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**HUC Teshuvah Plan Response to the Morgan Lewis Report  
of Investigation into Allegations of Misconduct at  
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion**

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## **Abstract**

This paper uses Maimonides's criteria for teshuvah, as presented in *Mishneh Torah* Hilkhot Teshuvah [HT], to analyze the recommendations of HUC's Teshuvah Working Group created in response to the Morgan Lewis Report of Investigation into Allegations of Misconduct at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

Also included in this paper is a sermon about *teshuvah gemurah*, complete repentance.

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# **HUC Teshuvah Plan Response to the Morgan Lewis Report of Investigation into Allegations of Misconduct at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion**

**By Samuel Rheins**

The Morgan Lewis Report of Investigation into Allegations of Misconduct at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, issued on November 3, 2021, recommends that HUC undergo a process of teshuvah in response to the investigation's findings and observations.<sup>1</sup>

They propose that HUC:

1. Engage in a truth and reconciliation process.
2. Conduct an optional reordination ceremony, or something similar, for those who were ordained by known harassers.
3. Remove endowed chairs, statues, and other public recognitions that memorialize or honor wrongdoers.
4. Take Proactive Steps to Prevent Such Behavior From Recurring.<sup>2</sup>

To that end, HUC President Andrew Rehfeld appointed a Teshuvah Working Group, co-led by Rabbi Laura Novak Winer and Rachel Margolis, RJE, "to recommend a path for HUC-JIR to gather testimonies and create listening opportunities, build rituals of healing and repair, and determine a process for issuing new documents and certificates of ordination and graduation - all in the name of teshuvah and accountability."<sup>3</sup> In February 2023, the Teshuvah Working Group

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<sup>1</sup> HUC-REPORT-OF-INVESTIGATION-11.04.21, pp. 29-30.

<https://huc.edu/wp-content/uploads/HUC-REPORT-OF-INVESTIGATION-11.04.21.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> <https://huc.edu/wp-content/uploads/Recommendations-Letter-3-15-23-final.pdf>.

presented its initial recommendations to President Rehfeld. An additional recommendation was presented in May 2023.

The goal of this paper is to use Maimonides's criteria for teshuvah, as presented in *Mishneh Torah* Hilkhhot Teshuvah [HT], to analyze the Teshuvah Working Group's recommendation. First, the paper will discuss whether it is possible for an institution to do teshuvah. Second, the paper will discuss if HUC's teshuvah plan meets the criteria for teshuvah. Third, the paper will discuss any additional issues with HUC's teshuvah plan.

### **Can an institution do teshuvah?**

One concern raised about HUC's teshuvah plan is whether an institution can do teshuvah. Maimonides did not discuss this topic, probably because our definition of an institution is modern, but he did articulate that communities can do teshuvah in HT 2:7 and 2:8. The biblical source for this is Leviticus 16:21, the ritual of the High Priest confessing the sins of the Israelites and sending the goat to Azazel:

Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat and confess over it all the iniquities and transgressions of the Israelites, whatever their sins, putting them on the head of the goat; and it shall be sent off to the wilderness through a designated agent.

In HT 2:7 Maimonides states that on Yom Kippur a community can do teshuvah:

Yom Kippur is the time of teshuvah for all, both individuals and the community at large....<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Maimonides *Mishneh Torah*: The Laws of Repentance: Translation by Rabbi Eliyahu Touger, 2:7.

In HT 2:8, Maimonides describes the Yom Kippur confessional *vidui* or *al cheit* in which a community takes responsibility for its actions:

The confessional prayer customarily recited by all Israel is: “For we have all sinned.” This is the essence of the confessional prayer.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, it is clear from these examples that a community can engage in the teshuvah process. By defining HUC as a community, which it is, it is possible for the institution of HUC to do teshuvah.

