

Ten Steps to a Healthy Relationship: Pesach to Shavuot

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Clearly, the journey from Egypt to Mt. Sinai parallels man's journey from betrothal to wedding ceremony. God frees the Jews and betroths Himself to us at Pesach. We travel from Egypt, protected on all sides with God's love, to Mt. Sinai, where we accept God's covenant. We agree to follow his Torah and mitzvot and God promises to protect us from all the sicknesses that befell Egypt. The commentators suggest that the relationship between God and His people is a metaphor for the most sacred relationship: a marriage between husband and wife.

The Exodus from Egypt to the arrival at Mt. Sinai is symbolic of the beginning of the relationship between a husband and wife. It is fair to say that God's actions and the way He treats the Jewish people is a paradigm for any long and communicative relationship. Just as the Ten Commandments, read every Shavuot, remind us of and reinforce our commitment to our relationship to our Creator, so too, when examining the journey between the first Pesach and Shavuot we can find ten steps that helped solidify the relationship between God and His people. We can use these actively to ensure our relationships in our personal lives as well.

The metaphor of bride and groom is often used by Rashi when discussing Bnei Yisroel receiving the Torah at Mt. Sinai.

Moses brought the people forth from the camp toward God and they stood under the mountain

Shemot 19:17

Toward God: This implies that the Shechina went out to greet them, as a bridegroom to a bride.

Rashi ibid.

ויוצא משה את העם לקראת האלקים מן המחנה
ויתיצבו בתחתית ההר
שמות יט:יז
לקראת האלקים: מגיד שהשכינה יצאה לקראתם,
כחתן היוצא לקראת כלה
רש"י שם

God gave to Moshe, when He finished speaking with him on Mt. Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, stone tablets inscribed by the finger of God

Shemot 31:18

ויתן אל משה ככלתו לדבר אתו בהר
סיני שני לחת העדות לחת אבן
כתבים באצבע אלקים
שמות לא:יח

K'khaloto is spelled defectively (without a vav) to be read k'khalato for the Torah was given to him as a gift like a bride to a bridegroom.

Rashi ibid.

ככלתו: ככלתו כתיב חסר שנמסרה
לו תורה במתנה ככלה לחתן
רש"י שם

This idea is also seen in the fifth of the sheva brachot. A couple is referred to as *re'im ahuvim*, loving and kind friends. The Hebrew word for love *ahuvim* is derived from the root word *hav*, to give. To love means to give. It isn't what my spouse is doing for me, but what I am doing for my spouse. We shouldn't view our relationship like a business. This isn't a 50/50 partnership. That kind of relationship can lead to mistrust. Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis is known for saying, "marriage is about give and give more".

1. Anticipating Your Spouse's Needs

The first of the ten solidifying steps we can learn from God is that He carried us on the wings of eagles. (Shemot 19:4) When we first left Egypt, Rashi tells us that God deliberately took us out of Egypt during the Spring, with nice weather. We were weary and He anticipated our needs.

2. Trust

The second action in this relationship was that of the Jewish people. In שמות יב:לט it states וגם הם צדה לא עשו להם ("and also they had not made provisions for themselves"). Rashi elaborates and mentions that the verse is a praise of Israel by pointing out that the people did not ask what they would eat in the wilderness; rather, they believed in God's word and went. The trust that the Jewish people placed in God is cherished and treasured by God.

I remembered you for your favor the kindness of your youth, the love when you were a bride, your following Me in the desert, in a land not sown.

Yirmiyahu 2:2

זכרתי לך חסד נעורייך אהבת
כלולותיך לכתך אחרי במדבר
בארץ לא זרועה
ירמיהו ב:ב

This trust elevated us according to the Mechilta to a level of holiness, where we separated ourselves from others and a connection was established with God. The element of trust is so important in a relationship that once you lose it, it is very hard to regain it

3. Praise

On the morning of the seventh day after leaving Egypt, the Jewish people teach us yet another valuable lesson, the importance of praise. After the splitting of the sea and the drowning of their enemies, Moshe and Miriam separately lead the men and women in song. In a relationship, take the time to express your appreciation appropriately. Spell out gratitude in detail so that your spouse is assured of your feelings. Chazal tell us that King Chizkiyahu had the potential to be the Messiah, but because he didn't recognize the importance of singing praise to God, he wasn't selected. When we think positively about our spouse it will also lead to a lessening of criticism.

4. Listening Effectively

In Chapter 15 of Sefer Shmot the Jewish people complain about a lack of water at Marah. God listens to the people. Listening effectively is skill number four. You need to truly hear the message the other person is trying to convey. On the fifteenth of Iyar the Jewish people ran out of food. Although they complain, God doesn't get angry. We learn from Chazal:

Man is recognized by three things: The way he spends money, the way he drinks, and the way he responds with anger.

על שלשה דברים האדם ניכר;
בכיסו, בכוסו, ובכעסו

While a person cannot help being hurt or upset, we can control our reaction.

