

te·shu·vah

תְּשׁוּבָה

Apologizing and really meaning it:
A special Honeymoon Israel guide for couples.



What is *teshuvah*?

And what does it have
to do with me?

Teshuvah literally means “returning”, it is the spiritual and practice practice of “returning” to your highest self and our highest values. Practically, teshuvah is done through accounting for your mistakes and apologizing directly (in a specific and sincere way) to the people you’ve hurt.

Why are we talking about teshuvah now?

What is so special about
apologizing now?

Teshuvah can be done at any time, the ancient Rabbis often tell us to apologize the day before we die, but we never know when we will die, so that means today. (The Rabbis can be dark) However, the High Holiday season is considered an especially auspicious time for it, as we want to enter the New Year with a clean slate.

What does *teshuvah* have to do with my relationship?

And why does HMI care?

At Honeymoon Israel, we are in many businesses: The Israel tour business, the business of nurturing Jewish community, the innovation business. But most importantly, we are in the business of love. Our greatest joy is in being a resource to our alumni couples by nurturing the love that brought them through our doors in the first place. Teshuvah can and should be practiced between people in all relationships (parent/child, friend/friend, etc), and we believe it is one of the keys to healthy and long-lasting romantic partnerships.

5 practical *teshuvah* steps

As the saying goes, "If you get two Jews into a room, you'll get at least three opinions." What makes *teshuvah* *teshuvah* can differ slightly from person to person, but almost all the Jewish sages agree that if you want to right a wrong, you'll have to go through the following five steps:

1. Recognition of how you messed up and hurt someone (Hakarát Ha-Chét'/הַכָּרַת הַחֵטָא)
2. Feeling remorse (Charatá/חַרְטָה)
3. Committing to not doing it again (Azivat Ha-Chét'/עֲזִיבַת הַחֵטָא)
4. Restitution where possible (הַפְּרָעוֹן)
5. Active confession (Vidui/וִדּוּי)

These five steps make up the process of *teshuvah*. Not shockingly, these steps also pretty much cover what most reliable couples' therapists and addiction groups recommend to strengthen relationships (see below for more detail on that). Coincidence? We don't think so.

The following two pages contain a worksheet that will guide you through the five steps above (plus an extra step to get you in the mood), and some space for you to free-write. You can use a *teshuvah* chart like this to assess all of your important relationships, but this one is specific to romantic partnerships. We encourage you to take your time with this soul work, and to keep it private so that you can write with honesty. Pay special attention to any feelings that come up for you along the way, and take breaks when necessary. This work isn't easy, but it's worth it.

**"Vulnerability is not winning or losing.
It's having the courage to show up
when you can't control the outcome."
-Brené Brown**

Honeymoon Israel Couples' Guide to *Teshuvah*: A Worksheet to Help You Apologize & Mean It

Step 0: Get in the mood כְּנוּחָה נַח-וָה קַא- Ka-vah-nah

Find a quiet space and a comfy place to sit. Offer an intention or dedication before you begin this work. Put aside any negative feelings you might be holding toward yourself or to your partner.

Jot down some thoughts about what you love about your partner and your relationship.

What about them made you fall in love? What do you admire most in your partner? What about them makes you feel proud? In what ways does your partner inspire you? What did you and your partner “create” together (physically, emotionally, spiritually, socially) in the past year that you are proud of? What are you looking forward to “creating” together this year?

Step 1: Recognition that you hurt your partner הַכְרַת הַחֲטָא' חַא-חֶת' Hakarát Ha-Chét'

Admitting when you were hurtful and caused pain is hard. Being hurtful toward or disappointing your partner (especially during a global pandemic when everything feels uncertain and stressful) is a human inevitability. We lash out and project our own insecurities onto those closest to us, and our partners are as close as it gets.

As you jot down a list of the ways in which you missed the mark with your partner this year, we invite you to regard your list as a growing opportunity for re-connection with your beloved and with yourself.

