

At the Jewish New Year

For more than five thousand years
This calm September day
With yellow in the leaf
Has lain in the kernel of Time
While the world outside the walls
Has had its turbulent say
And history like a long
Snake has crawled on its way
And is crawling onward still.
And we have little to tell
On this or any feast
Except of the terrible past.
Five thousand years are cast
Down before the wondering child
Who must expiate them all.
Some of us have replied
In the bitterness of youth
Or the qualms of middle-age:
“If Time is unsatisfied,
And all our fathers have suffered
Can never be enough,
Why, then, we choose to forget.
Let our forgetting begin
With those age-old arguments
In which their minds were wound
Like musty phylacteries;
And we choose to forget as well
Those cherished histories
That made our old men fond,
And already are strange to us.

“Or let us, being today
Too rational to cry out,
Or trample underfoot
What after all preserves
A certain savor yet—
Though torn up by the roots—
Let us make our compromise
With the terror and the guilt
And view as curious relics
Once found in daily use
The mythology, the names
That, however, Time has corrupted
Their ancient purity
Still burn like yellow flames,
But their fire is not for us.”

And yet, however, we choose
To deny or to remember,
Though on the calendars
We wake and suffer by,
This day is merely one
Of thirty in September—
In the kernel of the mind
The new year must renew
This day, as for our kind
Over five thousand years,
The task of being ourselves.
Whatever we strain to forget,
Our memory must be long.

May the taste of honey linger
Under the bitterest tongue.

A man in his life

A man doesn't have time in his life
to have time for everything.
He doesn't have seasons enough to have
a season for every purpose. Ecclesiastes
Was wrong about that.

A man needs to love and to hate at the same moment,
to laugh and cry with the same eyes,
with the same hands to throw stones and to gather them,
to make love in war and war in love.
And to hate and forgive and remember and forget,
to arrange and confuse, to eat and to digest
what history
takes years and years to do.

A man doesn't have time.
When he loses he seeks, when he finds
he forgets, when he forgets he loves, when he loves
he begins to forget.

And his soul is seasoned, his soul
is very professional.
Only his body remains forever
an amateur. It tries and it misses,
gets muddled, doesn't learn a thing,
drunk and blind in its pleasures
and its pains.

He will die as figs die in autumn,
Shriveled and full of himself and sweet,
the leaves growing dry on the ground,
the bare branches pointing to the place
where there's time for everything.

- Yehuda Amichai

The arc of evening
slowly turning,

the sun's blue shadows
washed away,

the gate still open
as three stars wait

to pierce the sky –
In the corridor

where night
bares its maze

you begin
to begin again.

- *Marcia Falk*

The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.
Don't go back to sleep.
You must ask for what you really want.
Don't go back to sleep.
People are going back and forth across the doorsill
where the two worlds touch.
The door is round and open.
Don't go back to sleep.

~ *Rumi, translated by Coleman Barks*

I needed to talk to my sister

I needed to talk to my sister
talk to her on the telephone I mean
just as I used to every morning
in the evening too whenever the
grandchildren said a sentence that
clasped both our hearts

I called her phone rang four times
you can imagine my breath stopped then
there was a terrible telephonic noise
a voice said this number is no
longer in use how wonderful I
thought I can
call again they have not yet assigned
her number to another person despite
two years of absence due to death

- Grace Paley, in *Fidelity* (2008)

The River

The golden leaves are falling, falling in the sunlight.
The migrant birds are crying in the emptied trees.
The moving waters glisten, glimmer in the sunlight,
Moving changing, flowing as if they'd never freeze.

Who can know the river, the unknown river?
Buoys and charts are words on the river of the mind,
And a poem is a crystal, ice from the river,
Formed when the yearning of the heart is defined.

The golden rhymes are falling, falling in the river.
The meters and the rhythms are sinking out of sight.
The word of God is forming, freezing on the river.
I reach and try to grasp it, but I break it in my fright.

-Ruth Brin

The Journey

One day you finally know
what you have to do, and begin,
though the voices around you
keep shouting
their bad advice –
though the whole house
begins to tremble
and you feel the old tug
at your ankles.
“Mend my life!”
each voice cries.
But you don’t stop.
You know what you have to do,
though the wind pries
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations –
though their melancholy
is terrible.
It is already late
late enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.
But little by little,
as you leave their voices behind,
the stars begin to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there is a new voice,
which you slowly
recognize as your own,
that keeps you company
as you stride deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you can do,
determined to save
the only life you can save –
Yours.

