

When is the last time you genuinely apologized to someone for something you did? What makes an apology worthwhile? What steps do people need to take in order for an apology to be sincere? Do you think Judaism's "opinion" will agree with yours?



Important note from the author and animator Hanan Harchol:

The Hebrew word for repair is *tikkun* (תיקון). And yet the four-step process I am describing in this story is actually that of *teshuvah* (תשובה) which is literally translated "to return" (to God) and is commonly translated as *repentance*. Why, then, did I not title the story "Repentance" and use the word *repentance* throughout? The reason was my personal feeling that the word *repentance* could be interpreted by some to have a judgmental, preachy tone, and might carry so much negative connotation that the viewer would possibly focus on the term rather than the concept itself. The essence behind *teshuvah* (as I understand it) is the process of fixing one's relationship with other people and one's relationship with God (to return to God). This Jewish teaching says that no matter how egregious the wrongdoing, one can always perform *teshuvah*. Further it states that the reason we are not perfect is specifically so we can then choose whether or not to go through the difficult, but nourishing, process of *teshuvah*. When trying to come up with a less preachy word that still embodies the essence of this process, I chose to use "repair."

Repairing a broken relationship or trust takes work, commitment, and a desire to do what you can to fix what has been broken. "Repair" (*teshuvah*) is encouraged throughout Jewish teaching; in fact, it is required in most cases when people make mistakes. Judaism's take is that repairing a mistake or apologizing for behavior is always an option, no matter the situation. The responsibility lies in your hands; the work of repair requires effort but is not impossible and has a value in and of itself.

① Repair: Maimonides' Four Steps

The most famous laws about repair come to us from the 12th century rabbi, philosopher, and physician Maimonides (1135-1204, Spain), or Rambam, one of the greatest Torah scholars of the Middle Ages. Maimonides wrote codes of law for the Jewish community, clarifying common Jewish practice and accepted standards of observance. He wrote for the simple "Jew on the street" as much as for scholars, and his codes have remained relevant across the spectrum of Jewish belief until today.

According to Maimonides, four of the most important steps of *teshuvah* are the following:

1. Verbally confess your mistake and ask for forgiveness (*Mishneh Torah 1:1*).
2. Express sincere remorse, resolving not to make the same mistake again (*Mishneh Torah 2:2*).
3. Do everything in your power to "right the wrong," to appease the person who has been hurt (*Mishneh Torah 2:9*).
4. Act differently if the same situation happens again (*Mishneh Torah 2:1*).

The fourth concept originates in the Talmud:

How is one to tell whether a penitent is genuine? Rabbi Judah said: When the penitent has the opportunity to commit the same sin once and once again and he refrains from committing it.

Yoma 86b

1. Hanan's father is confused by the actions of his friend. He doesn't judge him for the *mistake*, but does seem to judge him for his *response* to the mistake. He desperately wants Shlomo to have tried to enact some level of *teshuvah*. Is this a realistic expectation?
2. Hanan initially believed *teshuvah* would be essentially impossible because Shlomo would never be able to repay the money lost. According to his father, however, money was the least of the issues. The recognition, confession, and attempt to reimburse were far more important. With whom do you agree and why? Do you see a value in completing some of the steps but not all of them?
3. Shlomo had the chance to change his actions with every new deal he brokered, yet he didn't. If someone repeatedly makes the same mistake, how does that affect the nature of an apology?

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② The Process of Repair

Judaism argues that there is always room for *teshuvah*. An early Jewish text, *Exodus Rabbah*, teaches:

The gates of repentance are always open, and anyone who wishes to enter may enter.

Exodus Rabbah, 19:4

A similar message is taught in *Lamentations Rabbah*:

...Prayer is likened to an immersion pool, but repentance is likened to the sea. Just as an immersion pool is at times open and at other times locked, so the gates of prayer are at times open and at other times locked. But the sea is always open, even as the gates of repentance are always open.

Lamentations Rabbah 3:43, section 9

1. Why does Judaism set up such a permissive standard? Why doesn't Judaism require the ideal behavior from the outset?
2. Does Judaism emphasize the act of *teshuvah* for the good of the person doing it or for the person who was wronged?
3. People often immerse themselves in guilt as a substitute for choosing to go through the difficult process of doing *teshuvah*. Both Judaism and Hanan's father take away the "guilt" aspect of repair, instead focusing on the *opportunity* which the process of *teshuvah* provides us to be human, make mistakes, and learn from them. How does this framing feel? Is there any value to the "guilt" you feel when you do something you wish you hadn't?
4. If the process of *teshuvah* is never-ending, always allowing for mistakes to be made and corrected, how do you avoid becoming lazy about your actions? Why try to be the best friend, partner, child, parent, etc., you can be if there is always room to apologize when you fall short?

Along with laws about repair, Maimonides also teaches that the recipient of an apology should be open to offering forgiveness and receiving the apology.

...When the person who wronged him asks for forgiveness, he should forgive him with a complete heart and a willing spirit. Even if he aggravated and wronged him severely, he should not seek revenge or bear a grudge.

Mishneh Torah 2:10

5. Hanan's father did not invest in the pyramid scheme. If he had, do you think he would have been as gracious about what he hoped for Shlomo?

6. Are you as forgiving with people when there is a financial mistake made as you are with an ethical mistake?

Hanan Harchol, the author and animator believes that the most important exchange in the script is between Hanan and his father when he asks:

HANAN: ...if we're *not* able to fix the *mistake*, then *what* are we ultimately *repairing*?!?

His father answers:

DADDY: Well, that's simple: we're repairing *ourselves* and our *relationships* with *other people*....That's what it's all *really* about...

7. His father is speaking about repair, but what is the deeper meaning he implies? What is the most compelling line to you?
8. What does Hanan's father mean when he says the following?

DADDY: Even someone who has committed an unforgivable crime has the opportunity to go through the process of repair.

According to Jewish law, murder is unforgivable because the person is unable to give forgiveness. How could a person do *teshuvah* for an unforgivable crime?

