

Maimonides on Teshuvah\Repentance

1. REGRET and RENOUNCE

No wrongdoing can be transformed until we first recognize the error of our ways. We look into our hearts and souls and admit to ourselves that our actions were wrong. No excuses. No rationalizations. One cannot begin to make *teshuvah* by apologizing for an action if you do not really believe you were wrong.

2. CONFESS

Confession, acknowledges that saying something aloud to others makes it real. Speaking about our mistakes forces us to confront the consequences of our actions. Confessing our wrongdoings begins with confessing to those we most directly wronged. Jewish tradition declares that forgiveness only can be bestowed by the one wronged.

3. RECONCILE

To reconcile with the person wronged begins with sincere apology. It continues with a long-term investment of time and energy. Patience. Hurt can be quick—healing can take time.

4. MAKE AMENDS

Making amends acknowledges that healing the pain we have caused needs to be achieved through concrete actions—making the injured party whole including financial compensation.

5. RESOLVE

Teshuvah will be complete only if we resolve not to repeat the offense. Having recognized the wrongfulness of our actions, having apologized and reimbursed the injured party, we resolve to work diligently not to fall into the same behavior when the situation or opportunity arises again.

Thoughts from On Apology by Aaron Lazere

"How Apologies Heal" (chapter 3)

"...successful apologies heal because they satisfy at least one—sometimes several—distinct psychological needs of the offended party. These needs are:

- restoration of self respect and dignity
- assurance that both parties have shared values
- assurance that the offense was not their fault
- assurance of safety in their relationships
- seeing the offender suffer
- reparation for the harm caused by the offense
- having meaningful dialogues with the offenders (pp 42-43)

(Thanks to Rabbi Herb Schwartz for the above summary and giving me the book.)

ON REPENTANCE

"In Judaism, the conception of repentance--regretting sin, determining not to repeat it, seeking forgiveness for it--defines the key to the moral life with God. No single component of the human condition takes higher priority in establishing a right relationship with God, and none bears more profound implications for this-worldly attitudes and actions; the entire course of a human life, filled as it is with the natural propensity to sin, that is, to rebel against God, but comprised also by the compelled requirement of confronting God's response, punishment for sin, takes its direction, finds its critical turning, at the act of repentance, the first step in the regeneration of the human condition as it was meant to be."

Jacob Neusner | Questions

1. Why in our literature do we lack role models for repentance?
2. Is Neusner saying that repentance defines our humanity?
3. Note the two words "natural" and "compelled." Isn't that great? Does that define Judaism?