Step 2: Feeling remorse חַרְטָא חַרְטָא Charatá

Remorse is a feeling. It is composed of feelings of regret, of failure to maintain our moral standards. It's really important to write out any feelings you associate with having hurt your partner last year.

We know it can feel risky and vulnerable, but trust us: Write out how you feel about having hurt your partner. Pay special attention to any physical sensations that come up for you as you reflect.

Step 3: Committing to not doing it again
עֲזִיבַת הַחֲטָא' אֶזִיבָה

This step is about taking action. Rather than vowing to something unreasonable, we suggest using this space to reflect on any inner patterns and cycles you are aware of that make it hard for you to show up for your partner in the way they deserve.

Can you commit to learning a new pattern or to exploring how to adopt new skills? Consider using this space to make a list of what support (if any) you might need (time and space for intentional self care, a therapist, a support group, etc) to begin this work.

Step 4: Restitution where possible
הַפְּרָעוֹן פֵּאֵרָאוֹן

"Restitution" is the act of making good, as best one can, for any damage done. If one has stolen, one must return the object or pay compensation. If one has damaged another's reputation, one must attempt to correct the injury.

Use this space to consider the ways in which you might actively repair the hurt you caused, and be ready to offer these suggestions to your partner. If you are unsure, that's ok. You can always ask your partner what they think they might need from you in order to begin their healing, and hopefully, to forgive.

Step 5: Active confession
וִידוּי וִידוּי

This last step is "the big one" take some time and private space to sit down with your partner and apologize to them in-person for the hurt you caused them in the past year. Remember: Teshuvah isn't about being "right".

In order for your act of teshuvah to be complete, you must be prepared to apologize to your partner unconditionally.

Use this space to map out any logistics or preparations for how and when to invite your partner to this conversation.

Five Notable Jewish Rules of Apologizing & Forgiving

Some hurts are unforgivable

Reflecting on the harm we've caused and sincerely asking for forgiveness is a holy act. But we'd be remiss if we didn't explicitly acknowledge that Jewish law and tradition teaches us that forgiveness cannot be sought for crimes against humanity, violence, abuse, or other inexcusable acts. Teshuvah is powerful, but it doesn't erase the impact of physical or emotional pain or trauma.

Asking 3 times

According to Maimonides, one of our wisest sages, when you ask someone for forgiveness, they are allowed to turn you down. If this happens, you should return a second and third time and try apologizing again. If they won't forgive you after three tries, then you're considered to have atoned, even if you haven't been granted forgiveness by them. So consider yourself in the clear, at least spiritually speaking, if you've given it everything you have.

Teshuvah is both the journey & the destination.

There are basically four ways people respond to requests for forgiveness:

- Yes, I forgive you.
- I need more time.
- I can make a decision to forgive you, but I'm still very hurt.
- No, there's nothing you can do to ever make it right. I don't forgive you.

The second and third responses are the most common, and you should be prepared for them. Don't assume that after you make your apology your partner will be ready to forgive and move on. Reconciliation is not something that's granted — it's earned. Sometimes proving our sincerity takes time and trust.

Direct isn't always best for us

While direct, person-to-person teshuvah is the gold standard in many ways, Jewish tradition and law acknowledges that sometimes we can cause more harm than good by interacting with those we've hurt.

Jewish tradition teaches us that we can practice teshuvah indirectly by writing in a journal or by speaking with a therapist or good friend. Teshuvah should never involve putting ourselves or others at serious risk physically or emotionally.

Grudges hurt only you

Ancient Jewish thinkers knew it thousands of years ago, and modern medicine and psychology proves it now. Grudges aren't good for us, and they don't accomplish much. The High Holidays are an excellent time to really start anew, and to let go of the baggage that weighs you down. If it's safe to do so, consider this season as an opportunity to liberate yourself from holding grudges, especially against your partner.