- Mary Oliver, in *Dreamwork*

U'netaneh Tokef

We declare the terrifying power of this day,
this awesome, sacred day.
We hear the great shofar sounded once again.
We listen for the still, small voice in its wake.

בְּרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה יִכְתְּבוּן וּבְיוֹם צוֹם כְּפוּר יִחְתְּמוּן,
B'rosh hashanah yikateyvun, uve'yom tzom kippur yeychatemun.

(On Rosh Hashanah it is written and on Yom Kippur it is sealed.)

This is the season we dare to ask out loud:
who will live and who will die?

Who by famine and who by war;
who through oppression and who through neglect;

Who by weapons and who by dehumanization;
who through hatred and who through ignorance.

Who in the dark and who in the bright light of day;
who by passion and who by design.

בְּרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה יִכְתְּבוּן וּבְיוֹם צוֹם כְּפוּר יִחְתְּמוּן,
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Who will benefit from power and who will be victimized by it;
who will dwell in safety and who will be uprooted.

Who will be targeted and who will be collateral damage;
who will escape and who will fall.

Who will be beaten down and who will rise above;
who will find peace and who will dwell in darkness.

Who will be protected and who will be vulnerable;
who will be counted and who will fall through the cracks.

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B'rosh hashanah yikateyvun, uve'yom tzom kippur yeychatemun.

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Who will be privileged and whose chances will be slim;
who will be brought in and who will be cast out.

Who will be healed and who will not have access to healing;
who will be fed and who will go hungry.

Who will be loved and who will be despised;
who will reach out and who will turn away.

Who will be written in and who will be erased;
who will succumb and who will fight back.

בְּרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה יִכְתָּבוּן וּבְיוֹם צוֹם כִּפּוּר יִחְתָּמוּן,
B'rosh hashanah yikateyvun, uve'yom tzom kippur yeychatemun.

(On Rosh Hashanah it is written and on Yom Kippur it is sealed.)

וּתְשׁוּבָה, וּתְפִילָה, וּצְדָקָה מְעִבְרִין אֶת רֵעַ הַגְּזֵרָה.
U'teshuvah, u'tefillah u'tzedakah ma'avirin et roah hagezeyrah.

(But repentance, worship and acts of justice can overturn the harshness of the decree.)

- Rabbi Brant Rosen

Atonement Songs

The wild sounds of the shofar
pierce my skin and open my heart.
And I'm crazed for tunes in a minor key
that vibrate my tailbone and belly
and echo out across a shul packed
with doubters and believers
who come together
one day of the year to hear
archaic formulas and prayers.
Just for this moment
open us to rich tones –
Simple melodies that convey truths or fictions
about our fate.

- Judith Rafaela, in *Another Desert: Jewish Poetry of New Mexico* (2001) [edited and adapted]

To want, to have, to do
the verbs I live
in perpetual unrest.

How difficult to be,
to embrace the homely
details of my days

to open my heart
to the sounds
of this amphibious life,

to trust in the motion toward
as a fish trusts
the river at its gills,

to trust in this journey –
to swim,
to be still.

~ Michael Glaser

The *Kol Nidre* Mirror to Our Soul

Life is filled with more than the scrapes and bruises of childhood that require nothing more than a kiss and a hug to make them better. Life's real issues are far more complicated and sometimes intractable. Technology assures us a solution for every problem; medicine promises a pill for every pain. But religion recognizes that we are mortal; we can't fix everything. *Kol Nidre* reminds us to forgive ourselves for it.

I recently learned that you can trap bees on the bottom of a Mason jar without a lid. The bees fly in for the honey at the bottom of the jar and then they think they are stuck, because they never look up to see that the jar is open. Life weighs us down. Like the bees on the bottom of the Mason jar, we think that there is no way out of our situation, that we are trapped. *Kol Nidre* – the High Holy Days – tells us to look up.

Technology is not so forgiving. One of the problems of the Internet is that it does not forget; it keeps all our data – forever. We cannot delete foolish e-mails or unflattering photos. Our digital past remains indelibly with us. How different is the Book of Life where tradition pictures God recording our good and bad deeds. That record is erasable through *t'shuvah*. If we regret something written in our own life's book, atonement is our delete button. The Rabbis teach that if individuals have repented, we are not allowed to remind them of their past errors. Our past does not shackle us to the bottom of a Mason jar; we can look up. We can begin again.

