YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Special Elul Shiur**

***Ani Le-Dodi Ve-Dodi Li*: The Relationship Between God and the Jewish People**

**By Rav Michael Rosensweig**

The *gemara* (*Gittin* 90b, *Sanhedrin* 22a) cites R. Elazar’s comment that whenever a *zivug rishon* (first marriage) ends in divorce, the Temple altar sheds tears:

אמר ר' אלעזר כל המגרש אשתו ראשונה אפילו מזבח מוריד עליו דמעות.

What is the connection between a first marriage and the altar that accounts for this emotional response?

The Maharsha, in his novellae to *Sanhedrin* (*Chiddushei Aggadot*, *Sanhedrin* 22a), offers a very technical explanation:

הוא משל כאלו המזבח בוכה עליו שהמגרש אשתו אשת נעורים ממעט אכילת זבחים דאשת הנעורים מצויה שמביאה קיני זיבה ולידה למזבח.

It is as if the altar itself cries because one who divorces his wife diminishes the amount of sacrificial offerings, because it is common for the *eshet ne’urim* (wife of one’s youth) to bring childbirth and *zava* offerings on the altars.

Generally speaking, a first marriage is more likely to produce children; a divorce thus likely reduces the quantity of childbirth offerings, and *zava* offerings as well. In this respect, the altar is “upset,” as its activity is diminished when a first marriage concludes in divorce.

While technically sound, this is obviously not a particularly inspirational explanation. In his comments to *Gittin* (90b), the Maharsha provides a more edifying explanation. The *Nevi’im* and *Ketuvim* often invoke the relationship between a husband and wife as a metaphor for the relationship between God and *Kenesset Yisrael*, the Jewish People. The Maharsha explains that *zivug rishon* and *zivug sheni* (a second marriage) parallel the First and Second Temples. The degree of sanctity and quantity of sacrificial activity in the First Temple far surpassed that of the Second Temple. This decline, which is emblematic of the very quality of this lofty relationship, prompts the altar to weep.

In parallel fashion, it can be suggested that the altarbemoansthe tragedy of the *egel ha-zahav*, the golden calf, which marred the initial idealistic bond between the Jewish People and God. At Sinai, the Jewish People accepted the Torah, and the building of the *Mishkan* was intended to be the marital *chuppa* and their shared dwelling place. In the midst of the wedding itself, the Jewish People sullied the fledgling relationship and desecrated that exclusive bond by constructing the golden calf.[[1]](#footnote-1) In this metaphor, the distinction between *zivug rishon* and *zivug sheni* is a consequence of the sin of the betrayal at the golden calf.

**The Broken Relationship**

The idea that discord between a husband and wife is symbolic of a disconnect – even a rupture – in the relationship between God and the Jewish People resonates throughout Jewish theology. The poignant metaphor of a wayward wife repentantly returning *le-ishah ha-rishon*, to her first husband – symbolically casting *Klal Yisrael* as the wife who has betrayed God, her faithful husband – is quite prominent throughout *Tanakh*.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The marital bond paradigm of God’s relationship with the Jewish People is, of course, the dominant metaphor of *Shir Ha-Shirim*.[[3]](#footnote-3) It is therefore unsurprising that this *megilla* is also perceived as a source that calls for introspection and *teshuva*, centering on the demands and opportunities of that relationship. In this context, we encounter the passionate declaration and articulation of devotion: “*Ani le-dodi ve-dodi li*, I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine” (*Shir Ha-Shirim* 6:3). Avudraham’s insight, which was popularly cited by subsequent halakhic thinkers, is that the first letters of each word form an acronym for Elul, the period that initiates intense reassessment of this special bond, thereby reinforcing this theme.[[4]](#footnote-4) Furthermore, the conceptual basis for the halakhic construct of *teshuva mei-ahava* (*Yoma* 86a) – repentance motivated by love – is patterned after this seminal theme of *Shir Ha-Shirim*. The Rambam (*Hilkhot Teshuva* 10:2) explains that *ahavat Hashem*, love of God, is the highest level of religiosity that one can attain. This ideal is depicted dramatically as an all-encompassing, even a (constructively) obsessive, relationship between a husband and wife, whose mutual devotion is absolute. That intensely single-minded admiration, devotion, and longing models how *Kenesset Yisrael* are to cultivate their feelings toward God. Indeed, the Bach (*Orach Chayim* 581:2) cites the verse, “*Ani le-dodi ve-dodi li*” as reflecting the *teshuva mei-ahava* performed during Elul.

