

# WORD prompt

Every week The Jewish Press asks 5 individuals to remark on a word or phrase.

## This week's word is Forgiveness.

*Rachel Tuchman*



The idea that forgiveness is about “letting go” and making peace” ignores the complexity of human emotions. Healing has many different pathways and each person will have their own journey. It can be harmful to pressure people to “forgive.” It can leave them feeling even more hurt, betrayed, and in some cases traumatized.

Of course, we don’t want to carry the burden of hanging on to anger and pain, but this doesn’t mean that we need to absolve those who hurt us of their wrongdoings or reconnect with them.

It’s nobody else’s job to tell you to forgive. You are still a good, loving person even if you choose not to “let go.”

“You are not a less loving or whole person if there are certain things you do not forgive, and certain people whom you choose not to see. Perhaps you are even a stronger or more courageous person if you have leftover anger, whether from one violation or countless little micro-violations even as you move on.” -Harriet Lerner

*Rachel Tuchman is a licensed mental health counselor or practicing in Cedarhurst, NY with over ten years of experience. She is a HAES (Health At Every Size) aligned clinician and is dedicated to promoting education on body respect and behaviors that honor our health. Rachel also does speaking engagements for schools, synagogues, and various community organizations*

*Eli Lebowicz*



It’s that time of year when we’re supposed to feel bad about the things we’ve done wrong. I’ve heard that one concept of *gehinom* is where you’re racked with this crippling guilt over what you could’ve done better and are repeatedly replaying the mistakes you’ve made – so, basically just being Jewish.

When asking forgiveness, we’re probably supposed to dig deeply into how we’ve wronged each other. I assume a mass Facebook or WhatsApp message probably doesn’t count. Try to do some introspection, and you’ll surely find one trait to work on. If you don’t find any, then chances are you have way more than one.

You’ll also realize that people and G-d let you get away with a lot, and maybe the next time a minor annoyance happens, instead of getting mad, you’ll look at it like Al Capone getting arrested for tax evasion. That analogy may only make sense to me. Point is, it’s pretty audacious to expect G-d to forgive you when you’re still holding a grudge about not getting that Shabbos meal invite back in 2004.

May we all be inscribed in the Book of Life and Self-Awareness.

*Eli Lebowicz is a standup comedian. He did 90+ virtual shows during COVID, and is thrilled to perform live again, without having to stare at nostrils through a webcam. He’s a Levi, but doesn’t sing or play instruments, so in the Beis Hamikdash, he’ll probably be the guy taking temperatures.*

*Shira Boshnaek*



This time of year people tend to ask: “Are you *mochel* me for anything I might have done?” The custom is to respond, “Yes, and are you *mochel* me?” And we assume that this fulfills our obligation.

But can we really assume that we have forgiven them and that they have forgiven us? While we might assume that the holy spark within your heart really might forgive, it takes more work than that. When there is real pain, we’re going to need to talk it out. One of my children told me they received a “*mechilah* call” from a classmate. This person usually didn’t talk to them, but apparently was moved by the pre-Yom Kippur feeling. My child responded to them, “I’ll need to think about it. It hurts when you exclude me.”

I was flabbergasted by the courage it took to say that, and the insight which they shared. Any genuine change of relationship, especially *mechilah* and *teshuvah*, takes time and effort.

It’s a two-step dance: the injurer needs to humble themselves by admitting their wrong and asking forgiveness while the injured needs to consider whether the pain is too great to let go, or whether carrying it around is poisoning them.

May we learn how to let down our guard to say, “I was wrong”; and in the right time, be able to let go of our hurt.

*Shira Boshnaek has been the co-director of OU-JLIC at Brooklyn College for the last fourteen years. She holds a MA in education from Nova Southeastern University. A veteran kallah teacher, she has taught over 400 women.*

*Dan Eleff*



As someone who’s been blessed to be able to see much of Hashem’s beautiful world, I have learned some valuable lessons along the way about true forgiveness.

When I travel, I can clearly see how everything is *bashert*. Whether it’s a fuel shortage that caused our kosher Antarctica cruise to detour to the Falklands allowing us the opportunity to learn and print the *Tanya* with another Jew; or choosing a slower customs line that put me in a taxi that was just behind, rather than inside, a deadly riot; or a missed connection that forced us to spend a Shabbos in Japan thereby giving us the chance do a mitzvah with a local Jew living in Tokyo – it’s Hashem who chooses our experiences and the people we meet. What appears to be a missed opportunity becomes life changing.

When we have negative interactions, we sometimes forget that it’s Hashem who orchestrated it for *his* own reasons, which are ultimately for the best.

When I focus on the *hashgaha pratis* rather than the “problem” it becomes easier to let go. By doing that, I can not only forgive, but be thankful for everyone I encounter and the lessons learned.

*Dan Eleff is the CEO and founder of Dansdeals.com, voted the #1 miles and points blog by USA Today’s readers. He lives in Cleveland with his wife and four children. He received Rabbinical ordination and an MBA before deciding to turn DansDeals from a hobby into a career.*

*Reader Response*



*Liz Rosenblatt*

Asking for forgiveness is just as hard as forgiving. Being able to forgive may be one of the hardest tasks in a divorced person’s life.

If the divorce was forceful, toxic and hurt you and/or your children, it is a very hard undertaking to accomplish. It takes boldness and calmness and a lot of strength. Because the pain and hurt never go away.

Some therapists may tell you that when you forgive, you are healing and cleansing yourself. And when you ask someone to forgive you, it takes courage to do so. Asking for forgiveness means you acknowledge you did something to hurt and what you did was painful to another; you are asking that person to help you empty out your pain. In order to forgive, you need to ask for forgiveness as well.

It took a pandemic for my ex to ask me for forgiveness for what I “perceived” he did wrong. Forgiveness can be worked on at anytime of the year – but especially prior to the *Yom Tovim* to show Hashem that you are really trying hard. Because even Hashem forgives.

*Liz Rosenblatt lives in Suffern, NY.*

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Readers are invited to send in their submissions, too. The word for the September 24 issue is {Rain}.

Please send your submissions to [word@jewishpress.com](mailto:word@jewishpress.com) by September 19 to be considered for publication.