- Rabbi Sandy E. Sasso, in *All These Vows: Kol Nidre* (Lawrence A. Hoffman, ed., 2011) [edited and adapted]

Wild Geese

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

- Mary Oliver

It Is Enough

To know that the atoms
of my body
will remain

to think of them rising
through the roots of a great oak
to live in
leaves, branches, twigs

perhaps to feed the
crimson peony
the blue iris
the broccoli

or rest on water
freeze and thaw
with the seasons

some atoms might become a
bit of fluff on the wing
of a chickadee
to feel the breeze
know the support of air

and some might drift
up and up into space
star dust returning from

whence it came
it is enough to know that
as long as there is a universe
I am a part of it.

~ Anne Alexander Bingham

Forgiveness

Let us forgive the worst among us
because the worst is in ourselves.
The worst lives in each of us,
along with the best.

Let us forgive the worst
in each of us
and all of us
so that the best
in each of us
and all of us
may be free.

- from *My Life is My Sun Dance: Prison Writings* by Leonard Peltier

This is the hour of change.
Within it we stand uncertain on the border of light.
Shall we draw back or cross over?
Where shall our hearts turn?
Shall we draw back, my brother, my sister,
or cross over?
This is the hour of change, and within it
We stand quietly
on the border of light.
What lies before us?
Shall we draw back, my brother, my sister,
or cross over?

~ Leah Goldberg

But we have only begun
To love the earth.

We have only begun
To imagine the fullness of life.

How could we tire of hope?
— so much is in bud.

How can desire fail?
— we have only begun

to imagine justice and mercy,
only begun to envision

how it might be
to live as siblings with beast and flower,
not as oppressors.

Surely our river
cannot already be hastening
into the sea of nonbeing?

Surely it cannot
drag, in the silt,
all that is innocent?

Not yet, not yet—
there is too much broken
that must be mended,

too much hurt we have done to each other
that cannot yet be forgiven.

We have only begun to know
the power that is in us if we would join
our solitudes in the communion of struggle.

So much is unfolding that must
complete its gesture,

so much is in bud.

~ Denise Levertov

Our father, our king, we resent fathers and kings.
Our mother, our teacher, we resist mothers and teachers.
Our eclipse, our no-one, renew us for a good year.
Our figment, our construct, hear us, pity us, and spare us.
Our guess, our denial, seal us in the book of pardon.
Our hope, our dismay, speed our liberation.
Our doubt, our division, temper us to your need.
Avinu Malkeinu, for your sake if not for ours.
Our limit, our secret, remember us 'til we live.

Our rock, our redeemer, give us endurance in pain.
Our place, our midst, root us in the cracks of your being.
Our breath, our life, evade all our theologies.
Our midwife, our surgeon, bring out of us what is in us.
Our infant, our patient, demand from us 'til we provide.
Our lover, our consoler, lie down beside us in loneliness.
Our enemy, our catastrophe, goad us to act justly.
Our maker, our destroyer, build us again from the ground up, carefully.

~ *Catherine Madsen*

There are days
when the sun goes down
like a fist,
though of course

if you see anything
in the heavens this way
you had better get

your eyes checked
or, better still,
your diminished spirit.
The heavens

have no fist,
or wouldn't they have been
shaking it for a thousand years now,

and even
longer than that,
at the dull, brutish ways of mankind -

heaven's own creation?
Instead: such patience!
Such willingness

to let us continue!
To hear,
little by little, the voices -

only, so far, in
pockets of the world -
suggesting the possibilities

of peace?
Keep looking.
Behold, how the fist opens
with invitation.

~ Mary Oliver

New Year Resolve

The time has come
To stop allowing the clutter
To clutter my mind
Like dirty snow,
Shove it off and find
Clear time, clear water.

Time for a change,
Let silence in like a cat
Who has sat at my door
Neither wild nor strange
Hoping for food from my store
And shivering on the mat.

Let silence in.
She will rarely mew,
She will sleep on my bed
And all I have ever been
Either false or true
Will live again in my head.

For it is now or not
As old age silts the stream,
To shove away the clutter,
To untie every knot,
To take the time to dream,
To come back to still water.

- May Sarton

Telling the Story

In America, what's real
juggles with what isn't:
a woman I know props fabulous tulips
potatoes,
in her flowerbed, in snow.

