



Another Way

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July 15, 2024

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Everyone does things that they regret sometimes but expressing that regret can often be a challenge. On this episode of *TEXTing*, **Elana Stein Hain** and **Yonah Hain** examine a text from Shemot Rabbah to discover how we can meaningfully express our regrets and make amends.

*This source sheet is part of the **July 15, 2015** episode of the podcast **TEXTING with Elana Stein Hain** which delves deeply into Jewish texts to guide and inspire us as we grapple with the concerns and meaning of this moment. Join Elana as she addresses the issues of our day through the lens of classical Jewish texts in conversation with Hartman scholars.*

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1. Shemot (Exodus) 32:11

וַיַּחַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת־פָּנָיו ה' אֶל־לֹהֵיו וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה ה' יַחַרְהֵ אַפָּי בְּעַמִּי אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
בְּכַח גְּדוֹל וּבְיָד חֲזָקָה:

But Moses implored his Lord God, saying, "Let not Your anger, God, blaze forth against Your people, whom You delivered from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand.

2. Bamidbar (Numbers) 30:3

אִישׁ כִּי־יָדָר לַה' אֹהֶשֶׁבֶע שְׁבַעָה לְאַסֹּר אֶסֶר עַל־נַפְשׁוֹ לֹא יַחַל דְּבָרוֹ כְּכִלְהִיצָא מִפִּיו
יַעֲשֶׂה:

If a householder makes a vow to God or takes an oath imposing an obligation on himself, he shall not break his pledge; he must carry out all that has crossed his lips.

3. Shemot (Exodus) Rabbah 43:4

Part 1: The Conflict

דָּבָר אַחֵר, וַיַּחַל מֹשֶׁה, מֵהוּ כֵּן, אָמַר רַבִּי בִּרְכַּיָּה בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי חֲלָבוּ בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי יִצְחָק, שֶׁהִתִּיר
נִדְרוֹ שֶׁל יוֹצְרוֹ. כִּי־צָד, אֲלֵא בְּשַׁעָה שְׁעָשׂוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל הֶעֱגֵל עֲמַד מֹשֶׁה מִפְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים שֶׁיִּמְחַל
לָהֶם. אָמַר הָאֱלֹהִים, מֹשֶׁה, כָּבֹד נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי (שְׁמוֹת כב, יט): זֶכֶךְ לְאַלְהִים יַחֲרֹם, וְדָבָר
שְׁבוּעָה שֶׁיִּצָּא מִפִּי אֵינִי מַחְזִירוֹ.

Another matter, "Moses implored [*vayhal*]," what is this? Rabbi Berekhya said in the name of Rabbi Helbo, in the name of Rabbi Yitzhak: He dissolved the vow of his Maker. How so? When Israel crafted the calf, Moses rose to placate God, so He would pardon them. God said: 'But I already took an oath: "One who sacrifices to gods shall be destroyed" (Exodus 22:19), and an oath that emerged from My mouth, I do not recant.'

Part 2: Giving Permission for Regret/Making Amends/Admitting Fault

אָמַר מֹשֶׁה רַבּוֹן הָעוֹלָם וְלֹא נָתַתָּ לִי הַפָּרָה שֶׁל נְדָרִים, וְאַמְרַתָּ (במדבר ל, ג): אִישׁ כִּי יָדָר
נִדָּר לַה' אוֹ הִשָּׁבַע שְׁבַעָה לְאַסֹּר אֶסֶר עַל נַפְשׁוֹ לֹא יַחַל דְּבָרוֹ, הוּא אֵינּוּ מוֹחֵל אֲבָל חָכָם
מוֹחֵל אֶת נִדְרוֹ בְּעֵת שִׁשְׁשָׁל עָלָיו, וְכָל זָקֵן שִׁמּוּרָה הוֹרָאָה אִם יִרְצֶה שִׁיקְבְּלוּ אַחֲרֵים
הוֹרָאָתוֹ צְרִיךְ הוּא לְקִימָה תַּחֲלָה, וְאַתָּה צוִּיתָנִי עַל הַפֶּרֶת נְדָרִים, דִּין הוּא שֶׁתִּתִּיר אֶת נִדְרָךְ
כְּאֲשֶׁר צוִּיתָנִי לְהִתִּיר לְאַחֲרֵים.