### **Does HUC’s teshuvah plan meets the criteria for teshuva?**

#### **Aspects of Teshuvah**

This section will list essential functions of the teshuvah process presented in HT and analyze if HUC has met the criteria. They are *vidui* (confession), damages and appeasements, and *teshuvah gemurah* (complete teshuvah). The analyses are based on the assumption that an institution can do teshuvah.

#### ***Vidui***

*Vidui*, the confession of one’s sins, is an essential element of the teshuvah process. According to HT 1:1, it is a positive commandment to verbally confess one’s sins:

If a person transgresses any of the mitzvot of the Torah, whether a positive command or a negative command - whether willingly or inadvertently - when he repents, and returns

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 2:8.

from his sin, he must confess before God, ... as [Numbers 5:6-7] states: "If a man or a woman commit any of the sins of man... they must confess the sin that they committed." This refers to a verbal confession. This confession is a positive command. How does one confess: He states: "I implore You, God, I sinned, I transgressed, I committed iniquity before You by doing the following. Behold, I regret and am embarrassed for my deeds. I promise never to repeat this act again."<sup>6</sup>

Maimonides writes that for a *vidui* to count, one must confess before God, express regret, and vow to never repeat the sin. Regarding HUC, an adequate *vidui* would include a detailed confession of the sins that HUC committed, a statement of regret for the sins it committed, and a promise to never repeat the same mistakes. While HUC is not responsible for the alleged or proven misconduct of its faculty members, it was inconsistent in its institutional response to complaints of alleged misconduct.<sup>7</sup> As of December 2023, when HUC published its "Sacred Respectful Community Progress Report" outlining the steps it has taken "based on the recommendations in the Morgan Lewis report as well as prior recommendations issued by the Presidential Taskforce on Safe and Respectful Environments,"<sup>8</sup> no institutional *vidui* has been issued.

### **Damages and Appearances**

Damages and appeasements are an essential aspect of teshuvah. HT 2:9 states that for the teshuvah process to work, the guilty party must pay any required damages and seek verbal

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 1:1.

<sup>7</sup> HUC-REPORT-OF-INVESTIGATION-11.04.21, p. 31.

<sup>8</sup> <https://huc.edu/about-huc/developing-a-sacred-respectful-community-at-huc-jir/sacred-respectful-community-progress-report>.



forgiveness from the wronged party. Proper damages entail giving the victims some kind of object worth value. Appeasement entails making a genuine effort to ask for forgiveness:

[S]ins between man and man; for example, someone who injures a colleague, curses a colleague, steals from him, or the like will never be forgiven until he gives his colleague what he owes him and appeases him. Even if a person restores the money that he owes, he must appease him and ask him to forgive him. Even if a person only upset a colleague by saying things, he must appease him and approach him until he forgives him.<sup>9</sup>

HUC's plan for damages is to offer all alumni, free of charge, a new graduation or *smikhah* diploma that does not display the signature(s) of people who allegedly did something wrong. Whether or not a new diploma is sufficient to make up for all owed damages is a matter of opinion. In addition, rabbinical and cantorial alumni can choose to participate in a "ritual of repair and healing" and select who will offer "words of blessing: either Rabbi Andrea Weiss, in her role at the College-Institute, or a cantor or rabbi of one's own choosing."<sup>10</sup> Despite these gestures, HUC has yet to make an explicit attempt to seek forgiveness from the victims. Seeking forgiveness would mean that HUC has to admit guilt and liability. And, presumably to protect itself legally against a lawsuit, HUC is not admitting guilt. Much of the plan for HUC's teshuvah process is based on listening to the stories and testimonies of those who were wronged. Neither the Morgan Lewis recommendation that HUC engage in a truth and reconciliation process by "creating a forum in which individuals who wish to come forward and tell their stories publicly

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<sup>9</sup> Maimonides Mishneh Torah: The Laws of Repentance, Translation by Rabbi Eliyahu Touger, 2:9.