5. The Art of Communication

A true Middah of God which is recognizable in His relationship with the Jewish people is communication. God constantly called on Moshe to relay His thoughts to us.

And Moshe said: If you will diligently listen to the voice of the Lord your God, and what is right in His eyes you will do, and you will listen to His commandments and will keep His statutes, all the diseases which I have put upon the Egyptians I will not put upon you.

Shemot 15:26

ויאמר אם שמוע תשמע לקול ה'
אלקיך והישר בעיניו והאזנת
למצותיו ושמרת כל חקיו כל
המחלה אשר שמתי במצרים לא
אשים עליך כי אני ה' רפאך
שמות טו:כו

Following listening effectively is the art of communication. At the start of the relationship this is the focus. Both sides must voice their thoughts and opinions, necessary to prevent quarrels or prejudgments.

6. Stand by Your Spouse

When Moshe himself gets frustrated, because the people have complained twice already about their lack of water and God's ability to provide it, we see Hashem's positive attitude and His willingness to stand by the Jewish people during their frustration as the sixth lesson.

[Moshe is so upset he says] What shall I do for this people? A bit more and they will stone me ... [God tells Moshe] Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel.

Shemot 17:5

מה אעשה לעם הזה עוד מעט וסקלני
... עבור לפני העם וקח אתך מזקני
ישראל
שמות יז:ה

The Midrash Tanchuma Beshalach 22 asks, what is the purpose of these two passages? The midrash regards it as a rebuke from God for Moshe's impatience. "God answered Moshe: Is this the way you talk? How often have I told you not to order them about but to lead them like a shepherd his flock; ..." We might think that Moshe is right. What kind of behavior is this from the Jewish people?

Do not test God the way you tested Him in Masah

Devarim 6:16

לא תנסו את ה' אלקיכם כאשר נסיתם במסה
דברים ו:טז

Isn't this contradicting the Midrash? The Midrash feels that Hashem sided with Bnei Yisroel. This pasuk clearly shows us that Hashem was not happy with the Jewish people at the time. Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch tells us that at the beginning of a relationship certain things can't be expected. Hashem allowed Bnei Yisroel this learning curve. After God had proven Himself to us it would then not be acceptable to test God. We are told to hold fast to this certainty and to not ask for further miracles. We need to believe that God is in our midst and live and die in that certainty.

7. The Importance of Time and Effort

When the Jewish people reach Mt. Sinai the seventh lesson is taught, the importance of time and effort in a relationship. The Jewish people wanted to hear the commandments directly from God, so Moshe instructs them to diligently prepare themselves.

8. The Importance of Boundaries

In Chapter 19 they separated for three days from their spouses and prepared themselves physically and spiritually to greet God at Mt. Sinai. God as well set up boundaries on the mountain because even in the most intimate of relationships people need to respect each other, an eighth point to be learned.

God reiterates His love for His people.

You will be a treasure to Me from among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine You will be to Me a kingdom of ministers and a holy nation.

Shemot 19:5

והייתם לי סגלה מכל העמים...ואתם
תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש
שמות יט: ה

9. Love is Based on Reason

The essence of a relationship between two people is expounded upon in Rav Samson Rafael Hirsch's commentary in Chayei Sarah when Yitzchak brings Rivkah into his mother's tent.

And Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah. And he married Rivkah, she became his wife and he loved her, and only then was Isaac comforted after his Mother

Bereishit 24:67

ויביאה יצחק האהלה שרה אמו ויקח את
רבקה ותהי לו לאשה ויאהבה וינחם יצחק
אחרי אמו
בראשית כד: סז

Rav Hirsch states that the longer Yitzchak and Rivkah were married the more Yitzchak loved Rivkah! Like this marriage of Yitzchak and Rivkah, Jewish marriages are contracted not strictly by passion, but by reason and judgment. This ninth idea is different from most non Jewish marriages whose main reason for existing is "love." However, love that is based on attraction alone is blind and every step leads to disappointment.

10. Sharing the Same Basic Goals and Values

We finally reach the tenth action in this relationship: the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai which is the main celebration of Shavuot. The Torah tells us

They journeyed from Rephidim and arrived at the wilderness of Sinai and encamped in the wilderness. And Israel encamped there opposite the mountain

Shemot 19:2

ויסעו מרפידים ויבא אל מדבר סיני
ויחנו במדבר ויחן שם ישראל נגד
ההר.

שמות יט:ב

Why the repetition? According to Rashi it is to show “כאיש אחד בלב אחד” - “we were as one man with one heart.” At that moment God and the Jewish people shared the same basic goals and values. Both parties were committed to honoring the covenant of the forefathers using the Torah, which comes from the word, להורות, to instruct, as their guide.

A relationship is destined to succeed when strengthened by God and His people. At Mt. Sinai, we were taught to follow halacha, which shares the same root as ללכת, “to go” implying that in the Torah, God has given us the preparation to success; the “way to go”.

God has shared with us the intimate activities of His relationship with the Jewish people. It is clear that if we want a successful marriage this is the path that we too should follow.