

## THOUGH YOU HAVE BROKEN YOUR VOWS

I hope the music today has been soothing, giving you a feeling of relaxation, ease or even healing, since there is so much in life that can set our nerves on edge and cause us division and disruption. We all need some sort of healing, and perhaps, on the eve of Yom Kippur, you were listening to National Public Radio and heard the story about the e-scapegoat. Created by an organization whose goal is to communicate basic Judaism, the goat's website is [escgoat.com](http://escgoat.com). That is 'esc' as in the abbreviation of 'escape' on computer keyboards, and goat, all one word.

The cartoon goat is inspired by the sixteenth chapter of the Biblical book of Leviticus. This chapter ends with the reading for today which details the establishment of Yom Kippur, but the first majority of the chapter speaks about blood sacrifices and one goat that is ritually selected. Onto this goat, the Priest is instructed to place the sins of the community, and then to send the Goat into the wilderness of Azazel. Later Christians confused this name of a desert with the name of a demon and created various levels of confusion, but the basic idea was for the goat to get lost and die in a desert wilderness. The website allows a cartoon goat to collect sins and then roam the wilderness of the Internet, announcing the sins via 'tweets.'

One emphasis in modern American culture has been on forgiveness. Everyone from Oprah to the Mayo Clinic website will tell you to let go, to not keep grudges, and to forgive, all because it is good for you. Forgiveness is a canceling of a debt someone owes you. It is letting go of a grudge or a sense that someone has taken something from you. Giving forgiveness is important. It is very powerful. Every year on the Sunday near to Yom Kippur I preach on forgiveness and reconciliation. Our religion and the Jewish religion are very similar at root. We draw from the ethical and justice oriented teachings of the prophets and the Hebrew Scriptures, just as Jesus did. Above all we share a sense that the purpose of faith is tikkun olam, the repair of the world.

The point today is that in repairing the world forgiveness is not the same as seeking forgiveness. And forgiveness is not atonement. Today I want to emphasize the process of atonement, which requires much more than a goat getting lost in the wilderness. It requires regret, repair, repentance, and reconciliation.

I like to say that there is one question at heart, of each religion. For Judaism it is "what does the lord require?" In Christianity it is "What is required for salvation?" Today our question is "what is required for atonement?" I am not talking about anything that should be forced on you by others. Atonement is something you must do of your own will and out of your own desire for reconciliation.

We all will feel guilt at some time or other, of falling short, of failing or of causing harm. Our actions have consequences and we may regret those consequences. I remember in my first year in seminary, studying for the ministry, we had a discussion about regret.

We were supposed to speak about some regret we had. But I, a happy twenty-something young man, had no regrets. Even if I had made a bad decision, I felt it was the best decision I could have made at the time and I should accept my choice and the consequences. I had no regrets. Since then I have lived long enough to have gathered some regrets. There are several things I have done or said that I know caused harm and I sincerely wish I could take them back or heal the damage I caused. So, the first step in healing is to express regret. This is much more than saying "I'm sorry". Often that phrase only means "I am sorry you found out what I did" or "I am sad that you are angry at me". But true regret is a willingness to be honest about the harm you caused and to name it. It helps to say what we did wrong and to say how it hurt another, without explanation or defense: simply to admit the facts.

Last night my wife and I went to see the movie, "Blue Jasmine". The movie depicts a group of people none of whom are willing to acknowledge the harm they have caused. The main character keeps justifying her actions. She was involved in her sister losing \$200,000. She keeps saying that she was only "trying to help them get in on a good deal." But she never shows real regret for the fact that it was not a good deal but a scam. She never shows regret for the harm and loss she caused. She admits things went badly, but it was not her fault because she was trying to help.