<sup>10</sup> Reaffirmation of Ordination Update; email sent to alumni by Rabbi Rachel Maimin, HUC-JIR Teshuvah Director, February 5, 2024.

are provided the opportunity to do so...”, nor the plan to ensure that the victims’/survivors’ stories be recorded or documented and “housed at the American Jewish Archives and made publicly available”,<sup>11</sup> nor the Teshuvah Working Group’s guiding principle to “Learn, apologize, and witness in order to transform the institution”<sup>12</sup> satisfies Maimonides’s expectation of appeasement.

### ***Teshuvah Gemurah***

*Teshuvah Gemurah* is defined as a complete teshuvah. Achieving this demonstrates that the guilty party made genuine efforts to improve. Maimonides in HT 2:1 says that one has reached the level of complete teshuvah when one faces the same situation in which they sinned but refrains from sin:

What is complete teshuvah? A person who confronts the same situation in which he sinned when he has the potential to commit and, nevertheless, abstains and does not commit it because of his teshuvah alone and not because of fear or a lack of strength.<sup>13</sup>

As mentioned above, a guiding principle of HUC’s Teshuvah Working Group is to “Learn, apologize, and witness in order to transform the institution.”<sup>14</sup> This means that HUC would take everything that it learned throughout the process and create new policies and structures to properly deal with future accusations of misconduct. Only time will tell if HUC can reach the level of complete teshuvah. On the Sacred Respectful Community Progress Report, under

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<sup>11</sup> HUC-REPORT-OF-INVESTIGATION-11.04.21, p. 29.

<sup>12</sup> <https://huc.edu/wp-content/uploads/Recommendations-Letter-3-15-23-final.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Maimonides Mishneh Torah: The Laws of Repentance, Translation by Rabbi Eliyahu Touger, 2:1.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

“Institutional Teshuvah: Taking Responsibility for and Healing from Our Past”, there is no proposed date for the action item “Build[ing] a meaningful teshuvah process to understand survivor experiences and hold ourselves accountable.”<sup>15</sup>

### **Additional Issues with HUC’s Teshuvah Plan**

#### ***Bushah***

*Bushah*, causing shame, is one of the unfortunate consequences of the HUC teshuvah plan. This is especially the case for accusations of alleged misconduct against named HUC faculty members. Many of the accusations presented in the Morgan Lewis report are serious allegations of sexual misconduct. By HUC permitting the publication of such accusations, it effectively destroyed the reputation of former faculty and caused embarrassment, *bushah*, to them and/or their families. As Maimonides teaches, shaming rabbis and Torah sages is a sin, the consequence of which could be losing one’s portion in *Olam Haba*, the World to Come:

Our Sages said that a person who frequently commits [these sins] will not receive a portion in the world to come and [counseled] that these [sins] be avoided and care be taken in regard to them. They are ... one who embarrasses a colleague in public; one who takes pride in his colleague's shame; one who disgraces Torah Sages; one who disgraces his teachers....<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> <https://huc.edu/about-huc/developing-a-sacred-respectful-community-at-huc-jir/sacred-respectful-community-progress-report>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 3:14.

In HT 2:9, Maimonides states that one who wrongs one's teacher or rabbi must seek forgiveness from that individual until it is granted:

If [the wronged party] was one's teacher, a person should continue seeking his forgiveness, even a thousand times, until he forgives him.<sup>17</sup>

Maimonides also teaches to not suspect good people of sin:

One who suspects worthy people. He will also say to himself "I have not sinned," for he will rationalize: "What have I done to him? All I did was raise a doubt whether he committed the wrong or not." He does not realize that this is a sin, for he has considered a worthy person as a transgressor.<sup>18</sup>

The key word is suspect. If misconduct can be proven, that is one thing. But suspecting or accusing individuals of misconduct without allowing them to defend themselves against such accusations is a violation of halakhic principle.