Moses said: 'Master of the universe, did You not give me [the laws of] nullification of vows, and You said: "If a man takes a vow to the Lord, or takes an oath to impose a prohibition upon himself, he shall not profane [*yahe*] his word"? (Numbers 30:3). He does not profane it, but a Sage may pardon [*mohe*] his vow when he requests it. Any elder who issues rulings, who wants others to

accept his ruling, must first fulfill it himself. You commanded me regarding the nullification of vows, it is only right that You nullify Your vow, as You commanded me to nullify for others.'

Part 3: Moshe Maintaining Humility (as an onlooker)

מִיָּד נִתְעַטֵּף בְּטָלִיתוֹ וַיֵּשֶׁב לוֹ כְּזָקֵן, וְהַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עוֹמֵד כְּשׂוֹאֵל נִדְרוֹ, וְכֵן הוּא אוֹמֵר (דברים ט, ט): וַאֲשֶׁב בְּהָר, וְאֶפְשָׁר שֶׁהָיָה מֹשֶׁה יוֹשֵׁב וְהָאֱלֹהִים יֹתֵבֵרֵךְ שְׁמוֹ עוֹמֵד, אָמַר רַבִּי דְרוֹסָאִי קְתִידָא עָשָׂה לוֹ כְּקְתִידָא שֶׁל אֶסְטִלִּיסְטִקִין הִלְלוּ בְּשַׁעָה שֶׁהוּא נִכְנָסִין לִפְנֵי הַשְּׁלֵטוֹן וְהוּא נִרְאִין עוֹמֵדִין וְאֵינֶן אֵלָּא יוֹשְׁבִין, וְאֵף כֵּן, יוֹשִׁיבָה שֶׁהִיא נִרְאָה עֹמֵדָה, הִיא: וַאֲשֶׁב בְּהָר.

Immediately, he wrapped himself in his cloak and sat as an elder, and the Holy One blessed be He, may his name be blessed, was standing like one who requests nullification of his vow. Likewise, it says: "I sat on the mountain" (Deuteronomy 9:9). Is it possible that Moses was sitting, and God, may His name be blessed, was standing? Rabbi Derusai said: [God] crafted him a special chair like the chair of the scholars (אִיסְכּוּלִסְטִיקָא- scholasticus!- this was a court advocate/pleader) who enter before the sovereign; they appear to be standing but are actually sitting. Here too, it is sitting that appears like standing. That is, "I sat on the mountain."

[This section not read during podcast]

דָּבָר אַחֵר, וַאֲשֶׁב בְּהָר, וְכִי יֵשׁ יוֹשִׁיבָה לְמַעְלָה, אֵתָּה מוֹצֵא שְׂכָלֶם עוֹמְדִין, שְׁנֵאֲמַר (ישעיה ו, ב): שָׂרָפִים עֹמְדִים מִמַּעַל לוֹ, וְכֵן (יחזקאל א, כד כה): בְּעֹמְדָם תִּרְפִּינָה כְנִפְיָהֶם, וְכֵן (דניאל ז, טז): קִרְבַּת עַל חֵד מִן קְאָמִיָּא, וְכֵן אֶפְלוּ מֹשֶׁה כְּשֶׁעָלָה לְמִרוֹם הָיָה עוֹמֵד, שְׁנֵאֲמַר (דברים י, י): וְאֲנֹכִי עֹמְדִתִּי בְּהָר, וּכְתִיב (דברים ה, ה): אֲנֹכִי עֹמֵד בֵּין ה' וּבִינֵיכֶם, וְאֵין יוֹשֵׁב שָׁם אֵלָּא הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְבִדּוֹ, שְׁנֵאֲמַר (דברים הימים ב יח, יח): רָאִיתִי אֶת ה' יוֹשֵׁב עַל כִּסֵּאוֹ, וְהוּא אוֹמֵר וַאֲשֶׁב בְּהָר, וּמֵהוּ כֵן, אָמַר רַב הוֹנָא בַר אֲחָא שְׂיֵשֶׁב לְהַתִּיר נִדְרוֹ שֶׁל יוֹצְרוֹ,

