



Repentance and Forgiveness - Jewish responses to the Bullier

Repentance and Forgiveness

From our earliest stories in Torah, there are vivid examples of mistakes people have made. From Cain slaying his brother Abel, to Judah selling Joseph into slavery, Aaron helping to build the golden calf, Moses losing his temper and being denied entry into Israel, and David committing adultery, sometimes otherwise really decent people have made a really poor choice at someone else's expense. Nowhere in Judaism are we commanded to be perfect. We are, however, commanded and expected, upon making a mistake, to seek repentance and forgiveness.

The goal of wisdom is to engage in repentance and good deeds. –Berachot 17a

Teshuva – Repentance

Repentance in Judaism known as teshuva (Hebrew תשובה, literally "return"), is the way of atoning for a sin, mistake, or poor choice. While this idea is central to the High Holidays, it is paramount year-round, as we navigate our world and our choices every day. According to the Talmud, repentance was among the first things God created; even before God created the physical universe (Nedarim 39b).

According to Gates of Repentance, by Rabbenu Yonah of Gerona, if someone commits a forbidden act, they can be forgiven for that act if they engage in *teshuva*, which includes:

- regretting/acknowledging the sin
- worrying about the future consequences of the sin
- acting and speaking with humility
- acting in a way opposite to that of the sin (for example, for the sin of lying, one should speak the truth)
- understanding the magnitude of the sin
- refraining from lesser mistakes for the purpose of safeguarding oneself against committing greater mistakes
- correcting the mistake however possible
- pursuing works of compassion and truth
- refraining from committing the same mistake if the opportunity presents itself again
- teaching others not to engage in the same behavior

Guides to the process of repentance in Judaism can be found through Jewish and rabbinical literature. Maimonides' Rules of Repentance in the Mishneh Torah specifically addresses the value and importance of teshuva in our lives.

If the humiliation took place in the presence of others, make your apology in their presence, as well as in private. Otherwise the victim has the right to say, "You shamed me in front of others, and now you want to apologize in private. Bring me all the people who heard you embarrass me, and then I will accept your apology. - Yalkout Shimoni, Hosea 14

Selicha – Forgiveness



In Judaism, if a person makes a poor choice or causes harm, but then sincerely and honestly apologizes to the wronged individual and tries to rectify the wrong, the wronged individual is religiously required to grant forgiveness (Hebrew סליחה, literally "forgive"):

"It is forbidden to be obdurate and not allow yourself to be appeased. On the contrary, one should be easily pacified and find it difficult to become angry. When asked by an offender for forgiveness, one should forgive with a sincere mind and a willing spirit. . . forgiveness is natural to the seed of Israel." (Mishneh Torah, Teshuvah 2:10)

In Judaism, we are commanded to go directly to the person we have harmed in order to be entitled to forgiveness. Unlike in other religions, in Judaism a person cannot simply obtain forgiveness from God for wrongs the person has done to other people. Thus the Tefila Zaka meditation, which is recited just before Yom Kippur, closes with the following:

"I know that there is no one so righteous that they have not wronged another, financially or physically, through deed or speech. This pains my heart within me, because wrongs between humans and their fellow are not atoned by Yom Kippur, until the wronged one is appeased. Because of this, my heart breaks within me, and my bones tremble; for even the day of death does not atone for such sins. Therefore I prostrate and beg before You, to have mercy on me, and grant me grace, compassion, and mercy in Your eyes and in the eyes of all people. For behold, I forgive with a final and resolved forgiveness anyone who has wronged me, whether in person or property, even if they slandered me, or spread falsehoods against me. So I release anyone who has injured me either in person or in property, or has committed any manner of sin that one may commit against another [except for legally enforceable business obligations, and except for someone who has deliberately harmed me because the one doing harm thinks "I can get away with harming this person because this person will forgive me"]. Except for these two, I fully and finally forgive everyone; may no one be punished because of me. And just as I forgive everyone, so may You grant me grace in the eyes of others, that they too forgive me absolutely."

Thus the reward for forgiving others is not God's forgiveness for wrongs done to others, but rather help in obtaining forgiveness from the other person.

If another person has been hurtful to you, and has come to you to apologize, and you have accepted their apology, one must move on and leave the incident in the past. This does not mean that your feelings are no longer valid. It means that you are giving the person who has hurt you permission to make amends, to learn from the situation, and the ability to come through the situation a stronger person.

One who overcomes their natural tendencies (i.e. to hold onto a grudge) and instead forgives, all their sins are forgiven. - Babylonian Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 17a