaned from the Thirteen Divine Attributes of Compassion revealed to Moses in the process. The key is to understand that the relationship between Moses and G-d can help us deal with all relationship issues – between you and yourself, between you and your loved ones, between you and G-d.

And to grow from there. [Amen]

## 18. Image of G-d (Optional)

Many of us have grown up with the image of a G-d that sits mighty in heaven, detached, angry, full of wrath, waiting to punish us for our sins. If nothing else, this week’s dialogue between Moses and G-d dispels that myth, and teaches us that our relationship with G-d is far more complex, far more subtle. It is a highly personal relationship, intimate in nature, and one that touches the very core of our being.

To quote Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev: “The G-d you don’t believe in I don’t believe in either.”

Perhaps our big challenge is to destroy our false G-ds and false images of G-d, and to allow ourselves to be introduced to the Real G-d – the one that speaks to your soul in the most intimate way. Amen.

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