



THE APOLOGY

Your friendship with Ethan ended so abruptly last year that seeing him walk up to you after school catches you completely off guard. For a long time, it was almost impossible to believe he was the one who started that rumor. You still remember walking down the halls while people whispered behind your back because of a lie he never admitted to telling.

Standing there now, Ethan looks nothing like the person who let that happen. He's nervous, stumbling over his words as he explains how much he misses the old days. He keeps talking about moving past the "drama" and just starting over. It's tempting to say yes; you haven't found that easy connection or those inside jokes with anyone else. Yet, there is a noticeable gap in his story. He hasn't actually mentioned the rumor itself or the months spent dealing with the fallout.

This is the moment you've wanted for so long, and seeing him own up to his feelings makes a part of you want to just let the past go and move on. However, you're struggling with the fact that while he wants to move on, he hasn't faced the specific damage he caused. Rebuilding a friendship is a big commitment, and Ethan is waiting for you to say something.



What do you say?



PARSHA COMPASS

MIKETZ

In Parshat Miketz, Joseph's brothers come to Egypt to buy food because there is a famine in Canaan, where they live. Joseph recognizes his brothers, but they do not recognize him. Years earlier, these same brothers sold Joseph into slavery when he was young. Since then, Joseph has risen to become the second most powerful person in Egypt, in charge of all the food during the famine. Now his brothers are standing before him asking for help, and they have no idea who he is. Joseph treats them harshly. He accuses them of being spies, throws his brother Shimon in prison, and demands that they bring back their youngest brother, Benjamin. Joseph seems determined to hold his brothers accountable for what they did to him. He has the power to punish them, and at first, it appears that is what he wants.

But in next week's parsha, Joseph breaks down in tears and forgives his brothers. He tells them, **"Do not be distressed or blame yourselves because you sold me here... It was not you who sent me here, but God"** (Bereshit 45:5,8). Joseph moves from seeking justice to choosing forgiveness and reconciliation with his brothers.

After someone causes harm, how do you hold them accountable without losing the chance to repair things?

BIG QUESTIONS. DEEP VALUES. BOLD CONVERSATIONS.

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THE BABYSITTING JOB

On the way home from school your neighbors caught you at the door and asked if you could babysit their kids this Sunday. They have a three-year-old, a five-year-old, and a seven-year-old. You can already imagine the scene: the youngest crying for a bottle while the middle spills juice on the rug and the oldest wants help with a board game. You have babysat one kid before, and managing three people at once is a big step up from what you are used to.

The neighbor mentioned that the youngest has been having a hard time at bedtime lately. You keep wondering how you will handle a difficult toddler while keeping the other two settled and safe in another room. You are just not sure you have the experience to handle this kind of chaos.

At the same time, your neighbors clearly believe you are capable. Part of you wants to find out if they are right. This is the kind of job that would prove you can handle real responsibility, but you are still worried about what happens if things go wrong.



Do you take the job or tell them you are not ready yet?



PARSHA COMPASS

SHEMOT

In Parshat Shemot, God appears to Moses in a burning bush, a bush that was on fire but did not burn up. God tells Moses that he must go to Pharaoh and lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. Moses protests, and says, **“Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?”** (Shemot 3:11). Moses is worried he’s not the right person for such a huge task. He worries that the Israelites will not believe that he was sent by God, and he is concerned about his speech impediment: **“Please, O Lord, I have never been a man of words... I am slow of speech and slow of tongue”** (4:10).

But God insists that Moses is the chosen leader. God gives Moses signs to prove this to the Israelites. God also assures Moses that ultimately it is God who is responsible for giving people their powers of speech. Finally, God tells Moses that Aaron will be at his side to help him lead the people. Ultimately, Moses agrees, and he returns to Egypt and speaks confidently to Pharaoh in God’s name, saying, **“Let My people go”** (5:1).

When you’re called on for a role that feels like a stretch, how do you know whether to step up or step back?

BIG QUESTIONS. DEEP VALUES. BOLD CONVERSATIONS.



THE BIRTHDAY FUND

Birthday season in your class had gotten complicated. Some kids were showing up with huge presents, others with something small. Feelings were often hurt, so the class created a birthday gift fund. Everyone puts in the same amount at the start of the year, and when a birthday comes around, the class buys one gift together. You believed in the idea and were glad when it worked.

So far it's been going well. But your best friend Jordan's birthday is coming up, every year you two get each other special birthday gifts. Last week you were at the store and saw the perfect thing, a limited-edition jersey from Jordan's favorite player that's been sold out everywhere. You keep thinking about getting it.