Streets aren't gold, but they could be.
Once a traveler mailed letters
in a trashcan for a week.
He thought they were going somewhere.
In America everything is going somewhere.

I answered a telephone
on a California street.
Hello? It was possible.
A voice said, "There is no scientific proof
that God is a man."
"Thank you." I was standing there.
Was this meant for me?
It was not exactly the question
I had been asking, but it kept me busy awhile,
telling the story.

Some start out
with a big story
that shrinks.

Some stories accumulate power
like a sky gathering clouds
quietly, quietly
till the story rains around you.

and quit speaking;
a farmer leaning into his row of

a mother walking the same child
to school.

What will we learn today?
There should be an answer,
and it should
change.

~ *Naomi Shihab Nye*

For a New Beginning

In out-of-the-way places of the heart,
Where your thoughts never think to wander,
This beginning has been quietly forming,
Waiting until you were ready to emerge.
For a long time it has watched your desire,
Feeling the emptiness growing inside you,
Noticing how you willed yourself on,
Still unable to leave what you had outgrown.
It watched you play with the seduction of safety
And the gray promises that sameness whispered,
Heard the waves of turmoil rise and relent,
Wondered would you always live like this.
Then the delight, when your courage kindled,
And out you stepped onto new ground,
Your eyes young again with energy and dream,
A path of plenitude opening before you.
Though your destination is not yet clear
You can trust the promise of this opening;
Unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning
That is at one with your life's desire.
Awaken your spirit to adventure;
Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk;
Soon you will be home in a new rhythm,
For your soul senses the world that awaits you.

~ John O'Donohue

Pray for Peace

Pray to whomever you kneel down to:
Jesus nailed to his wooden or plastic cross,
his suffering face bent to kiss you,
Buddha still under the bo tree in scorching heat,
Adonai, Allah. Raise your arms to Mary
that she may lay her palm on our brows,
to Shekhina, Queen of Heaven and Earth,
to Inanna in her stripped descent.

Then pray to the bus driver who takes you to work.
On the bus, pray for everyone riding that bus,
for everyone riding buses all over the world.
Drop some silver and pray.

Waiting in line for the movies, for the ATM,
for your latte and croissant, offer your plea.
Make your eating and drinking a supplication.
Make your slicing of carrots a holy act,
each translucent layer of the onion, a deeper prayer.

To Hawk or Wolf, or the Great Whale, pray.
Bow down to terriers and shepherds and Siamese cats.
Fields of artichokes and elegant strawberries.

Make the brushing of your hair
a prayer, every strand its own voice,
singing in the choir on your head.
As you wash your face, the water slipping
through your fingers, a prayer: Water,
softest thing on earth, gentleness
that wears away rock.

Making love, of course, is already prayer.
Skin, and open mouths worshipping that skin,
the fragile cases we are poured into.

If you're hungry, pray. If you're tired.
Pray to Gandhi and Dorothy Day.
Shakespeare. Sappho. Sojourner Truth.

When you walk to your car, to the mailbox,
to the video store, let each step
be a prayer that we all keep our legs,
that we do not blow off anyone else's legs.
Or crush their skulls.

And if you are riding on a bicycle
or a skateboard, in a wheelchair, each revolution
of the wheels a prayer as the earth revolves:
less harm, less harm, less harm.

And as you work, typing with a new manicure,
a tiny palm tree painted on one pearlescent nail
or delivering soda or drawing good blood
into rubber-capped vials, writing on a blackboard
with yellow chalk, twirling pizzas--

With each breath in, take in the faith of those
who have believed when belief seemed foolish,
who persevered. With each breath out, cherish.

Pull weeds for peace, turn over in your sleep for peace,
feed the birds, each shiny seed
that spills onto the earth, another second of peace.
Wash your dishes, call your mother, drink wine.

Shovel leaves or snow or trash from your sidewalk.
Make a path. Fold a photo of a dead child
around your VISA card. Scoop your holy water
from the gutter. Gnaw your crust.
Mumble along like a crazy person, stumbling
your prayer through the streets.

- by Ellen Bass

In your image,
in your image, God,
You made me in your image,
and I reach upward, seeking -
to be like You, God.

Just? Like You I'm vengeful.
Merciful? Like You I seek an understanding heart.
Jealous? Yes, I'm jealous
and iniquitous
and long suffering -
and like You
I dream to make a world,
(in miniature, God),
to do my bidding.