Thus, the casting of the relationship between *chet* and *teshuva*, sin and repentance, in terms of returning to one’s first husband is a notion that deserves further attention and examination.

**The Marital Relationship Between the Jewish People and God**

Let us begin by examining in greater depth the nature of this marital relationship. Following the pattern reflected by the numerous verses of *Tanakh*, metaphors describing this kind of marital relationship between the Jewish People and God abound in *Chazal*. *Chazal* understood the relationship between God and the Jewish People as a marriage in which the Torah serves as the marriage contract. The *mishna* (*Ta’anit* 4:8) explains that “*be-yom simchat libo*, the day of his heart’s rejoicing” (*Shir Ha-Shirim* 3:11), refers to the giving of the Torah, and the *gemara* (*Pesachim* 49b, *Sanhedrin* 59a) conflates the terms “*morasha*” in the verse, “*morasha kehillat Yaakov*,the heritage of the congregation of Jacob” (*Devarim* 33:4), with the term “*me’orasa*,” connoting betrothal. The verses in *Hoshea* 2:21-22 also relate to this theme:

(כא) וארשתיך לי לעולם וארשתיך לי בצדק ובמשפט ובחסד וברחמים: (כב) וארשתיך לי באמונה וידעת את־ה':

And I will betroth you forever: I will betroth you with righteousness and justice, and with goodness and mercy. And I will betroth you with faithfulness; then you shall know God.

These verses, recited daily in the final phase of donning *tefillin* and constituting the denouement of *Hoshea*, further confirm this betrothal motif. This is the foundation for the Jewish People’s commitment to the Torah; sinconstitutes betrayal of this commitment. The altar itself shedding tears reflects this lost potential of the unrealized ideal, an ideal and a commitment characteristic of a fully realized marital relationship as well.

However, the metaphor of “*Eilkha na el ishi ha-rishon*, I will return to my first husband” (*Yeshayahu* 54:5), demands closer scrutiny. While the marital paradigm is so suggestive, its application here, when assessed against normative Halakha, seems problematic. A betrayal of the marital bond, as in the instance of *sota*, marital infidelity, precludes resumption of the marriage. Furthermore, there is an equally important and related distinction between the relationship of God and the Jewish People and even the most idyllic bond between a husband and wife – there is no capacity for *gerushin*, divorce, between *Klal Yisrael* and God. Notwithstanding the tears of the altar, divorce is at times a necessary option in the human domain.

R. Soloveitchik expounded on this important discrepancyand suggested two explanations.[[5]](#footnote-5) First, although the partners in a human marriage aspire to become one entity (see *Bereishit* 2:24), the most personal dimensions of man’s existential being cannot be fully shared with others.[[6]](#footnote-6) The unbridgeable gap that remains provides the philosophical justification or basis for divorce: even the most ideal marriage does not provide complete unity, and therefore an imperfect union can be dissolved. This restriction does not exist in man’s relationship with God, as there is no distance between Creator and creation that cannot be spanned through service of God. Although philosophically the chasm is greater and the gulf more unbridgeable, Torah study and observance are the divinely ordained guide and mechanism to bridge this gap. We perceive the Torah as a divine gift “*le-zakkot et Yisrael*, to give merit to Israel” (*Makkot* 3:16).[[7]](#footnote-7) Man’s *devekut ba-Hashem*, cleaving to God, will by metaphysical and philosophical necessity always be circumscribed, but this gap need not be a function of man’s inability to share, but rather a fundamental theological reality of God’s transcendence and infinitude. This is one distinction between human relationships and the relationship with God that precludes termination or divorce in the latter context.