But the fund was built on the idea that everyone gives the same amount, especially since some people in your class can't afford to buy extra gifts for their closest friends. If you add something personal on top, you're stepping outside what was agreed to. Knowing that Jordan would wear the jersey to school, people would ask where it came from and Jordan would either have to hide that it was from you or make it obvious you went beyond the fund. Either way, it puts Jordan in an uncomfortable position and might make others feel like their contribution through the fund wasn't enough.



Do you get Jordan the jersey?



PARSHA COMPASS

TERUMA

In Parshat Teruma, God commands Moses to tell the Israelites to give donations for the building of the Mishkan, the portable sanctuary where God's presence could live among the people while they wandered in the desert. God said: **"Tell the Israelites to bring Me gifts; you shall accept gifts for Me from every person whose heart is so moved"** (Shemot 25:2). People brought many different types of donations, and everyone gave voluntarily. No one was told how much to give. No matter how rich or poor someone was, each person gave what they felt moved to contribute.

In contrast, when God instructed Moses to collect a contribution to support the community, it was set at a fixed amount, a half-shekel, a small silver coin, the same for everyone. God explicitly said that **"the rich shall not pay more and the poor shall not pay less than half a shekel"** (30:15). Everyone contributed equally, regardless of their social status.

Which is more fair: everyone giving the same amount, or those who have more giving more?

BIG QUESTIONS. DEEP VALUES. BOLD CONVERSATIONS.

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THE SCREENSAVER

It started as a joke. Ms. Kaplan always leaves her computer unlocked, and one day an idea spread. What if someone changed the screensaver to a picture of her favorite celebrity? It would be hilarious. Some harmless fun.

But it needed to be you. Out of everyone in the class, you're the one who actually knows how to do it quickly and without getting caught. The class knew that, and so they looked at you. You reluctantly agreed.

The laugh was bigger than anyone expected. Ms. Kaplan walked in, saw the screen, and the whole room erupted. For about thirty seconds it felt like the best thing that had ever happened.

She did not find it funny. She told the class that someone violated her privacy and her trust, and that until that person came forward, everyone would lose free period for the rest of the week.

What you did was wrong, and you know it. But the whole class wanted it, cheered for it, and now they're all sitting quietly, waiting to see what you do. If you come forward, you're the only one who pays. If you don't, everyone pays together.



What do you do?



PARSHA COMPASS

KI TISSA

While Moses was up on Mount Sinai receiving the Torah, the Israelites grew restless. In Parshat Ki Tissa, they pressured Aaron, Moses's brother and second-in-command, saying, **"Come, make us a god who shall go before us, for we do not know what has happened to Moses"** (Shemot 32:1). Aaron melted down their gold jewelry and made it into a golden calf. When Moses came back and saw what had happened, he was furious. By the end of that day, three thousand people had been killed as punishment for worshipping the golden calf, while Aaron, who had actually cast it, emerged unharmed. The midrash (Tanchuma Ki Tissa 19) defends Aaron, insisting that he tried to talk the people out of making the golden calf and slow them down.

The Torah seems to be advocating for a model of collective responsibility, in which the entire people are held accountable for a wrong they did together, rather than singling out one person to bear it alone. And yet Aaron was the one who actually made the calf. The people pressured him, but he was the one who acted. Perhaps being the one who carried it out, whatever the pressure behind it, is what matters most.

When something goes wrong in a group, what responsibility does the leader carry?

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BEFORE IT MEANS SOMETHING

With your Bat Mitzvah approaching, you're starting to feel a genuine sense of pride in how much you've accomplished. After months of practice, you finally feel ready chant the Torah portion in front of the congregation.

Last week, your grandfather asked if you would be willing to lead the morning blessings and parts of the Amidah, too. You already know how to recite them, but prayer just isn't meaningful to you right now. Your Torah portion is different because you studied and deconstructed it until it meant something personal. That part feels real, while the prayers feel like going through the motions.

Your grandfather told you he hadn't wanted to lead those prayers at his own Bar Mitzvah either. The prayers weren't meaningful then, but he did them anyway, and eventually something shifted. Those prayers are now the part of Jewish life he returns to most. There is no pressure to say yes, but it makes you wonder if the parts that don't mean anything yet are exactly the ones worth doing. On the other hand, maybe your Bat Mitzvah should only include what already feels true to you.



Do you lead the prayers or keep the ceremony to what already feels meaningful?