Another matter, "I sat on the mountain," is there sitting above? You find that all of them are standing, as it is stated: "Seraphs standing above Him" (Isaiah 6:2); likewise, "when they stood their wings would slacken" (Ezekiel 1:24); and likewise, "I approached one of those standing" (Daniel 7:16). Likewise, even Moses would stand when he ascended on high, as it is stated: "I stood on the mountain" (Deuteronomy 10:10), and it is written: "I was standing between the Lord and you" (Deuteronomy 5:5). No one sits there other than the Holy One blessed be He, as it is stated: "I saw the Lord sitting on His throne" (II Chronicles 18:18); yet he says: "I sat on the mountain"? What is this? Rav Huna bar Aḥa said: He sat to dissolve the vow of his Maker.

Part 4: Divine Regret

ומה אמר לו דבר קשה, אמר רבי יוחנן דבר קשה אמר לפניו תהיית אמתמהא, אמר לו תוהא
אנא על הרעה אשר דברתי לעשות לעמי, אותה שעה אמר משה מתר לך מתר לך, אין כאן
נדר ואין כאן שבועה, הוי: ויחל משה, שהפך נדרו ליוצרו, כמה דאת אמר (במדבר ל, ג):
ולא יחל דברו, אמר רבי שמעון בן לקיש לפיכך נקרא שמו איש הא-להים, לומר שהתיר
נדר לא-להים, וכן ויחל משה.

And what did he say to God? A difficult thing. R. Yohanan said: he said before God: Did you regret it? (exclamation point) **If the individual who made a vow regrets it, the rabbi may nullify it. Although it is difficult to speak of God as experiencing regret, that is what Moses asked Him.* God said: 'I regret the evil that I said I would perform against My people.' At that moment, Moses said: 'It is dissolved for You, it is dissolved for You. There is no vow here and there is no oath here.' That is, "Moses implored [*vayhal*]" – that he nullified the vow of his Maker, just as it says: "He shall not profane [*yahe*] his word' (Numbers 30:3). Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: That is why he is called man of God, to say that he dissolved a vow for God. **Just as a man can dissolve his wife's vow, Moses dissolved God's vow.* Likewise, "Moses implored [*vayhal*]."

God won't nullify God's own neder (perhaps there is no one to nullify it...):

4. Sifrei Devarim 29:2

ולא שמע אלי, ולא קבל תפלתי. ויאמר ה' אלי רב לך, אמר לו משה אדם נודר לאין הולך
לא אצל רבו שיתיר לו נדרו מה עליך לשמוע דברי רבך.

"and He would not hearken to me": He did not accept my prayer. "And the L-rd said to me: 'rav lach. Presume to speak to Me no more about this thing.'" An analogy: A man makes a vow. Does he not go to his master for absolution of his vow? If the master makes a vow (affecting his disciple), it is the disciple's part to heed the words of his master. You, too, heed the words of your master. (Thus, "rav lach" ["You have a Master!"])

God nullifies Moshe's neder

5. Mekhilta DeRabbi Shimon Ben Yochai, Additions 4

מלמד שהתיר לו נדרו: והאיך התיר לו אמר משה אם היית יודע שישראל מתעכבין ואינן
נגאלין אלא על ידך היית נודר: אמר לפניו רבונו של עולם אפלו על אחד מהם לא הייתי
נודר: אמר לו הקב"ה אם כן מותר לך מופר לך:

This teaches that [God] nullified [Moshe's] vow. How did God nullify it? God said, "Moshe, if you would have known that Israel would be delayed and not redeemed by you, would you have made your vow?" [Moshe] said before God, "Master of the World, I would not have made the vow about even one of them." The blessed Holy One replied, "If this is the case, then your vow is nullified."