And then there is the story of the Rabbi who was sick of all the fasting and seriousness and deprivation of Yom Kippur. On one very lovely Saturday he decides to go golfing instead of avoiding all work. The weather is too good not to enjoy it, he thinks to himself. He chooses a course where he is sure not to meet anyone he might know. As he is out on the links an angel in the divine court sees him and rushes to God. "Oh Lord" he says, "Look, the Rabbi, he is breaking your commandment, he is not keeping the Sabbath holy!" God replies "I'll fix him". So he looks down and the Rabbi lifts his club and takes a driving swing and the ball flies off the tee and through the air and lands straight into the hole in the green. It is a hole in one, and on one of the more difficult parts of the course! "What?" cries out the angel "What kind of punishment is that?!" God smiles wryly and says, "Who's he goin' to tell?"

Yes, sometimes we regret what we do and we want to repair the relationship or person we have hurt. The Fifty First Psalm puts it succinctly:

51:16-17 16 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. 17 The sacrifice, of God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, O God, will not despise-

Maimonides (1134–1204) the great medieval Jewish philosopher commented on the Bible passage about the scapegoat. He wrote, "These ceremonies are of a symbolic character and serve to impress each of us with a certain idea and to lead us to repent, as if to say, 'We have freed ourselves of our previous deeds, cast them behind our backs and removed them from us as far as possible.'"

So this leads us to repentance. The word literally means to turn around to turn away from one thing toward another. Repentance means changing your actions. It will not help to admit that stealing apples is wrong and causes harm, and then to go ahead and steal more apples. True regret should lead us automatically to repent of that action. If getting drunk causes us to behave badly then we must simply stop drinking.

Repair -

The theological notion is that your trespasses are against god, so UU owe God something.

The ten days leading up to Yom Kippur are known as the Ten Days of Repentance. During this period Jews are encouraged to seek out anyone they may have offended and to sincerely request forgiveness so that the New Year can begin with a clean slate

The process of repentance is called [teshuvah](#) and it is a crucial part of Yom Kippur.

There are several stages of teshuvah, including the sinner recognizing his or her wrongs, feeling sincere remorse and doing everything in their power to undo any damage that has been done. If a specific person has been wronged the offender must ask that person for forgiveness. The final stage of teshuvah is resolving to never commit such a sin again.

Repair- some things are beyond repair Murder, public fraud or thievery, and public defaming of another person are all different because the victims are unreachable or not able to be counted.

Mr. Peabody's apples.

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

**Come, come, whoever you are.  
Wanderer, idolater, worshipper of fire,  
come even though you have broken your vows a thousand times,  
Come, and come yet again. Ours is not a caravan of despair.**

- As quoted in *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English* (2004) by Amin Malak

By the mercy of God Paradise has eight doors —

one of those is the door of repentance, child.

All the others are sometimes open, sometimes shut;

but the door of repentance is never closed.

Come seize the opportunity: the door is open;

A reading by Leslie Takahashi-Morris.

Come, come, whoever you are, come with your hurts, your imperfections, your places that feel raw and exposed.

Come, come, whoever you are, come with your strengths that the world shutters to hold. Come with your wild imaginings of a better world.

Come with your hopes that seems no one wants to hear. Wanderer, worshiper, lover of leaving, we will make a place for you. We will build a home together. Ours is no caravan of despair. We will walk together. Come, yet again, come.

Repair-  
Repentance- Related to regret.

Seeking forgiveness is different.

Our country did not go the way of Nuremberg, to bring the perpetrators of such crimes to justice.” In our case, neither the apartheid government nor the liberation movements had defeated their adversary. Our country could not afford the exorbitant cost of trials, even if we could have held them and had the evidence to satisfy a court of law.

Our country rejected the other extreme of a blanket amnesty, as happened in General Augusto Pinochet’s Chile. It victimized the victims a second time around and was really trying to let bygones be bygones, when in fact they never become bygones. Certainly, Gen. Pinochet now knows you can’t act with reckless impunity and hope to get away with it forever. This is a moral universe.

Our country chose a middle way of individual amnesty for truth. Some would say, what about justice? And we say retributive justice is not the only kind of justice. There is also restorative justice, because we believe in Ubuntu -- the essence of being human, that idea that we are all caught up in a delicate network of interdependence. We say, “A person is a person through other persons.” I need you in order to be me and you need me in order to be you.

