

Sparks

by Rabbi David Aaron
*Founder and Dean, Isralight
Rosh Yeshiva, Orayta*

Can You Forgive G-d?

How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world. ~~
Anne Frank

This imperfect world is the perfect place for a dynamic life filled with challenge, growth and love. That's the way G-d planned it.

Here is what the Torah tells us: "In the beginning G-d created heaven and earth. And the earth was **chaos** and **void**, and **darkness** was upon the face of the deep....And G-d said: 'Let there be light': and there was light....G-d divided the light from the darkness. G-d called the light 'Day' and the darkness He called 'Night'...Let there be firmament in the midst of the water...Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear...G-d called the dry land Earth, and the gathering of waters He called Seas, etc.'" (Genesis 1:2-10)

G-d intentionally created the world in a state of chaos, void, and darkness. This is the biblical hint to the Kabbalistic idea of the broken vessels. The six days of creation is actually about how G-d takes this original world of darkness, void and chaos and gives it light, form, order and definition. This of course is the beginning of the *Tikkun* which is the mending of the broken vessels. However these six days were only the beginning of the *Tikkun* process. When we get to the seventh day we are told, "And by the seventh day G-d completed His work which He had made: and He abstained from all His work which He had made. G-d blessed the seventh day and sanctified it; because on it He abstained from all His work that G-d had created to do."

The Oral traditions asks, "What is the meaning of these last words, 'all His work that G-d had created to do'?"

The answer is that G-d didn't just create the world, rather G-d created work to do. And for whom did G-d leave this undone work? For you and me. That's why the Torah says, "G-d completed His work" and then seems to contradict itself by saying, "And He abstained from all His work." The word "abstained" means an interruption of work not a completion of work. What is the Torah teaching us? Is the world complete or was it left incomplete? The answer is -- the most complete world for humanity is an incomplete world where we can be a partner in its completion.

Yes, this imperfect world is the perfect place for challenge, growth and love. It's the perfect place for a perfect becoming. Each day we encounter the forces of chaos, void and darkness within the world and within ourselves. And each day we are offered the opportunity to become G-d's partner in building the world and completing ourselves.

This is the meaning of the covenant G-d makes with Abraham. G-d tells Abraham, “I am E-l Sha-ddai, walk before Me and become complete. I will set My covenant between Me and You.” The Talmud explains the meaning of this divine name “E-l Sha-ddai”. The Hebrew word “Di” means enough. Therefore the message to Abraham was: I am the One who said “enough!” The world was advancing towards its completion however G-d said “enough” and stopped it. Therefore G-d intentionally caused the world to be incomplete in order that we can become G-d’s associate creators of this world. We have come into this world to build it and to be built by it. Who you are is G-d’s gift to you; who you become is your gift to G-d.

Being All That You Can Become

It’s important to understand that the theme of life is *teshuvah*. Most commonly translated as “repentance,” *teshuvah* has nothing to do with the beating one’s breast and undergoing penance (as in sackcloth and ashes); it means literally “to return” and describes specifically the intricate process of returning to G-d, returning to a life of growth and dynamic becoming. This intricate process begins with fixing one’s mistakes and resolving not to repeat them, but it’s more than that.

Kabbalah teaches that *teshuvah* is the theme of the cosmos. G-d intentionally set in motion the breaking of the vessels. He intentionally created a world full of chaos so that there would be an opportunity for challenge, which would create the possibility of error. Having made mistakes, we can then experience remorse and struggle to find the courage to change for the better. We can then humble ourselves to ask forgiveness and commit ourselves to continued growth.

Therefore, *teshuvah* isn’t relevant exclusively to individuals and their mistakes. Whatever one does affects the entire cosmos, because everything that happens works toward the making order out of the chaos and contributes to the process of constant becoming. *Teshuvah* is actually the theme of life. We are always in the midst of *teshuvah*. Life is an endless journey—an adventure in becoming. It’s all about improving, building, and accomplishing—that’s what we love doing.