This point is strengthened in HT 4:4 subsection 4, where Maimonides teaches not to take pride in a friend or colleague's shame in order to prevent one from feeling superior to that person:

One who takes pride in his colleague's shame. He tells himself that he has not sinned, for his colleague was not present. Thus, no shame came to his colleague, nor did he humiliate him. He merely contrasted his good deeds and wisdom against the deeds or

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 2:9.

<sup>18</sup> Maimonides Mishneh Torah: The Laws of Repentance, Translation by Rabbi Eliyahu Touger, 4:4.

wisdom of his colleague in order that, out of that comparison, he would appear honorable, and his colleague, shameful.<sup>19</sup>

One might say that the prohibition against shaming enables rabbis to act with impunity, thereby condoning inappropriate behavior. It is commendable that HUC wanted to be as transparent as possible by allowing Morgan Lewis to name names, but in this case the misconduct is alleged, not proven. In addition, three of the people named in the Morgan Lewis report were deceased when the report was issued.<sup>20</sup> If it is so determined that the Morgan Lewis report for HUC unjustly caused *bushah*, HUC should consider ways to address the hurt to the reputation of the faculty members and/or their families.

The question at the heart of the Morgan Lewis report and the HUC Teshuvah Plan is, are there instances in which sharing the name of an alleged perpetrator is warranted? If someone's misdeeds are well known, this person shamed themselves. For instance, if a member of the faculty is arrested or convicted of a crime, their misdeeds are public information. If HUC helps an investigation by providing information and naming names, that is part of the due process of law. Even if someone was not formally accused or convicted of a crime but was well known on campus for their indiscretions, this person brought shame upon themselves. HUC is a small community; people know and people talk. One might question, therefore, what purpose was served by the Morgan Lewis exposé of names and allegations of misconduct when presumably this was common knowledge?

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 4:4.

<sup>20</sup> [huc.edu/wp-content/uploads/HUC-REPORT-OF-INVESIGATION-11.04.21.pdf](https://www.huc.edu/wp-content/uploads/HUC-REPORT-OF-INVESIGATION-11.04.21.pdf), Repeated Credible Allegations of Misconduct, pp. 21-28.

Bringing shame upon someone who was not formally accused of a crime and whose alleged deeds are not widely known is problematic. The Morgan Lewis report may have publicized alleged misconduct that was not well known and cannot be provable. HUC was not obligated to undertake the investigation, nor was it obligated to publish names or the details of individuals' alleged misconduct. Being named in the report effectively is a presumption of guilt, especially for those faculty who were deceased when the report was published. Another problem with the report is the lack of sufficient due process. From what is described in the report, Morgan Lewis interviewed 170 individuals,<sup>21</sup> who remain anonymous, but the accused were not given the opportunity to defend themselves.

It is worthwhile that HUC is engaging in a teshuvah process and trying to better its community. However, the manner in which it publicized the names of the accused who had no opportunity to defend their actions was inappropriate and contrary to Maimonides's process for teshuvah. Even if every accusation is true, HUC brought shame, *bushah*, to the individuals named in the report and, for that reason alone, should engage in a teshuvah process.

### **Closure and Forgiveness**

A principle of teshuvah detailed in HT 2:10 is that one should willingly forgive and not hold onto anger in one's heart:

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<sup>21</sup> <https://huc.edu/wp-content/uploads/HUC-REPORT-OF-INVESTIGATION-11.04.21.pdf>, p. 2.

It is forbidden for a person to be cruel and refuse to be appeased. Rather, he should be easily pacified, but hard to anger. When the person who wronged him asks for forgiveness, he should forgive him with a complete heart and a willing spirit. Even if he aggravated and wronged him severely, he should not seek revenge or bear a grudge. This is the path of the seed of Israel and their upright spirit.<sup>22</sup>

Not holding onto anger helps those who have been wronged heal and move on with their lives. HUC cannot force those who feel they have been victimized to forgive their wrongdoer (although the institution should at least admit wrongdoing for ignoring people's complaints and for failing to create due process for those who believe they were mistreated). However, the HUC-JIR Teshuvah Working Group's recommendation of *Shomea*/Listening may be hindering the teshuvah process by encouraging "victim-survivors and other stakeholders... to be heard and seen by the College-Institute"<sup>23</sup> indefinitely, rather than forgive and let go of grudges.