And loving I can be, yes, loving,
to a penitent, punished child.

Yet clearly, God, most clearly,
do I see in me your oneness,
your all-oneness,
your aloneness -
in my heart.

- Shulamis Yelin (1913-2002), Canadian-Jewish poet

HOW TO SAY YOU'RE SORRY

As Yom Kippur approaches, I'll share what I've learned about how to apologize—and how not to
By Marjorie Ingall

September 29, 2014

For two years, purely for my own amusement and education, I've co-written a blog called SorryWatch. The site, which I do with my friend and fellow writer Susan McCarthy, applauds good apologies (and analyzes what makes them good) and flings metaphorical monkey poop at bad ones (and examines what makes them terrible). We examine apologies in politics, sports, pop culture, literature, and history, and we look at research on effective and ineffective apologies. Now, as Yom Kippur looms, it seems an opportune time to discuss what I've learned about how to say you're sorry and do it right.

Because, sadly, there are so many epically bad apologies out in the world. Probably the worst we've analyzed were by sports figures: Lance Armstrong and Ray Rice (written back in May, before the who-saw-the-inside-the-elevator-tape-and-when scandals erupted). Runner-up: Chris Christie's eyeball-popping, ultra-defensive post-G.W.-Bridge-closure press conference.

We've seen Jews on both the giving and receiving ends of bad apologies. We've looked at Henry Ford's wretched apology to the Jewish community for his anti-Semitic newspaper, Gary Oldman's wretched apology to the ADL for his anti-Semitic remarks, a German spa's wretched apology to everyone for its romantic Kristallnacht special on the event's 75th anniversary, Rupert Murdoch's wretched apology to no one in particular for inane tweeting about the "Jewish-owned press," and a young Jewish op-ed writer's wretched apology to the universe for suggesting that genocide of Palestinians is permissible.

On the more positive side, Susan and I have looked at Emory University's excellent apology for its history of anti-Jewish prejudice at its dental school, Charles Dickens' remorse for his hateful anti-Semitic caricature of Fagin, Kveller's thoughtful apology for running a biased and homophobic essay, and Pharaoh's pretty decent apology to Moses. (Pharaoh was a jerk, but if you restrict yourself to the text, the man gave good sorry.)

My personal interest in apology dates, of course, from having children. I started writing about teaching kids to say they're sorry when I was the East Village Mamele at the *Forward*. I was a new mom, acutely aware of the moral import of bringing up new humans. I was terrified of raising tiny Ed Geins. So, I did a lot of reading of contradictory parenting articles. It was interesting to learn that some experts don't believe in forced apologies; I discovered that I do.

Maybe because Judaism is a religion that's all about how you act, not what you think. I don't care if you're not sorry in your heart; you still have to say it to your sister if you smacked her on the head with a My Little Pony. You can track my own struggles with and questions about children's apologies as my kids got older through my Tablet columns.

Susan and I both read psychiatrist Aaron Lazare's book *On Apology*, as well as a bunch of legal and medical journal articles about the impact of apologizing. Here, as a public service, I'll take you through what we've learned.

The mechanics of good apologies aren't difficult. The 12th-century sage Maimonides said that true repentance requires humility, remorse, forbearance, and reparation. Not much has changed since then. Basically, you have to take ownership of the offense, even if it makes you uncomfortable. Name your sin, even if it makes you squirm. Use the first person, and avoid passive voice ("I'm sorry I kicked your Pomeranian," not "I'm sorry your dog got hurt," or worse, "I'm sorry it was impossible to ignore the incessant yapping of your undersocialized little hellbeast"). Acknowledge the impact of what you did. ("My lateness was disrespectful of your time and inconvenienced you on what I know was a busy day.") Be real, open and non-defensive. ("What I said was moronic and mean, and I'm ashamed of myself.") Offer a teeny bit of explanation if it's relevant, but keep it short and—this is key—don't use it as justification for your actions. ("I was tired and crabby because I had to work late, but that's no excuse for taking it out on you.")

And when you've said your piece, let the wronged party have their say. If they need to process, process. If they're clipped and abrupt but accept your apology, say, "Thank you." If they remain mad, well, you'll have to sit with that for a while. Maimonides said that if your first apology isn't accepted, you have to try twice more. If after that the person won't forgive you, you're free to stop trying.