The Rav advanced a second reason that the divine relationship is irrevocable. A meaningful physical human relationship is contingent upon sanctity, which is subject to desecration and destruction. For example, the Halakha addresses the specific parameters of *ervat davar*, the grounds for divorce that constitute desecration in a framework of a marriage.[[8]](#footnote-8) However, when it comes to God’srelationship with the Jewish People, that bond is completely suffused with sanctity to such an extent that it withstands any abuse or challenge that taints or compromises it. This singular bond is hypersensitive to impropriety, dysfunction, and desecration, but simultaneously invulnerable to permanent breach or irrevocable disrepair. This relationship is more easily damaged and disappointed, but it can never be absolutely profaned or irrevocably tarnished. Rashi explains this phenomenon in his commentary on *Shir Ha-Shirim* (1:6, s.v. *she-shezafatni ha-shamesh*): Sometimes the impression of darkness is only superficial. The sanctity that is the basis of the relationship between God and the Jewish People is permanent, and therefore there can be no *gerushin*. This idea is expressed by *Yeshayahu* (50:1) when he remonstrates with the nation, reminding them that God never divorced them; it was their improper behavior that alienated them from Him.

This relationship even endures in a time of destruction,when Jerusalem and *Klal Yisrael* are referred to figuratively as “*ke-almana*, like a widow”(*Eikha* 1:1), but never as a *gerusha*, a divorcee.[[9]](#footnote-9) Additionally, they are only **compared** to a widow, “***ke****-almana*”; they are not really widowed. Rashi (ad loc., s.v. *hayta ke-almana*), quoting the interpretation of the *midrash* based on a careful reading of the verse,[[10]](#footnote-10) explains that it is possible for the Jewish Peopleto return to God precisely because her situation also differs from the actual *almana* analogy. In any case, irrespective of the transgression/desecration, there is certainly no equation to divorce. Indeed, the prophet Hoshea, even as he invokes the imagery of the marital paradigm of *erusin*, declares unequivocally the divine promise that this particular betrothal is permanent: “*ve-erastikh li le-olam*, And I shall betroth you to Me forever” (*Hoshea* 2:21).

In light of these explanations, the atypical elements and departures from classical marriage underscore that the differences do not detract from the metaphor; they merely reflect an even more intense marital relationship. The discrepancies magnify further the characteristics associated with a marriage here.

**Preserving the Relationship for the Long-Term**

There are consequences to the fact that the relationship between God and the Jewish People cannot be broken. On the one hand, the permanence of God’s relationship with the Jewish People means that there is always the possibility of return; the door is always open. That is, of course, a very good thing. But this positive consideration also heightens the expectations and raises the stakes of this bond, magnifying even minor grievances within this treasured exclusive relationship. If two people share a lesser, casual relationship, neither will be particularly sensitive to a petty offense; damage to the relationship would require a more grave or acute transgression. Such relationships are typically conducive to a wider latitude of perceived insults that likely inflict less pain. Longer-term, higher-stakes relationships require far greater existential investment and effort. They demand a greater appreciation of context, and they necessitate some compromise or, at minimum, coping mechanisms to overcome or integrate differences. Absent the luxury to simply withdraw and abandon the relationship, a long-term perspective must be cultivated, especially since the capacity to inflict pain and exacerbate conflict is heightened.

This is one way to interpret the verse in *Amos* (3:2): “*Rak etkhem yadati mi-kol mishpechot ha-adama*, *al kein efkod aleikhem et kol avonoteikhem*, You alone have I singled out of all the families of the earth; that is why I will call you to account for all your iniquities.”[[11]](#footnote-11) There are several levels of meaning to this interpretation. First, as *Chazal* frequently explain, the stakes are not as high for the other nations of the world as they are for the Jewish People, because God does not supervise or scrutinize the conduct of other nations as extensively.[[12]](#footnote-12) As such, there is rarely an intermediate level of palliative or corrective punishment. Particularly egregious or degenerative transgressions typically engender severe punishment or even destruction, while relatively minor infractions are ignored or treated benignly. In sharp contrast, God scrutinizes *Klal Yisrael*’s conduct and holds them extensively accountable. *Chazal* perceive this as an extraordinary kindness reflecting the depth of the bond, even as high expectations concomitantly may also imperil.[[13]](#footnote-13) Indeed, the constant supervision constitutes a further kindness in that it enables the neutralization of lesser offenses before they cascade into unmanageable, unforgivable offenses. Ultimately, this approach secures the Jewish People’s future by providing a defusing mechanism and a safety net to protect the precious relationship.