It doesn’t always seem so wonderful. But if it did, there would be no growth. We would miss the opportunity to make mistakes, grow from them, celebrate the triumph, and experience the sweetness of forgiveness.

G-d is like a great coach who’s training you for the Olympics. He sets up a training ground filled with obstacles. That is His gift to you. He is really creating opportunities for you to jump higher. He also knows that the higher you need to jump, the harder you could fall. But that’s the price you pay to enter the Olympics. You are bound to make mistakes and fail sometimes. But when you do, don’t despair. It’s all part of the process. Just try again, and keep moving forward. Don’t spend your valuable time beating yourself up over the past, constantly bemoaning all the mistakes you made. Jewish tradition reminds us that great people make great mistakes.

Of course, you must recognize that you made a mistake, and you should regret it and resolve never to do it again. But don’t think that you will never make another mistake. In fact, expect that it’s bound to happen, and no human being is exempt from this. However, we need to remember the profound mystery that G-d is not only our coach urging us to greater achievements, but is also the source of the runner (the soul) within us. And He has a vested interest in the outcome of the race.

Sometime ago I read a book called *I'm O.K., You're O.K.* After I read it, I felt O.K. but not great. Maybe I misunderstood the book, but I took it to mean “Nobody's perfect.” Everybody makes mistakes. So just accept that they are O.K., that's O.K., and you're O.K.

Torah and Kabbalah don't want you to think you are O.K. They want you to know that you are great. Their message is “I'm Great, You're Great.” We are all manifestations of G-d's greatness in this world. We are not just O.K. We are great. And part of our greatness is the possibility to make mistakes, stumble, and fall sometimes. It's not that we *want* to fall or *try* to fall. But sometimes we do make mistakes. No matter how low we fall—even when we intentionally commit horrible crimes—we can always recycle our garbage into the gold of growth and personal renewal.

When we realize this, we will be able to forgive ourselves and we will recognize how much G-d forgives us. G-d knew when He created this world of chaos that the stakes were very high. He created a world that offers the greatest opportunity for an adventure in becoming. Here is the greatest opportunity for mistakes, yet the greatest opportunity for change and forgiveness. Here is the greatest opportunity for hate, but also the greatest opportunity for love. Here is the greatest opportunity for cruelty, but also the greatest opportunity for kindness.

G-d knew the stakes were high. Therefore, G-d forgives us when we make those mistakes, if we are genuine in our recognition of them and work hard to change. The Talmud, the compilation of Jewish oral tradition, suggests that G-d also wants our forgiveness.

Why is the new-moon offering different, in that the phrase ‘a sin offering unto the Lord (Numbers 28:15) is used in connection with it [whereas ordinarily the phrase ‘a sin offering’ is used without the additional ‘unto the Lord’]? Because the Holy One, blessed be He said, ‘This goat will be an atonement for My diminishing the moon [and leaving the creation incomplete]. (Tractate Shavuot 9A)

In others words this offering is not ‘unto the Lord’ but on ‘behalf of the Lord.’ G-d is seeking forgiveness.

How is this possible?

I have a very loving dentist, and as he drills away at my tooth, he constantly asks me to forgive him for the pain he is causing me. And although everything he is doing is only for my good, it's possible for me to forget that at times and feel angry. And so, too, in this sometimes painful and challenging life of growth, it's important, for our own sakes, to forgive G-d— even though deep down we intuit that everything that happens is an expression of ultimate goodness. The opportunity to rise to challenges, make courageous choices and serve G-d, to manifest divine goodness is G-d's very gift of life.

Can you trust that it all for the best and forgive G- d?

Rabbi David Aaron

Author of *Endless Light, Seeing G-d, The Secret Life of G-d, Inviting G-d In, Living A Joyous Life, The G-d-Powered Life, and Tefilla Training*