

**5770 Yom Kippur Intro to Haftorah**  
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As we enter into this new year, we remember the creation of the world and the very first two people to have a relationship, Adam and Eve. As we all know, things didn't go very well between them. From the very beginning, they broke the rules and got into some pretty serious trouble with God. But, their problems really began when they turned against one another. Eve is the one who gives Adam the forbidden fruit and when he is caught, Adam immediately "tattles" on Eve. Not the best foundation for a new relationship. At this point in the story, they have both hurt one another tremendously. So what should they do next?

Ask any three-year old on the playground what *they* should do if they hurt someone, and you will always get the same answer. You should say "I'm sorry." There may be a few additions – one child may tell you should also hug the person you've hurt, another may say you should give them your toy .... But the idea is the same. Adam and Eve should apologize to one another and then apologize to God. But is it really that simple?

For a three year old, once the "I'm sorrys" have been said and the hugs or toys have been given, the incident is forgotten. They are not pondering the meaning of the incident weeks, months, or even years later. As adults, we all know it isn't so simple.

We all know the consequences of the betrayal in the Adam and Eve story. But the Rabbis want us to look further. The Rabbis point out that the text reads as follows: "So the Lord God banished *him* from the garden of Eden, to till the soil from which *he* was taken. He drove *the man* out..." What does this teach us? That Eve was never expelled from the garden. Eve chooses to follow Adam out into the unknown world.

Try to imagine Adam and Eve facing one another the morning *after* the expulsion. One *Midrash* teaches that the next morning, Adam questions Eve about why she has chosen to leave Eden. Eve replies that she loves Adam and wants to be with him. Adam, understandably, is unsure of whether he can trust Eve again. Eve has similar reservations. So how do they move forward?

Let's come back to Adam and Eve in a moment. First, I want to talk about us - me and you all here today. We have all focused a great deal of effort in our preparations for this day, for Yom Kippur, in asking for forgiveness. We have said "I'm sorry" to those we might have wronged (up to three times if necessary!) and have worked on ways to avoid making similar mistakes in the future. We know what the rules are for the apologies.

But what about the person who is supposed to be doing the forgiving? What have we been taught about how to get to the place of being able to forgive? In today's Haftorah, God declares, "For I will not always contend, I will not be angry forever." How do we keep from being angry forever? How do we *really* forgive?

When I talk about forgiveness, I am not referring to simple acts. This is not about forgiving the grocery clerk who miscounts your change or the visitor who accidentally spills red wine on your new white carpet. Those are like the "playground" incidents of children - easy to forgive, easy to move past. I'm also not talking about those incidents that are unforgivable. I believe we cannot forgive those who commit large scale atrocities like the Nazis or the hijackers on the planes on 9/11. But there are times when things are not so clear. There are times when we really, truly want to be able to forgive; times when we know in our minds that forgiveness is the best option. But for some reason, we feel like we can not do it.

In the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides teaches that: [A person wronged] "should erase the matter from his heart and not bear a grudge, for as long as he bears a grudge and remembers it, perhaps he will ultimately come to wreak vengeance. Therefore, the Torah took a strong stand against bearing a grudge such that a person must erase the wrong from his heart and not remember it at all. And this is the correct attitude to have so that it is possible to sustain civilization and the interaction of people with each other."

It may be the "correct attitude", but it isn't easy. The hardest part of Yom Kippur for me, and I'm sure for many of you, is the act of forgiving those who have hurt us. We focus this holiday on the ideas of *T'shuvah*, *Tzedakah*, and *T'fillah*. We focus on apologizing, giving to charity, and heartfelt prayers to correct our own actions. But we spend very little time learning what it means to forgive and aren't really taught how to do it well.

I know I am fortunate to have people in my life – my parents, my siblings - that I always knew would never let me down. And they never have. Perhaps that is why now, as an adult, when I feel betrayed by someone it is so hard to move forward, so hard to truly forgive. Seeing or speaking to someone who has hurt me, even long after the incident is over, still causes that little pull on my heartstrings, the catching of my breath that reminds me of the pain that was caused.

Why is it *so* hard to forgive those who have betrayed us or hurt us deep in our souls? I think it is because in order to feel betrayal, in order for someone to have hurt us that much, it must have been someone we truly loved and cared about. Only someone that means *that* much to us can cause us that kind of pain. Otherwise, it wouldn't really matter.

Let's return to Adam and Eve. The *midrash* imagines God and Satan having a conversation on that important morning after Adam and Eve leave Eden. Satan asks God "Why did you expel only Adam and not Eve?" God answered: "It was the only way they could rebuild their love. Otherwise, Adam would never really be sure that Eve was sorry. But because she was willing to give up Eden for him, he knew her love. And because it was her choice to be with him, her choice to move forward, she was also able to forgive."

Rabbi Ilana Grinblatt teaches that "Each Yom Kippur we are forced to ask one question of ourselves. What does God want?" I believe God wants us to forgive, wants us to move past the pain. In this Haftorah, God talks about forgiveness. God says "For their sinful greed I was angry; I struck them and turned away in my wrath." Despite this anger, God still pledges. "I note how they fare and will heal them: I will guide them and mete out solace to them, And to the mourners among them [offer] heartening, comforting words: It shall be well, well with the far and the near ... and I will heal them."

God is modeling for us that whatever hurt or betrayal might have happened, we should still forgive, still treat others with kindness. But we must still learn from what has happened. For when a hammer is used to put nails into a block of wood, the nails may be removed, but the wood is never really whole again. We cannot pretend that the injuries have not occurred, but must find a way to move forward in kindness and in love. We can not change what others have done to us. But we can change how we choose to respond to it.

This Haftorah is often used as a wake up call for social justice - a reminder that we are responsible for our brothers and sisters all over the world living without food and shelter. And it must be that as well. But, it is easy to argue that we should feed the hungry and clothe the naked. It is harder to remember that we are equally responsible for feeding the spirits of those that are around us, that we must wrap our friends and neighbors in the blankets of kindness that should be surrounding them. We must be the ones doing the forgiving as well. Once we have done this then, as the text teaches “Shall your light burst through like the dawn and your healing spring up quickly... Then, when you call, the Lord will answer.”

How do we “dwell in holiness” like God? By doing the same as God. We must open up our hearts and find ways to truly forgive those who have hurt us. But opening our hearts isn't easy. Rabbi Mendl of Kotzk teaches that we should look to the Shema as a guide for this process. “The verse says ‘And these words which I command you this day shall be *upon* your heart.’ The verse does not say ‘*in* your heart.’ For there are times when the heart is shut. But the words rest upon the heart, and when the heart opens in holy hours, they sink deep down into it.” On this holy day of Yom Kippur, I invite you to open up your heart to forgiveness. If Adam and Eve can truly forgive one another, then surely, so can we.

May this year be filled with blessings of love and forgiveness. *G'mar Hatimah Tovah.*