

**Title:** Repentance – Correcting Our Mistakes

**Author:** Jewish Educators' Network

**Age Group:** Years 7-13, Students and Adults

**Format:** Text Bank, Lesson Plan

**Categories/Topics:** Rosh Hashanah

**Description:** In this lesson, the student will gain a more in depth understanding of what repentance means. The student will also gain practical tips of how they can implement their own personal repentance.

## Introduction

In this lesson, the student will gain a more in depth understanding of what repentance means. The student will also gain practical tips of how they can implement their own personal repentance.

The students will also have a deeper appreciation into how every small letter in the bible makes a difference, and how the Rabbis used to explain whole concepts from the appearance (or lack) of a single letter.

Often, these small nuances cannot be picked up if studying using an English translation only.

## Lesson Plan

### Trigger

Begin with a full-class discussion. Ask the following questions:

1. Have you ever wanted to own up to a mistake but found it very difficult to do so?
2. Have you ever managed to say sorry or correct your ways after making a mistake?
3. Can you think of any differences between the 2 situations that led you to being able to admit a mistake on one occasion, but fail to admit a mistake on another?
4. Have you ever justified a mistake by pretending what you did was 'right'? How creative were you in your reasoning's? Did you 'deep down' believe yourself?

Write on the board some of the answers. In particular make a note of answers to question 3 – identifying the factors that make owning up to a mistake easy/difficult or possible/impossible. Leave the answers visible on the board.

After this discussion divide the class into pairs or small groups, to study the texts below.

### Text 1

Adam and Eve have just sinned in the Garden of Eden, and God is about to expel them from the Garden.

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֱלֹהִים הֵן הָאָדָם הָיָה כְּאַחַד מִמֶּנּוּ לְדַעַת טוֹב וְרָע וְעַתָּה  
כִּי יִשְׁלַח יָדוֹ וְלָקַח גַּם מִעֵץ הַחַיִּים וְאָכַל וְחַי לְעֹלָם :

And the Lord God said, "Now that the man has become like one of us, knowing good and bad, what if he should stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever!"

**Genesis/Bereishit 3:22**

### Text 2

Abraham and Sarah are forced to leave Israel and travel to Egypt due to a famine. In Egypt, Abraham tells Sarah, his wife, to pretend to be his sister, in case Pharaoh is jealous.

לָמָּה אָמַרְתְּ אֲחֹתִי הוּא וְאָקַח אֹתָהּ לִי לְאִשָּׁה וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה אֲשַׁתְּךָ קַח  
יָלֶךְ :

"Why did you say 'She is my sister', so that I took her as my wife? Now, here is your wife; taker her and go!"

**Genesis/Bereishit 12:19**

### Text 3

This is read as part of the Torah reading on the first day of Rosh Hashanah  
In this passage, Abraham makes a long term contract with Abimelech in Beer Sheba.

וְעַתָּה הִשְׁבַּעָה לִי בְּאֱלֹהִים הַנְּהָ אִם תִּשְׁקַר לִי וּלְגִינִי וּלְנִכְדֵי כַּחֲסֹד  
אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי עִמָּךְ תַּעֲשֶׂה עִמָּדִי וְעַם הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר גֵּרְתָה בָּהּ :

Therefore swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my kith and kin, but will deal with me and with the land in which you have sojourned as loyally as I have dealt with you.

**Genesis/Bereishit 21:23**

### Text 4

Moshe is speaking to the children of Israel before his death, and before they enter the land of Israel. He recounts what happened to them while they were wandering in the desert for forty years. Moshe has just reminded the people about the second tablets they received and has just mentioned the death of his brother, Aaron. He then goes on to say....

וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל מָה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ שָׂאל מֵעַמְּךָ כִּי אִם לִירְאָה אֶת ה'  
אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְלַכֵּת בְּכָל דְּרָכָיו וּלְאַהֲבָה אוֹתוֹ וְלַעֲבֹד אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל  
לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ

And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God demand of you? Only this: to revere the Lord your God, to walk only in His paths, to love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and soul.

**Deuteronomy/Devarim 10:12**

**Note to teacher:**

All of the texts refer to some form of wrongdoing, either an act that has already taken place in the past, or a worry that some form of wrongdoing will take place in the future.

In their discussions, the pairs/small groups should read the texts, and try to identify what was 'wrong'.

In addition, in each of the texts an immediate response is sought.

In their discussions, the pairs/small groups should try to identify what corrective action is being asked for.

A table can be completed to record their ideas:

Verse	Mistake/Wrong Action	Response
<b>Bereishit 3:22</b>	Ate from the tree of Knowledge	Leave the Garden of Eden
<b>Bereishit 12:19</b>	Abraham lied to Pharaoh	Leave Egypt immediately
<b>Bereishit 21:23</b>	Threat of waging war	Make an oath/covenant
<b>Devarim 10:12</b>	Straying from the Torah	Listen to and love God

Compare the answers in the tables that the groups each put forward.

Now, in full class, look at the Hebrew. Which word appears in each of the four texts? (וְעַתָּה – “and now”)

What is the meaning of this word? Is it redundant? Does it mean literally 'now' or is it just introducing a new sentence or idea?

Together, look at this text from Genesis/Bereishit Rabba:

אמר רב אבא בר כהנא ...ועתה – אין ועתה אלא תשובה....

Rav Abba bar Cahana said, “Wherever you find the words ‘and now’ in the Torah it refers to repentance”

Why might the words 'and now' refer to repentance?

The rabbis seem to be teaching that repentance must be immediate. If we wait a little while after we do something wrong, we might begin to justify our actions, and we won't apologise or change our behaviour.

Do the students agree? Is repentance something that comes immediately? Does time interfere with the process? When we look back at our actions, do we remember events differently.

Look again at the list of answers to the trigger questions on the board. Did the time that lapsed in between making a mistake and owning up to it feature in the students original discussions?