

תשובה

Teshuvah
lit. return/turning

Take Responsibility for Your Actions

The Jewish approach recognizes that humans often fail to live up to the highest standards, but demands and honors learning from our mistakes and changing.

What is complete teshuvah? When a person has the opportunity to commit their original mistake again, and is physically able to make the same mistake again, but doesn't make the mistake because they have shifted. Not out of fear, nor because of physical weakness. Hilchot Teshuvah 2:1, Rambam (a 12th century Spanish philosopher).

Biblical heroes are not perfect. Jacob steals from his brother. Leah is jealous of her sister. Abraham and Sarah make mistakes. They struggle with their imperfections and in so doing, learn and grow. In the book of Genesis, for example, Judah learns self-sacrifice which eventually softens the heart of his brother Joseph. Orthodox feminist author Blu Greenberg writes, "Because they're flawed, we can strive for the higher qualities they represent without being overwhelmed by our own flaws."

A Hebrew word often translated as 'sin' is chet. Chet actually means 'missing the mark' and not 'sin.' We try to aim, sometimes miss our target and then try again, hopefully with better aim.

Simcha Bunim (a 19th century Polish Hasidic Rabbi) used to say: Every person should have two pockets. In one, carry a note that says *Bishvili Nivrat Ha'Olam* – for my sake was the world created. In the other pocket, a note that says, *Anochi Afar va'Efer* – I am dust and ashes. When one is feeling down, take out the note that says, 'For my sake was the world created.' When one is feeling smug, take out the note that says, 'I am dust and ashes.'

Questions for Conversation and Reflection

1. Being human means making mistakes. Are there any mistakes you've made that you still would like to make better somehow?
2. How does understanding the idea of 'sin' as 'missing the mark' change its connotations?
3. What would happen if you actually did the practice that Rabbi Simcha Bunim describes?