Another issue toward closure and forgiveness involves denouncing the alleged wrongdoers. While there may not be sufficient evidence to definitively prove guilt for an HUC faculty member, there may be sufficient evidence that that professor was not living up to the moral and ethical standards as outlined in HUC-JIR's Code of Ethics<sup>24</sup> and Policy Prohibiting Sexual Misconduct and Interpersonal Violence.<sup>25</sup> In such cases, the Morgan Lewis report recommends "Remov[ing] endowed chairs, statues, and other public recognitions that memorialize or honor

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<sup>22</sup> Maimonides Mishneh Torah: The Laws of Repentance, Translation by Rabbi Eliyahu Touger, 2:10.

<sup>23</sup> <https://huc.edu/wp-content/uploads/Recommendations-Letter-3-15-23-final.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> <https://huc.edu/wp-content/uploads/3101-Code-of-Ethics-Policy.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> <https://huc.edu/wp-content/uploads/3107-Policy-Prohibiting-Sexual-Misconduct-and-Interpersonal-Violence-Title-IX-and-Complaint-Procedure-.pdf>.

wrongdoers.”<sup>26</sup> HT does not address this, so an appropriate response depends on a contemporary understanding of Maimonides’s principles. On the Cincinnati campus, photos of all former faculty members are prominently displayed in the classroom building, and those who were ordained at HUC in Cincinnati appear in ordination class photos. Since all faculty have their photos displayed, these pictures are not honorifics. If someone was criminally convicted of a crime, it seems appropriate to remove their photograph and other honorifics. Although none of the allegations of misconduct resented in the Morgan Lewis report involved criminal cases, it is helpful to look to the American legal system for precedent. In the American judicial system, different standards of proof apply to different court levels of court. There is halakhik precedent for this as well. *Mishneh Torah* Hilkhhot Sanhedrin [HS] 2:5 states that kings of the House of David had the authority to make judgements beyond the court’s jurisdiction due to their righteousness and respect for Torah law:

Although the kings of the House of David may not be included in the *Sanhedrin*, they may sit in judgment over the people.<sup>27</sup>

Applying HS 2:5 to HUC, this implies that someone in a position of authority and beyond reproach, such as the president, provost, or chair of the Board of Governors could decide the status of honorifics pertaining to an individual accused of alleged misconduct, regardless of a legal or internal review process.

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<sup>26</sup> HUC-REPORT-OF-INVESTIGATION-11.04.21, p. 30.

<sup>27</sup> Maimonides *Mishneh Torah*, The Sanhedrin and the Penalties Within Their Jurisdiction 2, Translation by Rabbi Eliyahu Touger, 2:5.



Related to this is the question of scholarship. During my years of study at HUC, I have heard many discussions about studying the works of faculty accused of misconduct. Part of Maimonides's teshuvah process involves returning those who have committed offenses into good standing with the community. While curricular choices always are the discretion of the faculty, once the teshuvah process ends, HUC should continue to utilize the scholarship of professors who have been accused of wrongdoing. The only reasons to abandon their scholarship is if it is inaccurate or if better scholarly works are available. Utilizing someone's work for its scholarship does not equate to honoring its creator.