It is common wisdom that the key to a successful marriage is to stay on top of petty misunderstandings, differences, or offenses, preventing them from festering. If one tarries too long in addressing minor but vexing issues, divisions and distances eventually grow and become unbridgeable and irreparable. The verse in *Amos* accentuates our good fortune by telling us, “*Rak etkhem yadati mi-kol mishpechot ha-adama*” – we alone, *Klal Yisrael*, have this special relationship with God. And therefore, “*efkod aleikhem et kol avonoteikhem*” – God is going to supervise us more closely.

An additional motif accentuated in this verse articulates the delicacy and high spiritual stakes of the relationship as a factor in dictating ubiquitous scrutiny – also enabling constructive accountability – which determines that even relatively peripheral violations of trust may constitute an act of *begida*, betrayal. The marital paradigm reflects this perspective acutely. This theme is conveyed by the Talmud’s discussion of “*hikdicha tavshilo*” (she burned his food) and “*matza* *isha na’ah heimena*” (he found a more beautiful woman than her) as stimuli for divorce. The *zivug rishon* should be preserved at almost all costs. One method of accomplishing this is to make sure that small matters are neutralized and are not conflated with larger issues.[[14]](#footnote-14) At the same time, apparently minor infractions, and even petty annoyances like *hikdiha tavshilo* or superficial distractions like *matza* *isha na’ah heimena*, may be valid grounds for divorce precisely because the standards defining this ideal relationship are lofty indeed. The fact that trivial factors and mercurial considerations sufficiently exacerbate what should be an existential, loyal, and substantive bond is inconsistent with these standards of sanctity. It reflects that the relationship is already deficient and has deteriorated.

Another implication of this verse from *Amos* is that strict halakhic accountability and the concrete threat of punishment for halakhic dereliction are actually advantageous for the Jewish People, as they encourage the critical process of *teshuva* and repairing one’s deeds*.* This is more important for the Jewish People’s relationship with God than it is for the bond between God and the gentile nations. While repentance also applies to non-Jewish violations, its central role in Judaism defies comparison. *Teshuva* for Jews is not merely the neutralization of outstanding sin; it is an indispensable process of *avodat Hashem* that entails broader introspection and enables a transgressor to redefine and elevate his relationship with God.[[15]](#footnote-15)

This unique relationship between God and the Jewish People is further highlighted by the Mabit’s controversial assertion (*Beit Elokim, Sha’ar Ha-Teshuva*, 13) that notwithstanding the story of Yonah’s mission to Nineveh, the opportunity of *teshuva* is unique to *Klal Yisrael*.[[16]](#footnote-16) The Mabit explains that Yonah does not actually call upon the people of Nineveh to repent; he simply informs them of the consequences of their transgressions. They take the initiative on their own to do *teshuva* when they declare, “*Yashuvu ish mi-darko ha-ra’ah*, Let every man repent from his evil ways” (*Yonah* 3:8). Yonah hesitated to go to Nineveh because he thought *teshuva* would be ineffective, since the concept of *teshuva* is restricted to *Klal Yisrael*. Of course, this assumption about the effectiveness of *teshuva* for non-Jews was an error. Nevertheless, it is conceivable that the obligation to repent and the scope and centrality of *teshuva* derives from the singular bond with the Jewish People. Certainly the category of *teshuva mei-ahava* – which has the capacity to transform willful transgressions into merits (*Yoma* 86b) – is a special prerogative for the Jewish Peoplealone.[[17]](#footnote-17)

