

On Repentance and Repair: Amends, Apology, and Making Different Choices

And that's something that ideally is negotiated with the person who was harmed, right. You don't make amends at a person. You make them to the person and with the person. And what would feel like the correct amends to one individual may feel different than a totally different individual who has experienced the same kind of injury.

So restitution can be financial. It doesn't need to be financial. It can be direct with the victim but also indirect with a community or with a cause.

Once I've moved through and I've really started to work these steps, I've confessed, I've started to change, I've made amends, at this point when can I expect to return to the way things were. When can I go back to my position, my job, my status, my honor, my relationship?

Part of the amends process is accepting that actions have consequences. Things are different than they were before. It's just a fact, right. The person who was injured doesn't get to automatically go back in time and neither do you.

And the really critical piece of this work that a lot of people struggle with is that you don't get to just punch the buttons and say now everything is better, so I'm back, right. And it may be that if you are doing this work in a deep and sincere way that people will see naturally and organically that you are on their team, right. The person who was not invited to game night might be invited back to game night as a result of their very sincere actions. But somebody who is coming into that space with the entitlement, right, "OK, give me my status back, of course, I am earned-- I have earned it because I have checked those boxes," is somebody who does not understand the harm that they caused.

Moving to the fourth step of *shuvah*, how would you describe apology, which is remarkably late in the game?

And there's a reason why apology is so late. So you have already done-- this is the end of the process, right? You've already done basically just about as much as you can to try to sew up that hole in the cosmos that you yourself created.

You have owned what you have done beginning to and continuing to try to change and grow and transform. You have done what you can to repair in whatever way that you can. And by now, hopefully you've gotten it. You've gotten the memo. You've gotten that there's another human being that you hurt.

And so hopefully by now it matters to you. You see that there's another person there. And the apology is not about checking a box and getting off the hook. It is about communicating to another person that you are sorry that you hurt them.

And Maimonides uses very victim-centric language in the apology. He talks about you need to appease them, right, it's like *fayes otam*. [to appease them]. Like, it's about-- it's not about saying certain words. It's about what would be the thing that would appease-- care for this person. And so it's got to be from this open, flowing heart that sees the other person and wants to have them feel better.

What happens in the case of the apology encounter that would cause further harm to the victim? What happens if that apology is actually unwelcome?

So it's difficult, and it's a complex dance because we know that we need to apologize. And in a victim-centric model, again, it's not about a cathartic experience for the perpetrator. I've heard so many examples of somebody being ambushed at the last minute or called in the middle of the night.

And it's, like, the experience of the person who is harmed is not on the harm-doers mind. And that's not healing, right. That's not repair. And so we need to step way, way back and have the humility to know that sometimes we don't get our cathartic experience and that living with that has to be one of the consequences of our actions. And that's just part of the work.

My rabbi, Rabbi Alan Lew, *zichrono livrachah*, his memory be for a blessing, used to say how could the person get to exactly the same situation. And then he would answer in his, kind of, Brooklyn accent like "If you don't do the work, you will find yourself in exactly the same situation," right, that our unresolved anger that we don't address, that we don't deal with will insert itself somehow maybe not in that exact situation and with that same person. But our anger will blow up in some place somewhere.

Our unaddressed fear of commitment will explode in another relationship somewhere along the way, somehow, somehow, right. Our whatever issues that are playing out in the workplace will somehow go through. Like, our internalized white supremacy will somehow manifest in another way, right. The systems and structures in our HR department that manage to effectively bury this complaint are going to find a way to harm someone else if we don't address the systems.

So when we don't do the work, we continue to find ways to manifest the harm. And it may look different, but the patterns are undeniable, right. We go from first contact to the Trail of Tears to Wounded Knee to the Dakota Access Pipeline. We go from slavery to lynching to redlining to Jim Crow to mass incarceration and voter suppression, right. It doesn't have to look exactly the same for it to be the same harm.

And when we don't do the work, we will find ourselves back there. When we think about institutions, when we think about nations, the work of confession, the work of starting to change requires rethinking some of how things have been. And that is scary. And that is threatening.

And it doesn't always require that suddenly we are dismantling everything that has ever existed and creating something new from the ground up. It sometimes just requires shaping new systems and creating better more whole systems. And it's a vulnerability. It opens us to vulnerability, right.

When we make ourselves vulnerable and own the harm that we have caused, we can create new futures for ourselves and for everyone who is hurt. And for institutions and for organizations and nations and individuals, it's scary but it offers a new path of wholeness for everybody.