### **Conclusion**

Utilizing the teachings of Maimonides presented in HT, one can conclude that HUC's teshuvah process has flaws. There has been no *vidui*, apology, or statement of remorse from HUC. This is the most basic aspect of the teshuvah process. HUC's attempt to pay damages by offering replacement *smikhah* documents is the bare minimum when it comes to damages. And the process of bringing shame to its professors is something that HUC will have to reckon with. However, the one positive in the proposed teshuvah process is the commitment to change. The desire of the Teshuvah Working Group is for HUC to adopt new policies so that the next time abuse happens at HUC it is dealt with in a timely and appropriate manner. When this occurs, it will be a sign that HUC has achieved a complete teshuvah. However, at the time of this paper, HUC has not set a working timeline. Only time will tell if the institution grows and learns from its mistakes.

## **Yom Kippur Sermon: Atone Again**

**By Samuel Rheins**

One of my favorite movies is Groundhog Day. In the film, Bill Murray plays a grouchy, narcissistic weatherman named Phil. The plot, if you haven't seen the film, is that Phil is sent to cover the annual Groundhog Day festivities in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania for the fourth year in a row. Phil thinks that reporting about a groundhog, a large squirrel, as he calls it, is beneath him, that this assignment will cast a shadow on his career. After reporting the event with zero enthusiasm, Phil and his crew have to spend the night in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania because of a blizzard. When Phil wakes up the next day, he is surprised to discover that it is still Groundhog Day and, moreover, that only he is aware of this! Phil is absolutely miserable. He is devastated about having to relive this day and, as he soon discovers, not just once but over and over again. Slowly, it dawns on Phil that this repetition isn't such a bad thing after all. Yes, he can do whatever he wants without consequences because everything resets the next day, but the time loop also gives him the opportunity to learn from past mistakes and finesse his behavior to achieve a certain goal.

You see, Phil has a work crush on his producer, Rita, played by Andie MacDowell. Of course, she wants nothing to do with her self-centered colleague, but Phil is determined to win her affection. Since he has seemingly unlimited opportunities to make a move, Phil gradually modifies his behaviors for the better when he faces the same decisions day after day. He learns what works and what doesn't to positively gain Rita's attention and, eventually, her affection. The theme of the film Groundhog Day is that change is possible, but that it takes hard work and perseverance.

It's not surprising that Groundhog Day was written by two Jews, Danny Rubin and Harold Ramis. Perhaps it was while sitting in a synagogue on Yom Kippur, hearing the familiar refrains about prayer, repentance, and charity that they were inspired to write the story. After all, doesn't being here on Yom Kippur feel sort of Groundhog Day-"ish"? Reciting familiar prayers, singing familiar tunes, reading familiar Torah and Haftarah passages. Sure, some of the "actors" have changed. Certainly our world has changed since last Yom Kippur but here, in this sacred space, at this sacred time, so much feels quite familiar, very *déjà vu*. The theme of Yom Kippur is that repentance, atonement, and change are possible.

Prayer, repentance, and charity are the bedrock of teshuvah, which means "returning". Teshuvah involves atoning for our wrongdoings and then not repeating the same negative behaviors. When we sin, we hurt ourselves. When we sin, we hurt others. When we sin, we distance ourselves from God, from our community, from our friends, and from our family. Teshuvah is about returning to a place of good standing.

One of the challenges with the process of teshuvah is that it can be theoretical. How can we know if we really have changed for the better since our lives aren't perpetual Groundhog Days? Unlike Phil, we can't rehearse scenarios over and over again. We can't refine our behavior incrementally in time that doesn't progress.

What the movie Groundhog Day portrays is what the 12<sup>th</sup> century Jewish sage Rambam, Maimonides, calls *teshuvah gemurah*, or a complete repentance. According to Rambam in his *Mishneh Torah* Hilkhos Teshuvah, Laws of Repentance, complete repentance happens when someone sins, goes through the teshuvah process and, when faced with the same situation

again, refrains from sin. Rambam shares as an example of *teshuvah gemurah* this scenario: a certain man went out of town, stayed at an inn, and was unfaithful to his wife. Racked with guilt, the man engaged in the teshuvah process. He admitted what he did was wrong, apologized to his wife, and promised to never repeat that sin. Later the man faced the same scenario. He was out of town in the same city, stayed at the same inn, and saw the same woman. This time, however, he remained faithful to his wife. Faced with the same choice he could have sinned, but he didn't.<sup>28</sup>