PARSHA COMPASS

TZAV

Sacrifices were at the heart of Israelite worship in the ancient Temple, the primary way people expressed gratitude, sought forgiveness, and drew close to God. When the Temple was destroyed, the rabbis taught that prayer took the place of sacrifice. **“A perpetual fire shall be kept burning on the altar, not to go out”** (Vayikra 6:6). Even at times when there were no sacrifices offered in the Mishkan, it was forbidden to let the fire go out. The Jerusalem Talmud (Yoma 4:6) teaches that when the Israelites were traveling through the wilderness, they covered the altar with a special copper vessel to make sure the flame stayed lit along the way.

Perhaps this continually burning flame taught that even when we have nothing to offer, even when we do not feel like praying or being spiritual, we still show up. The rabbis taught (Pesachim 50b) that it is better to perform the commandments even when your heart isn't fully into it, because if we get in the habit, we will eventually connect with God for the right reasons. But others argued that we should only pray when we really feel close to God, because otherwise our religious acts are hollow.

**When you don't connect with something,
is it better to show up without feeling it
or wait until you mean it?**

BIG QUESTIONS. DEEP VALUES. BOLD CONVERSATIONS.

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THE APP YOU DELETED

You used to play the same game on your tablet all the time. You were staying up really late to finish levels, and even found yourself thinking about your next high score during class.

Two weeks ago, you realized the game was becoming a problem, so you deleted it completely. At first, it was hard to find other things to do, but eventually, it started to feel better. You were sleeping more and didn't feel that constant urge to check the app. You felt proud of yourself for overcoming the habit and proving you didn't need it.

But at lunch, your friends still talk about the game. They plan when to play together after school and laugh about things that happened while they were playing. . You just sit there because you aren't part of it anymore, and feel like you are losing that connection with the group.

The game is still in the app store, and you could have it back in thirty seconds. You want to be part of the conversation again, but are afraid that if you download it, you will fall right back into your old habits.



Do you download the game again and try to play it less or keep it deleted because you know you are better off without it?



Parshat Nasso introduces us to the Nazir, a person who vows to take upon himself or herself additional commitments to draw closer to God. A Nazir vows not to drink wine or eat grapes, not to shave or get a haircut, and not to come into contact with the dead for a designated period of time. At the end of this period, the Nazir shaves off his or her hair and brings a sacrifice to God.

An entire tractate of the Talmud is about the laws governing the Nazir, and it reflects deep rabbinic uncertainty. On the one hand, the Nazir, who is called “**holy to God**” (Bamidbar 6:8), was praised for choosing self-denial as a path to holiness. On the other hand, the Nazir, who must bring a sin offering, was frowned upon for withdrawing from the world and from physical pleasure. Rabbi Elazar HaKappar (Nazir 19a) teaches that the Nazir sins because God wants people to enjoy the delights of this world. Perhaps self-denial is not necessarily the best path to spiritual growth.

**Is it better to cut temptation out entirely or
to find a healthier relationship with it?**

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HOME ALONE

Your parents have one absolute rule: no friends in the house when they aren't home. They've told you and your older brother, who is 13, that they trust you to be responsible, but they don't want the house turned into a hangout spot while they're away.

Yesterday, while your parents were out helping your grandparents, your brother's best friend showed up anyway. They hung out in the basement, and your brother made you promise not to say anything. While they were messing around, they knocked over a heavy floor lamp. It didn't break, but it made a loud thud and left a mark on the wall. "It's not a big deal," he told you. "Just don't be a snitch."

When your parents came home, and your mom asked how the afternoon went. You've always been honest with your parents, but if you tell the truth this time, your brother is going to face serious consequences and be furious. But if you stay silent, you're keeping something from your parents, and your brother will get away with breaking the trust they placed in both of you.



What do you tell your parents?



PARSHA COMPASS

HA'AZINU

Parashat Ha'azinu consists of a lengthy poem that God instructs Moses to teach to the children of Israel before his death. The poem chronicles God's relationship with the Jewish people across time. Like **"an eagle spreading its wings over its young"** (Devarim 32:11), God found the Israelites in wild lands and cared for all their needs, spreading wings over them like an eagle protecting its young, feeding them honey, oil, milk, and fine wheat. But then the Israelites grew comfortable and complacent, abandoning God to worship idols instead. God responds by turning away from them, afflicting them with famine and plague, and leaving their enemies to mock their misfortune.

But when the people's suffering reaches its most extreme point, something shifts. God chooses to have mercy on them. Rashi (on Devarim 32:36) understands this as the turning point, that even after harsh judgment, the divine response turns back toward the people with mercy.

When someone around us does something wrong, how do we decide whether they deserve consequences or compassion?

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