The greatest good is communal corporate harmony, and resentment, anger, revenge are corrosive of this harmony. To nurse grudges and resentment is bad for your blood pressure. Psychologists have now found that to forgive is good for our personal, physical, psychic health, as well as our health as a community, as a society. We discovered that people experienced healing through telling their stories. The process opened wounds that were festering. We cleansed them, poured ointment on them, and knew they would heal. A young man who had been blinded by police action in his township came to tell us the story of that event. When he finished he was asked how he felt now, and he said, “You have given me back my eyes.”

Retribution leads to a cycle of reprisal, leading to counter-reprisal in an inexorable movement, as in Rwanda, Northern Ireland, and in the former Yugoslavia. The only thing that can break that cycle, making possible a new beginning, is forgiveness. Without forgiveness there is no future.

...Yes, wonderfully, exhilaratingly, we have this extraordinary capacity for good. Fundamentally, we are good; we are made for love, for compassion, for caring, for sharing, for peace and reconciliation, for transcendence, for the beautiful, for the true and the good.

Who could have imagined that South Africa would be an example of anything but the most awful ghastliness? And now we see God's sense of humour, for God has chosen this unlikely lot and set us up as some kind of paradigm, as some kind of model that just might provide the world with a viable way of dealing with post-conflict, post-repression periods. We have not been particularly virtuous, anything but. We are not particularly smart -- precisely. God wants to point at us as this unlikely bunch and say to the trouble spots of the world, "Look at them. They had a nightmare called apartheid. It has ended. Your nightmare, too, will end. They used to have what people regarded as an intractable problem. They are now resolving it. Nowhere in the world can people ever again claim that their problems are intractable." There is hope for all of us.

How often should one forgive?

#188 Come, come whoever you are, wanderer, worshiper, over of leaving. Ours is not caravan of despair. Come, yet again come. [Though you've broken your vows a thousand Times]

*In the seventh month [Tishri], on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and you shall not do any work ... For on that day he shall provide atonement for you to cleanse you from all your sins before the L-RD. -Leviticus 16:29-30*

The issue of forgiveness has two sides. Those who have broken a vow or crossed a line and those who have been harmed by that action. In recent time the focus has been on granting forgiveness.

But forgiveness is not the same as atonement.

We hurt others all the time but ignore and forget those blunders because they are expected.

The words "Kol Nidre" are Hebrew for "All Vows"

"When you make a vow [*neder*] to the LORD your God, do not put off fulfilling it, for the LORD your God will require it of you, and you will have incurred guilt; whereas you incur no guilt if you refrain from vowing. You must fulfill what has crossed your lips and perform what you have voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God, having made the promise with your own mouth." (Deuteronomy 23:22-24)

Rash vows to God that for whatever reason were not fulfilled created painful religious and ethical difficulties for those who had made them; this led to an earnest desire for dispensation from them.

. If the first request for forgiveness is rebuffed, one should ask for forgiveness at least two more times, at which point the person whose forgiveness is being sought should grant the request. The rabbis thought it was cruel for anyone to withhold their forgiveness for offenses that had not caused irrevocable damage.[Learn more about teshuvah.](#)

Although many people think that transgressions from the previous year are forgiven through prayer, fasting and participation in Yom Kippur services, Jewish tradition teaches that only offenses committed against God can be forgiven on Yom Kippur. Hence it is important that people make an effort to reconcile with others before participating in Yom Kippur services.

Come, come, whoever you are. Wanderer, worshiper, lover of leaving. It doesn't matter. Ours is not a caravan of despair. Come, even if you have broken your vows a thousand times. Come, yet again, come, come.”

Only by atoning for our sins can we restore balance to our relationship with God and with our fellow human beings.

Atonement requires more than forgiveness.

To forgive is to let go. Not required. Requires empowerment. But what about the perpetrator.

Forgiving oneself should be easy. The difficulty is reconciling with others. Or, God.

But to reconcile requires action by the transgressor.

Regret

Repentance

Repair

Reconciliation

Jewish

Khol Nidre

Repairing damage

Hindus for new years also reconcile debts and books.

Twelve steps seeks to reconcile.