The restriction of *teshuva mei-ahava* to the Jewish People stems from the dialectical nature of *teshuva mei-ahava*. At first glance, *teshuva mei-ahava* appears to be a very surprising and even mystical idea. How could willful transgressions ever turn into merits? Upon further reflection, however, it betokens an intense and profound relationship that transcends particular moments and actions. The bond with the Jewish Peoplespans thousands of years and includes inspiring highs, spiritual attainments, abysmal failures, and cataclysmic setbacks. It is marked by a history of disruption and reconnection, and it is, by definition, one that is irrevocable, no matter how intolerable present circumstances are.

Again, the marital paradigm is instructive. An acute sense of alienation that stems from and accentuates distance and separation can also serve as a powerful catalyst for greater appreciation of one’s absent partner, which can facilitate the urgency to strengthen the bond. The crisis of impending profound loss can turn willful transgressions into merits, particularly when there is a long and intense history that reinforces the absolute conviction of a future joint destiny. For this reason, a marital bond that is irrevocable, which survives even betrayal and precludes any kind of termination, certainly exemplifies this motif even more forcefully.

**Understanding *Teshuva***

The significance of the long-term underlying relationship also pertains to the components of *teshuva*: *charata* (regret), *busha* (shame), and even *kabbala le-haba* (commitment for the future). Although we become acquainted with these facets of *teshuva* at a formative age, reflecting upon them reveals that they are challenging to implement, contemplate, and even to comprehend. True regret, for example, differs from a mere expression of “sorry.” It requires profound, tortured regret and authentic humiliation, even mortification. The goal is not simply to assuage one’s guilt and move forward, but to powerfully experience the magnitude of one’s transgression, stimulating an existential crisis. The *teshuva* process certainly entails a core assessment of purpose and meaning that is completely incompatible with a superficial disavowal of transgressions that retains a trace of ambivalence regarding this sinful experience. Ideal *teshuva* requires *charata* and *busha* – an unequivocal rejection of past experience as well as a clear future commitment. The sense of profound regret relates not only to one’s self-perception, but also to one’s image and reputation in the eyes of those who command one’s love and respect. Even more so, the sinner can hardly tolerate the fact that there is no refuge from Divine Omniscience. Authentic agonizing over the implications of an aberrant past, coming to grips with one’s capacity for egregious conduct, constitutes not only a vehicle to neutralize past infractions, as repentance is typically understood, but also a transformative cathartic act of *avodat Hashem* that elevates the true penitent.

*Kabbala al ha-atid* similarly goes beyond even a sincere resolution about the future. It requires that the penitent thoroughly reinvent his persona and reorder his values so that his present status will conform to his enlightened new reality and his commitment will preclude any predictable future lapse. One might question how *kabbala al ha-atid* can be required for *teshuva*, inasmuch as it entails a commitment absent knowledge of what tomorrow will bring and what influences will come to bear. Indeed, even if one can make a *kabbala la-hoveh*, a commitment for the present, can one really sincerely undertake a *kabbala al ha-atid*? While *kabbala al ha-atid* can be understood narrowly as a sincere commitment for the future, it too can encompass much more.