Moshe can nullify God's neder like a husband to a wife

6. Tehillim 90:1

תַּפְלָה לְמֹשֶׁה אִישׁ־הָאֱלֹהִים אֲדֹנָי מַעֲזוֹ אֶתָּה הָיִיתָ לָנוּ בְּדֹר וּבְדֹר:

A prayer of Moses, the man of God. O Lord, You have been our refuge in every generation.

7. Midrash Tehillim 90:4

דבר אחר אמר רבי יהודה בר' סימון בשם ריש לקיש למה נקרא שמו איש האלקים מה האיש אם מבקש להפר נדרי אשתו מפר ואם מבקש מקיים שנאמר (במדבר ל יד) אישה יפירנו וגו'. כך כביכול משה אומר להקב"ה (שם י לה-לו) קומה ה'. שובה ה' :

Another interpretation is given by Rabbi Yehuda bar Simon in the name of Reish Lakish: Why is God called "the Man of God"? Just as a man fulfills his vow whether he chooses to annul it or uphold it, so too, God fulfills His promise. As it says in Numbers 30:3, "He shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth." Similarly, Moses tells God in Deuteronomy 10:12, "Arise, O Lord, and return to Your resting place, You and the Ark of Your strength."...

Divine regret

8. Genesis Rabbah 27:4

וַיִּנָּחֵם ה' כִּי עָשָׂה אֶת הָאָדָם בְּאֶרֶץ (בראשית ו, ו), רַבִּי יְהוּדָה וְרַבִּי נְחֻמִּיָּה, רַבִּי יְהוֹנָדָה אָמַר תְּנוּהוּת הָיְתָה לִפְנֵי שְׁבָרָתִי אוֹתוֹ מְלֻמָּטָה, שְׁאֵלּוּ בְּרָאֲתִי אוֹתוֹ מְלֻמָּעָלָה לֹא הָיָה מוֹרֵד בִּי. רַבִּי נְחֻמִּיָּה אָמַר מִתְנַחֵם אֲנִי שְׁבָרָתִי אוֹתוֹ מְלֻמָּטָה שְׁאֵלּוּ בְּרָאֲתִי אוֹתוֹ מְלֻמָּעָלָה כְּשֵׁם שְׁהֶמְרִיד בִּי אֶת הַתַּחֲתוֹנִים, כִּךְ הָיָה מִמְרִיד בִּי אֶת הָעֲלִיוֹנִים. אָמַר רַבִּי אֵיבּוֹ תְּנוּהוּת הָיְתָה לִפְנֵי שְׁבָרָתִי בּוֹ יֵצֵר הָרַע, שְׁאֵלּוּלִי לֹא בְּרָאֲתִי בּוֹ יֵצֵר הָרַע לֹא הָיָה מוֹרֵד בִּי. אָמַר רַבִּי לִוִּי מִתְנַחֵם אֲנִי שְׁעֲשִׂיתִי אוֹתוֹ וְנָתַן בְּאֶרֶץ. (בראשית ו, ו) : וַיִּתְּעַצֵּב אֵל לְבָבוֹ, אָמַר רַבִּי בְּרַכְיָה, מִשָּׁל לְשָׁר שְׁבָנָה פִּלְטִין עַל יְדֵי אֲדָרִיכָל, רָאָה אוֹתָהּ וְלֹא עָרְבָה לוֹ, עַל מִי יֵשׁ לוֹ לְהַתְּפָעֵס לֹא עַל אֲדָרִיכָל, כִּךְ וַיִּתְּעַצֵּב אֵל לְבָבוֹ. אָמַר רַבִּי אֲסִי מִשָּׁל לְשָׁר שְׁעֲשָׂה סְחוּרָה עַל יְדֵי סָרְסוּר וְהַפְסִיד, עַל מִי יֵשׁ לוֹ לְהַתְּרָעֵם לֹא עַל הַסָּרְסוּר, כִּךְ וַיִּתְּעַצֵּב אֵל לְבָבוֹ. אֶפִּיקוֹרֵס אֶחָד שָׁאֵל אֶת רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן קֶרְחָה, אָמַר לוֹ אֵין אֲתָם אוֹמְרִים שֶׁהַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא רוֹאֶה אֶת הַנוֹלָד, אָמַר לוֹ הֵן. וְהָא כְּתִיב וַיִּתְּעַצֵּב אֵל לְבָבוֹ. אָמַר לוֹ נוֹלָד לָךְ בֶּן זָכָר מִיָּמִיךָ, אָמַר לוֹ הֵן, אָמַר לוֹ מָה עָשִׂיתָ, אָמַר לוֹ שְׁמַחְתִּי וְשְׁמַחְתִּי אֶת הַכֹּל, אָמַר לוֹ וְלֹא הָיִיתָ יוֹדֵעַ שְׁסוּפּוֹ לָמוּת, אָמַר לוֹ בְּשַׁעַת חֲדוּתָא חֲדוּתָא, בְּשַׁעַת אֲבֵלָה אֲבֵלָה. אָמַר לוֹ כִּךְ מַעֲשֶׂה לִפְנֵי הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, דְּאָמַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לִוִּי שְׁבָעָה יָמִים נִתְאַבֵּל הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עַל עוֹלָמוֹ קִדְּם שְׁלֹא יָבֹא מְבוֹל לְעוֹלָם, מֵאִי טַעֲמִיָּה וַיִּתְּעַצֵּב אֵל לְבָבוֹ, וְאֵין עֲצִיבָה אֵלָּא אֲבִלוּת, הֵיךְ מָה דָּאֵת אָמַר (שמואל ב יט, ג) : נִעְצַב הַמֶּלֶךְ עַל בָּנוֹ.

