

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?

Mystically-speaking, the Jewish High Holiday season brings with it a special opportunity to look inward. We use this time to account for all that has not served us, and for the ways in which we've messed up spiritually and practically. (Our entire tradition rests on the fact that human beings are complex and that we all inevitably screw things up.)

Luckily, Judaism regards mistakes as opportunities and as gateways to building greater connection with others and to deepening our own growth. In Hebrew, the act of repentance is called *teshuvah*, a Hebrew word translated as "returning." *Teshuvah* is a specific practice of "returning" to your highest self and to the values that you care most about. Practically, *teshuvah* is done through accounting for your mistakes and apologizing directly (in a specific and sincere way) to the people you've hurt.

Teshuvah can be done at any time, but the High Holiday season is considered an especially auspicious time for it. Make no mistake, we're not saying that hurting other people is good, or that you have to wait for pumpkin-spice season to apologize for your mistakes. The important takeaway here is that by taking active responsibility for our (inevitable) screw-ups, we will elevate our relationships and come closer to ourselves and to The Divine.

**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.

We are thrilled to present this specially-curated *teshuvah* guide to all our couples, and hope that it brings with it blessings of continually-deepening closeness, trust, and appreciation for all your partnerships. May 5781 be a year that opens the doors of your hearts to each other in new and special ways!



5 practical *teshuvah* steps to take some time before 5781

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 screwed up and hurt someone (Hakarát Ha-Chét'/ הַכָּרַת הַחֵטָא)
2. Feeling remorse (Charatá/חֲרָטָה)
3. Committing to not doing it again (Azivat Ha-Chét'/עֲזִיבַת הַחֵטָא)
4. Restitution where possible (הַפְּרָעוֹן)
5. And lastly (this is the hardest one) 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. As discussed, you don't have to wait all year to practice teshuvah (actually, please don't... your partner won't think that's very helpful), but it's really special to mark the High Holiday season as a moment to do it extra intentionally. Traditionally, it's recommended to free yourself of spiritual baggage by engaging in some serious teshuvah before Yom Kippur. That way, you don't spend Yom Kippur (the day of spiritual accounting and atonement) frantically apologizing and getting buried under unnecessary guilt. (Pro tip: Yom Kippur is actually not about guilt! Let that shit go, and free your soul so that it can embrace all the goodness coming to you in 5781.)

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 in 5780

Step 0: Get in the mood כְּנוּהַה נַח-כַּא 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 (5780) that you are proud of? What are you looking forward to "creating" together this year (5781)?

Step 1: Recognition that you hurt your partner הַכְרַת הַחַטָּא' חַכְרַת הַא-חֶט' Ha-Chét' 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. Special note: It's important to distinguish between feeling guilty and feeling ashamed for the hurts you caused. Jewish tradition teaches us that guilt is constructive and leads to self-awareness, while shame is damaging and unproductive. Be mindful of this distinction as you process your feelings here.

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 חַרְטָה 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. In the heat of the moment (especially during or after a fight), we sometimes lose our ability to name our feelings, and this loss works against our ability to communicate intentionally.

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' אֲזִיבָת

This step is about taking action. In a perfect world, it's about expressing a commitment not to hurt your partner ever again. But the world isn't perfect, and we know that you'll be making another teshuvah list in 5782, because our bad habits and hurtful reactions run in deep patterns and cycles that are very hard to break. And because we are human.

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 in 5781? 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 פֵּאִרָאוֹן

"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
וִדּוּי וִדּוּי

This last step is "the big one". It's the one that takes the most chutzpah (Yiddish for "confidence"). At some point (ideally before Yom Kippur), 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 5780. On the next page, we've provided you with some suggestions about how to do this in the most sincere and thoughtful way possible, but the biggest thing to remember is this: 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.

Apologize, but make it *teshuvah*

Some "dos" & "don'ts"

Apologizing is liberating. When you acknowledge your flaws – the things that make you human – it means that you can be vulnerable with your partner rather than allowing your fear of rejection or failure to overwhelm you. It feels really good, once you get over the “putting your pride aside” part. Apologizing sincerely is the most important part of teshuvah, and it is an art and a science. Below are a few steps you can take to give your teshuvah the best chance possible of really being heard and accepted by your partner:

Do

Remember that apologizing doesn't make you weaker. It makes you stronger. By recognizing and acknowledging your faults and attempting to make amends, you are taking the high road. This demonstrates your strength, courage, compassion, and wisdom.

Use “I” statements rather than “you” statements. Take real ownership over your role in the conflict.

Apologize for your own actions and attitude. Be specific about what you did wrong.

Ask for forgiveness when you apologize. If your partner can't forgive you in that moment, it's ok. Be gentle with them, and grateful when/if you receive forgiveness.

Attempt to make a repair. “I was wrong. Is there anything I can do to make it right?” is a perfect follow up to an apology because it restores trust and connection.

Allow room for closeness between you and your partner after you apologize.

Don't

Offer an apology just to make yourself feel better.

Apologize for your partner's feelings: “I'm sorry you're mad” is not an apology.

Add an excuse or a “but” to your apology. “I'm sorry I was rude, but I was really irritated” sends the message to your partner that you felt justified in your rudeness.

Expect a reciprocal apology. If you were brave enough to apologize first, don't do so expecting your partner to apologize equally or even at all. Your partner must have time and space to collect their thoughts and decide for themselves what is best. Let them make their own choice about what to do on their time.

Over-do it. Being sincere and thoughtful is wonderful, but taking up too much time and energy hammering every point home actually forces your partner to do a lot of emotional labor.

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, with three witnesses, 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. Additionally, we can put ourselves at risk by seeking apologies from people who may seriously harm us if we interact directly with them. If asking for forgiveness or for apologies directly will create more harm than good for either party, 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.