The rigorous *teshuva* program, comprised of these steps, is significantly facilitated by a national relationship with God that is very intense and complex, that is deeply rooted in the past, and that will confidently stretch forever into the future. The Rav spoke extensively about Halakha’s dynamic view of time. Time in Halakha is not static,[[18]](#footnote-18) and the boundaries of the past and the future are rather blurry. Halakhic time-consciousness defines how we relate to our national history as well as to pivotal halakhic institutions. This is true of the catastrophic events of destruction and mourning, and is equally applicable to the foundational experiences of Jewish life such as the revelation at Sinai, which is referred to in the Torah in the present tense, and the exodus from Egypt, whose memory is ubiquitous. This is further reflected by Moshe Rabbenu’s introduction of God to *Klal Yisrael* as the God who transcends time (*Shemot* 6:6). For God, in a metaphysical sense, the past, present, and future converge; they are all one reality. His name, the Tetragrammaton, connotes omnipresence in time – that He always was, is, and will be. The precise nuances of this concept are inherently beyond our cognitive grasp, but the Jewish People’s relationship with Godpartakes of this permanence and timelessness.[[19]](#footnote-19) For this reason, the institution of *teshuva* can redeem the past, and even elevate it. The very notion of *kabbala al ha-atid* would be more tenuous if the bond between God and the Jewish People could be terminated. However, this relationship is governed by the promise of “*ve-erastikh li le-olam*, I will be a partner to you forever.” Because of the irrevocability of the relationship, which determines that at worst we will be *ke-almana* and no more, because the relationship is enduring and timeless, it can withstand our limited knowledge and control of the future, enabling *kabbala al ha-atid* to become a rigorous and integral part of *teshuva*.

**The Opportunity of *Elul***

The eternal nature of the relationship between God and the Jewish People has profound implications for the special *teshuva* opportunity of the month of *Elul*. The Avudraham’s acronym explaining the name of the month has much more significance than is thought; it reflects not only reciprocity, but also and especially the marital relationship described in *Shir Ha-Shirim*. It thereby reflects the breadth and depth of *teshuva* as a process of *avodat Hashem* that stems from that special relationship. The Bach’s claim that *teshuva mei-ahava* is specifically connected to the *teshuva* of Elul and precisely the theme of “*Ani le-dodi ve-dodi li*” reinforces this motif.

This should motivate us to seize the opportunity of Elul. It is not only for the narrow pursuit of merits that secure our physical survival, but even more an opportunity to focus on this special bond that undergirds the purpose of existence and the concept of *teshuva*.

*This article is an adaptation of a sicha delivered by Rabbi Rosensweig in Elul 5768 and was closely reviewed by Rabbi Rosensweig. He thanks his students Avraham Wein and Yaakov Schiff for their help preparing this article for publication.*

