



# **Forgiveness, The Jewish Way**

Wellness Through Meditation

November 17, 2022

Rabbi Rick Kline

# Mitzvah/Commandment to Forgive

“Do not hate your brother in your heart.” (Leviticus 19:17)

“Who is a God like You, who forgives iniquity and remitting transgressions; ... who has not maintain His anger forever, for He desires loving-kindness.” (Micah 7:18)

“So shall you say unto Joseph: ‘Forgive, I pray you now, the transgressions of your brothers, and their sin for the evil they did to you. And now, we pray that you forgive the transgressions of the servants of the God of your father. And Joseph wept when they spoke this to him.’” (Genesis 50:17)

# Torah on Forgiveness

Who is a God like You, who forgives iniquity and passes over the transgressions of the remnant of His heritage?  
He does not maintain His anger forever, for He desires loving-kindness.  
He will again have compassion on us;  
He will subdue our iniquities and cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.  
He will be faithful to Jacob, and show loving-kindness to Abraham,  
as He pledged on oath to our ancestors in the days of old.  
**(Micah 7:18-20)**

## Joseph Reassures His Brothers

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?"  
So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died:  
'This is what you are to say to Joseph: Ah, pray forgive your brothers' offense and their sin, that they caused you ill! Now pray forgive the offense of the servants of your father's God!'" Joseph wept as they spoke to him.  
And his brothers themselves came, they flung themselves down before him and said:  
"Here we are, servants to you!"  
But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid! Am I in the place of God?  
Now you, you planned ill against me, but God planned-it-over for good,  
in order to do as is this very day—to keep many people alive.  
So-now, do not be afraid! I myself will sustain you and your little-ones!"  
And he comforted them and spoke to their hearts.  
**(Genesis 50:15-21)**

# Nature of Sin in Judaism

Chet (Sin) means to miss the mark. We are not perfect, try again.

“When one sins against another, one incurs an obligation to right the wrong one has committed. There is a debt towards the party borne by the offender. The more serious the wrong, the more serious the obligation to set it straight. In Rabbinic thought, only the offending party can set the wrong aright and only the offended party can forgo the debt of the sin.”

“Teshuvah [return or repentance] is part of the structure of God’s creation; hence, the sinner is obligated to do teshuvah and the offended person is obligated to permit teshuvah by the offender.”

“Sin disrupts our lives on the human level; it distorts our relationships with other persons, social institutions, and our selves. Sin also disrupts our spiritual lives; it distorts our relationship with God and our deepest inner spiritual being. Because sin alienates us from humanity and from God, there is more than one kind of forgiveness.” (Rabbi David J. Blumenthal)

# Judaism: 3 Levels of Forgiveness

1. **Mechilah**: most basic kind of forgiveness is “forgiving the other’s indebtedness.” The more serious the wrong, the more serious the obligation to set it straight. Our tradition is clear, if the offender is not **sincere in repentance** and has not taken concrete steps to correct the wrong then the offended party is not obliged to offer Mechilah. Mechilah is like a pardon granted to a criminal by the modern state. The crime remains; only the debt is forgiven.
2. **Selichah**, “forgiveness,” it is an act of the heart. Achieving an empathy for the frailties of the other, reaching a deeper understanding of the sinner. Selichah is not a reconciliation or an embracing of the offender; it is simply reaching the conclusion that the offender is human, frail and deserving of sympathy. A person abused by another may never reach this level of forgiveness, nor is that person obliged or morally obligated to do so.
3. **Kapparah**, “atonement” or **Tahorah** “purification.” This is the total wiping away of all sinfulness. It is an existential cleansing. Kapparah is the ultimate form of forgiveness, but it is only granted by God. No human can “atone” the sin of the another; no human can “purify” the spiritual pollution of another.

# Sincere Repentance Requires Reforming Your Character:

**"Recognition of one's sins as sins"** is an act of one's intelligence and moral conscience. It involves knowing that certain actions are sinful, recognizing such actions in oneself as more than just a lapse and analyzing one's motives for sin as deeply as one can.

**"Remorse"** is a feeling. It is composed of feelings of regret, of failure to maintain one's moral standards. Feeling alienated from God and from our own deepest spiritual roots.

**"Desisting from sin"** is an action. It is a ceasing from sin, a desisting from the patterns of sinful action to which we have become addicted. Desisting from sin involves actually stopping the sinful action, consciously repressing thoughts and fantasies about the sinful activity, and making a firm commitment never to commit the sinful act again.

**"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 to the offended party.

**"Confession"** has two forms: the ritual and the personal. Ritual confession requires the recitation of the liturgies of confession in synagogue. Personal confession requires individual confession before God as needed or inserting one's personal confession into your prayers. The more specific the personal confession, the better.