Finally, you have to make reparations. Pay for the broken window or the dry cleaning, tell everyone in the office that the error was yours and not your underling's, make a donation to the wronged party's favorite charity, educate yourself if your mistake was an indication of your cluelessness about other cultures, races, or religions. In your heart of hearts, you know what to do to try to make things right. Apologizing well requires both humility and bravery.

Apologizing poorly is a lot easier. Look!

The "Sorry if": Don't be "*sorry if*" anyone was hurt by your words or actions. Be *sorry that* you were hurtful. Own it. The "if" adds a shadow of doubt—hey, maybe you didn't say or do anything nasty after all! "If" is cowardly; "that" takes responsibility. Similarly, "it distresses me

that you're upset" is weaselly: You're implying that *their* reaction has caused *you* grief. A good apology is not about you.

The "Sorry but": "There's a lot going on in my life" and "I was exhausted" diffuse responsibility. They're excuses. Similarly, "that's not who I am" announces that you were possessed by some sort of demon, like Zuul in *Ghostbusters*. If you said it, is indeed who you are. It's up to you to face that unpleasant part of yourself and work to change it.

The poisoned apology: Susan coined this term for an insult wrapped in an apology, "like a cupcake with mud filling." When you say, "I'm sorry I rolled my eyes and cut you off during the meeting, but you just kept repeating yourself," you're blaming the other person for triggering your bad behavior. "I'm sorry I yelled ... but you provoked me," likewise avoids ownership—if they weren't so annoying, you wouldn't have to apologize! It's their fault! "I'm really sorry I tried to help" implies that the other person is a jerk—probably a jerk without self-awareness—for not accepting your kindness. "I'm sorry you misunderstood" hints that the other person is dimwitted. (Be sorry you said something hurtful, not that the other person mistook your meaning.) "I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings, but you tend to take everything personally" not only puts the onus on the other person, but also makes their sin a habitual one. You've insulted them twice in one apology! Well done!

The "I was just being funny": You hear this from professional comedians after they insult another race, gender, or group. But regular people do it, too. Saying you're sorry while telling the other person directly or indirectly that she's overreacting or has no sense of humor isn't apologizing.

The extraneous words: Two words that have no place in any apology: "Obviously" and "misconstrued." Here's why: The word "obviously" is not a humble word. If you *obviously* didn't mean the horrible thing you said, *why did you say it?* And if something really *is* obvious—if, say, you *obviously* didn't intend to spill red wine all over your friend's new couch, which I'm sure is true, because you're not a sociopath—why point out it out? Saying that you *obviously* are a good person who wouldn't hurl a fine Merlot hither and yon like a Real Housewife comes off as self-justifying, even if that's not your goal. The word "misconstrued," on the other hand, puts the onus on others for failing to see your good intentions. "Misconstrued" means you're really not at fault. In a good apology, you do not present yourself as the aggrieved party.

The case of the missing nouns: In a lot of public apologies, the politician, celebrity or cretinous CEO never actually says what he did wrong. He apologizes for "what happened" or "the events of last week." Sometimes the passive voice is favored, as in "unfortunate things were said." To

apologize well, you must *name the sin*. How else can you show that you understand the harm and won't repeat it?

The “You are *so sensitive!*”: Apologizing while telling someone she's overreacting is like giving her a delicious homemade cookie, then snatching it back and stomping on it.

“Let's move forward.” Ban this phrase from your apologies. It's code for “Let's forget this ever happened.” You have no right to make that request; the person you wronged gets to decide it's time to move on. The sinner doesn't have the prerogative to rush the forgiveness process. (And don't you dare say, “I'm paying the price, too”—that says you feel you've been punished enough. Not your call, babe.)

Bad apologies are cagey, ungenerous, grudging attempts to avoid taking full responsibility for whatever you're putatively apologizing for. Good apologies are about stepping up. And sometimes that means apologizing even if you feel you're the wronged party. You know the phrase “*shalom bayit*,” right? It means peace in the house. Not necessarily your actual physical house, though there's certainly that. (I've apologized to my spouse when I felt he was the one in the wrong, and I've apologized to my children for laughing at their fury when, I'm sorry, their fury was kind of funny.)

A good apology means laying yourself bare. (Not in a gross selfie way. Anthony Weiner, keep your pants on.) It means putting yourself in the other person's position, giving them what they want and need. In short, it's not about you. And even though I've been analyzing apologies for two years, it's something I need to keep reminding myself, during the High Holidays and all the time. Sinning is easy; apologizing is hard.