1. For an exploration of the significance of the *chet ha-egel*, see my “*Chet ha-Egel*: A Catastrophic Theological and Ideological Lapse,” available at torahweb.org. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Cf. *Hoshea* 2:9, “*Eilkha ve-ashuva el ishi ha-rishon*, I will return to my first husband.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Rambam, *Hilkhot Teshuva* 10:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Avudraham, *Seder Tefillot Rosh Hashana*, 260. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Family Redeemed: Essays on Family Relationships* (NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 2000), p. 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In the history of creation, Eve was created from Adam (*Bereishit* 2:21). The *gemara* (*Ketubot* 8a) debates the details of this process, including whether man was created “*du partsufin*”or“*partsuf ehad*,” with two faces or one. The Ra’avad (introduction to *Ba’alei Ha-Nefesh*) and the Ramban (commentary tothe beginning of *Bereishit*) respectively identify these factors as relevant to the capacity to facilitate an existential bond and forge a united identity with a spousal partner, thus largely overcoming this dilemma. This important conclusion is not incompatible with the Rav’s insight that, in the final analysis, human beings cannot completely bridge this gap. This manifestation of existential loneliness as part of the human condition is a prominent theme in the Rav’s writings. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Presumably, this merit transcends the means for reward and establishes the system of Halakha as a Torah value system and as a methodology for bonding with God. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See *Gittin* 90a and *Family Redeemed*, pp. 63-65, for the Rav’s discussion of legitimate halakhic grounds for divorce. I hope to address elsewhere the relationship between the definition of *erva* grounds for divorce and Halakha’s singular approach to the sanctity of marriage. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Note also Rambam’s view in *Hilkhot Beit Ha-Bechira* 6:15-16 that the sanctity of the *Mikdash* andYerushalayim always remains because it is the sanctity of the *Shekhina.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For the original *midrash*, see *Midrash Eikha* 1:1:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The word “*yadati*” here has not only an intellectual connotation, but also an intimate connotation, consistent with its use throughout *Tanakh*. Interestingly, Rashi and Metzudat David interpret *yadati* as “*ahavti*, I have loved.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. This less ambitious spiritual expectation is, of course, also reflected by the differences between the seven-*mitzva* and the six-hundred-thirteen-*mitzva* system. It can be demonstrated that the discrepancy is qualitative and fundamental. Noachides are obligated to observe only a very basic and broad system of human religious values, while Halakha is comprehensive and is intended to elevate all dimensions of Jewish life. Moreover, precisely when the two systems address the same broad obligation, the different spiritual orientations and agendas are acutely evident; for example, see *Sanhedrin* 56b. I hope to address this topic more extensively elsewhere. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See *Yevamot* 121b and *Bava Kama* 50a: “*Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu medakdek im sevivav ke-chut ha-se’ara*, God is scrupulous with those around him even to the extent of a hairsbreadth.” On the one hand, this reflects a higher expectation that triggers greater disappointment and disillusionment, but also and especially reflects appreciation, generosity, and reward. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. To be sure, a case could be made that if one has a closer relationship, one will be more forgiving with one’s partner. Certainly this dialectic characterizes any intense, defining, authentic relationship. In one respect, greater flexibility is warranted, as one is loath to discard or abandon a precious and primary relationship that is rooted in the past and inspired by a vision of a common future. However, this is also offset by greater expectations and the increased sting of perceived disloyalty and betrayal. A long-term relationship, and even more so a permanent bond, requires a strict code of conduct and core rules of engagement to safeguard and nurture the relationship for the long term. See Rashi (*Devarim* 29:12): “Because He has promised it unto you and has sworn unto your fathers not to exchange their descendants for another nation, for this reason He binds you by these oaths not to provoke Him to anger since He, on His part, cannot dissociate Himself from you.” Rashi accentuates the need for meticulous boundaries to ensure the continuity and evolution of the bond. See also Radak, *Amos* 3:2, who emphasizes that the closer bond establishes that transgressions constitute a greater crime and that they engender greater pain given expectations and the emotional and historical investment that links the parties. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. For a more extensive discussion of this topic, see my article, “*Teshuva* and *Viduy*: The Ambitious Method of Coming Closer to Hashem,” *Hakirah* 25 (Fall 2018), pp. 37-53. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. While the specific approach of the Mabit is somewhat innovative, the existence of qualitative differences and distinctions between Jewish and non-Jewish repentance is a more mainstream notion that is acutely reflected in Midrash and other sources. See e.g. *Midrash Tanhuma*, *Devarim* 32:4.

The Mabit also has an interesting suggestion that because of *Klal Yisrael*’s added obligation of 613 *mitzvot*, they need the obligation of *teshuva* because they are bound to sin. In chapter fourteen, the Mabitdiscusses other distinctions between the repentance of Jews and that of non-Jews*.* In the case of a Jew, *teshuva* is effective both in this world and the next, whereas for the rest of the nations it only wards off punishment in this world. The Mabit further argues that for the Jewish People, a mass *teshuva* by the public (partially) atones even for individuals who do not participate in that *teshuva*, whereas for other nations, *teshuva* only benefits those who actually perform it. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. This is explicit in the Mabit. Also see my “*Teshuva* and *Viduy.*” [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See R. Soloveitchik’s discussion of time consciousness and Henri Bergson's notion of time in his essay, “Sacred and Profane,”in *Shiurei HaRav*, ed. Joseph Epstein (New Jersey: Ktav, 1994), pp. 14-25. Also see the many sources cited in Jeffrey Woolf, “Time Awareness as a Source of Spirituality in the Thought of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik,” *Modern Judaism* 32:1 (February 2012), pp. 54-75. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. For many, this concept is also the foundation for free choice, as it neutralizes the dilemma of divine foreknowledge. Free choice is the centerpiece of *teshuva*,as reflected by Rambam’s devotion of a chapter to it in the middle of *Hilkhot Teshuva* (chapter 5). It should be noted that this is not the Rambam’s own solution to the quandary of divine foreknowledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)