While it would be convenient to equate Phil's behaviors in Groundhog Day with the man's behaviors in Rambam's anecdote, we never encounter the exact situation twice, even if they appear similar. Our time does not repeat itself. But imagine if we were as fortunate as Phil in Groundhog Day to have endless opportunities to get it right. Imagine having the opportunity to try and try again. Imagine having the knowledge to build incrementally on our successes and to completely disregard our failures. Imagine being able to see almost microscopically how the determined choices we make impact our lives and our relationships. Imagine the personal satisfaction of feeling that through hard work and endless attempts, we've finally achieved what we set out to accomplish. So how are we supposed to achieve *teshuvah gemurah* if the exact scenario never presents itself?

According to Rambam, first, adopt a new name.<sup>29</sup>

מְשַׁנֵּה שְׁמוֹ כְּלוּמַר אֲנִי אַחֵר וְאִינִי אוֹתוֹ הָאִישׁ שֶׁעָשָׂה אוֹתָן הַמַּעֲשִׂים

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<sup>28</sup> Mishneh Torah, Repentance, Translated by Eliyahu Touger, 2:1.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 2:4.

Rambam doesn't mean changing your name legally or assuming an alias, but creating a new and improved persona. Obviously this takes planning and work, trial and error, but it's worth the investment in time and effort if it leads to positive results. As it is written in *Pirke Avot* (5:17), "Rabbi Shimon used to say: There are three crowns: the crown of the Torah, the crown of the priesthood, and the crown of kingship, but the crown of a good name surpasses them all." From the point of view of Jewish tradition, having a good and respected name is a preeminent quality. We have it within our control to perform the acts that earn a good reputation.

Rambam also instructs those seeking repentance to cry out to God in prayer.

צוֹעֵק תְּמִיד לִפְנֵי הַשֵּׁם בְּבִכּוֹ וּבְתַחֲנוּנִים

Not howling like wounded coyotes for forgiveness, but praying with a particular focus. Let's say that we sinned by coveting something or by being greedy. During prayer, we can focus not on what we don't have, but on what we do have: the blessings in our lives and the things for which we are grateful. As we say daily in our prayers: *Modim Anachnu Lakh*, "For this I give thanks to you, God."

Rambam also instructs those seeking repentance to perform acts of tzedakah.

וְעוֹשֶׂה צְדָקָה כְּפִי כחו

We can be intentional in trying to repair some of the damage that we caused through our sins. For example, if we are guilty of *lashon hara* or gossip, we can lend our time or resources to organizations that promote "clean speech." If we are dismissive of others and focus only on our own needs, we can dedicate time to helping those who are vulnerable or need a helping hand.

Whatever the sin, there's a way to distance ourselves from it and flip our actions, or words, or thoughts for the better. Such deeds help us become better people and help us from making the same mistake twice.

Maimonides also instructs us to distance ourselves from temptations to sin.

וּמִתְרַחֵק הָרֵבָה מִן הַדָּבָר שֶׁחָטָא בּוֹ

In other words, stay away from bad influences and involve ourselves in healthy, productive, and positive relationships.

Every year during the High Holy Days, we reflect on our past behavior and contemplate who we want to become in the coming year. We don't have endless chances like Phil to redeem ourselves, and each time we try to change we face different pressures and challenges. That is the bad news. The good news is this. A core principle of the teshuvah process is that we can change for the better. We are not doomed to repeat our past mistakes. Our tradition gives us the tools and the opportunities so that we can be the best people that we can be. And when we sin, we know that there is a path back.

This year, may all of us change our names. May all of us seek to learn from our mistakes. May all of us grow and change for the better. *G'mar Chatimah Tovah*, have a meaningful Yom Kippur.

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