## Penitent/*Chozer Be-Teshuva*

- ▶ The tradition is quite clear, that recognition of sin, remorse, restitution, and confession, if done without **desisting from sin**, does not constitute teshuva.
- ▶ **Actual desisting from sin is what counts.**

# Five Questions of Forgiveness

- 1. What does it mean to forgive?**
- 2. How do we forgive?**
- 3. Why do we need to forgive?**
- 4. Who do we forgive?**
- 5. When do we forgive?**

# 1. What does it mean to forgive?

For(e), implies something takes place in the **Future** & requires **Forethought**:

- The Wrong occurred in the past: slandered, abused, slighted, treated unfairly.
- You feel mad, upset, disappointed, frustrated, disillusioned, saddened...
- It festers, eats at you, it is difficult to let go.
- The Fore is emotional, mental, psychological aspect which takes time & energy.

Give, is an action word, a verb.

- It takes lots of work and energy to really forgive.
- It is the action to take something from yourself: "Give it Up" or "Give it Away."
- If you harbour resentment, hate or jealousy, action is required to "Let it Go."
- To Release that person, not harbouring grudges or any ill feelings.

## 2. How do we forgive? What is the process of forgiveness?

1. Time: Take time to feel the hurt, sadness, resentment. Let it come out.  
If you keep it in or ignore it, it will manifest itself in other ways:  
i.e. physical illness, mental illness, other pathologies
2. Awareness: Not an easy task, especially if occurred in past: trauma/hurt.  
May be hard to recognize or acknowledge  
Requires reflection, self-awareness, mindful meditation, psycho-therapy.
3. Expression: Verbalize it out loud. Work with professionals, let them help you.  
“Whatever you bring out of yourself will save you; whatever you cannot bring out of yourself will destroy you.” (Gospel of Thomas)
4. Letting Go: Means to be able to say “I forgive you” and mean it.

# Clearing The Obstacles with Forgiveness and Repentance

*“Build up a path, Build up a path,  
Clear a road, Remove all obstacles, From the road of my people.” (Isaiah 57:14)*

Isaiah is saying to work on clearing our obstacles that entrap us in the past and God will assist us to release and heal.

*“I will not be angry forever ... for their sinful greed I was angry ... I note how they fare and I will heal them: I will guide them and mete out solace to them ... heartening comforting words: Peace, Peace (Shalom, Shalom), to you who are far away and to you who are near, Says God, and I will heal all of you!” (Isaiah 57: 16-19)*

### 3. Why do we need to forgive?

- ▶ Who is the one who suffers the most when you do not forgive?  
It is **YOU!**
- ▶ Letting Go and Releasing these obstacles, grudges, hurts, pains, traumas:  
Gives **YOU** Peace, Freedom, Solace, Strength, Renewed Energy.

“Forgiveness is the only way to free ourselves from the entrapment of the past.... Old hurts linger long in our memories and are hard to let go. We must each learn how to define ourselves by the present moment—which is all we really have.” (Richard Rohr)

## 4. Who do we forgive?

- ▶ First person to forgive is **YOURSELF!**
  - ▶ We are very hard on ourselves.
  - ▶ Must learn to accept ourselves and our imperfections.
  - ▶ “Love thy neighbor as yourself.” How can we love another when we find it so difficult to love our self? So we need to forgive ourselves, first and foremost.

# Seeking Forgiveness: Psalm 51

*When the prophet Nathan came to (King) David after he had committed adultery with Batsheva: “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and purify me of my sin. For I know my transgressions, and am ever conscious of my sin.” (Psalm 51:2-5)*

King David acknowledged his sin to himself, verbalized it to Prophet Nathan and then asked God for forgiveness. This does not exonerate his sin against Batsheva or her husband. He still needs to ask them for forgiveness and desist from this action.

King David Continues:

*“...blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.”(Psalm 51:11-13)*

*אֲדַנֵּי, שְׁפֹתַי תִּפְתָּח; וּפִי, יַגִּיד תְּהִלָּתֶךָ. Lord, open my lips and my mouth will declare your praise. (Psalm 51:17)*

## 5. When do we forgive?

### Nothing like the present!

To forgive means to give something up, to release something in the **future**, so the **past** hurt or trauma does not affect you in the **present**.

The process of forgiveness takes time, awareness, expression & letting go.

You forgive so you do not suffer that same hurt or trauma day in and day out.

You forgive so you can find peace.

You forgive so you can be healthy.

You forgive in order to be free.

Forgive yourselves and all those who have wronged you.

At the same time ask those same people for forgiveness,

for the things you can take responsibility for,

even if those people are no longer alive.

This is the path to peace.

This is the path to health.

This is the path to love.

From here we can begin a new year and new beginnings.