“The Lord regretted that He had made man on the earth, and He was saddened in His heart” (Genesis 6:6).

“The Lord regretted [*vayinahem*] that He had made man on the earth” – Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Neḥemya, Rabbi Yehuda said: [God said:] ‘There was regret before Me that I created him below [“on the earth”], for had I created him on High, he would never have rebelled against Me.’ Rabbi Neḥemya said: [God said:] ‘I take solace [*mitnahem*] in the fact that I created him below [“on the earth”], for had I created him on High, just as he incited the lower beings [on earth] to rebel against Me, so he would have incited the supernal beings [the angels] to rebel against Me.’

Rabbi Aivu said: [God said:] ‘There was regret before Me that I created an evil inclination in him, as had I not created an evil inclination in him, he would not have rebelled against Me.’ Rabbi Levi said: [God said:] ‘I take solace in the fact that I made him so that he would [ultimately] be placed in the earth.’

“And He was saddened in His heart” – Rabbi Berekhya said: This is analogous to a king who built a palace by means of an architect. He saw it and it was not to his liking. At whom should he be angry? Is it not the architect? So, “He was saddened in his heart.”

Rabbi Asi said: This is analogous to a king who engaged in commerce by means of an intermediary and incurred a loss. Against whom should he have a grievance? Is it not against the intermediary? So, “He was saddened in his heart.”

A certain heretic asked Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korḥa, saying to him: ‘Do you not say that the Holy One blessed be He foresees the future?’ He said to him: ‘Yes.’ [The heretic continued:] ‘But is it not written: “He was saddened in his heart”?’ He said to him: ‘Has a male offspring ever been born to you in your lifetime?’ He said to him: ‘Yes.’ He said to him: ‘What did you do?’ He said to him: ‘I rejoiced and encouraged everyone else to rejoice.’ He said to him: ‘But did you not know that he would ultimately die?’ He said to him: ‘At a time of rejoicing there is rejoicing; at a time of mourning there is mourning.’ He said to him: ‘So was the situation before the Holy One blessed be He, as Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Seven days the Holy One blessed be He mourned His world before the Flood came to the world. What is the source? “He was saddened [*vayitatzev*] in his heart,” and *atziva* is nothing other than mourning, just as it says: “The king is grieving [*ne’etzav*] over his son”’ (II Samuel 19:3).