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Judaism: out of the garden

There's no such thing as "original sin" in Judaism

Unlike Christianity and Catholicism, Judaism teaches that human beings are not inherently sinful. Jewish tradition does not understand human imperfections as being the result of an "original sin" by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. As Rabbi Joshua Lesser says:

"Jews don't believe in original sin.

We believe in original goodness."

"Sin" is the result of our natural, negative human tendencies to stray away from our most sacred, core values. When we stray, we are presented with an opportunity to re-channel our energy and to strengthen our character and our most important relationships. Without "sin" we would never have a reason to evolve.

Guilt vs. shame

Jewish tradition teaches us that guilt is constructive and leads to self-awareness, while shame is damaging and unproductive. Feel your guilt, use it, and move on.

Do right

Judaism says that "sin" isn't just about doing wrong. It can be equally about missing a chance to do right. As Leviticus teaches: "Justice, justice shall you pursue."

Missing the mark

The word in Hebrew for sin (chet) is actually an archery term for when an arrow goes astray. When an archer misses the target, it is not a permanent failure. Rather, an archer can keep trying to get arrows closer to the target and ultimately to its center. There is no guarantee of immediate success, nor does success ensure that the goal will be reached every time.

The Yom Kippur Antidote

Can humans be absolved and rid themselves of their guilt? The ideology of Yom Kippur answers: Yes. But it takes real work. Luckily, Judaism provides a straightforward approach including Cheshbon HaNefesh (a spiritual accounting of the soul) and Teshuvah (sincere apologizing) See our HMI website for some resources that can help.