

Family Learning and Activities

Pedagogy of Partnership is a comprehensive Jewish educational model that supports educators in bringing Torah to the next generation. Rooted in Jewish values and practices, PoP enables learners of all ages to develop the habits of wonder, empathy, and responsibility toward others and Torah. PoP conducts professional development workshops, coaching, a fellowship program for a growing network of schools, and provides ready-to-use materials for educators and leaders. The PoP approach restores relationship building to its central place in education and promotes connectivity. PoP is co-founded and co-directed by Dr. Orit Kent and Allison Cook.

“...home is the spot where the influence of true piety is most strongly felt, where the blossoms of that lovely plant shed the rarest fragrance, and bring forth the sweetest fruit.”
– Grace Aguilar (19th C. England), *The Spirit of Judaism*

The home is one of the most powerful places for teaching and learning our most cherished ideals. In this spirit, we offer two family resource guides, geared for different age groups. Utilizing principles from Pedagogy of Partnership (PoP), these resources place relationship-building at their core, in both form and content, through *havruta* study, discussion guides, and group activities.

While the activities have been crafted with families in mind, people of all ages will benefit from revisiting and wrestling with their *teshuvah* practices. We invite you to find a conversation partner and process together.

During both of these activities we encourage you to practice “attentive silence”—listening closely and asking follow-up questions—while others speak. Do not jump in with an alternative perspective before you have heard and explored the other’s ideas. Ask

questions: “Can you tell me more about that?” or “I am not sure I understand, can you explain it in other words?” This practice helps deepen the conversation and build relationships as you learn together.

We are proud to share this family learning opportunity from one of PoP’s star coaches, Rabbi Devin Maimon Villarreal. At the Hadar website, you can find the second resource: “[Returning to the Mark: Practicing Teshuvah as a Family](#),” appropriate for families with kids in elementary and middle school.

It is our hope that these resources will play a role in your family’s engagement with the High Holidays this year and contribute to your learning together in a way that will “bring forth the sweetest fruit” in your homes.

Shanah Tovah from all of us at PoP,
Dr. Orit Kent & Allison Cook



Balance Beams

The Obstacle is the Path: A "Doing" Approach to *Teshuvah*

Rabbi Devin Maimon Villarreal

In classic Jewish literature, we find that there are at least two approaches to *teshuvah* or repentance. The approach of **not-doing** is at the heart of practices such as fasting, abstaining from leather shoes, and other restrictions. These rituals interrupt our typical rhythms, thereby enabling us to see ourselves more clearly and take the steps necessary to change. It is empowering to remind ourselves that we are not governed by our past habits or mistakes.

The other approach focuses on **doing**. Any part of our bodies or minds that is currently doing wrong, can also do right. This approach encourages us to pursue active practices during the High Holiday season, such as increased *hesed* (acts of loving kindness) and *tzedakah* (charitable giving and justice work).

These two approaches can often be applied to the same goal. For instance, if one wants to stop speaking *lashon hara'* (gossip), one could follow the restrictive approach and take on a *ta'anit dibbur* (a vow of silence). Or, according to the second approach, they could actively make a commitment to use their speech for *mitzvot* such as *nihum aveilim* (comforting mourners) or *bikkur holim* (visiting the sick).

Neither approach is better or worse; both are essential parts of the *teshuvah* process. Part of the personal *teshuvah* journey is figuring out which approach might work best for us at different moments in our life. The text study and activity that follow explore the "doing" approach and how it might impact the lives of parents and children.

Text Study for Parents and Caregivers

Make time before or during Rosh Hashanah to learn and discuss the following text with a *havruta*, your partner, a friend, or anyone with whom you share the task of child rearing.

שערי תשובה א:לה (רבינו יונה, ספרד, מאה ה-13)

העיקר היא להיטיב פעליו בדבר אשר זדה עליו...ובכל האיברים אשר חטא ישתדל לקיים בהם המצות. וכן אמרו רבותינו ז"ל, הצדיקים באותו דבר שחוטאים בו מתרצים. עוד אמרו (ויקרא רבה כא:ה): אם עשית חבילות של עבירות, עשה כנגדן חבילות חבילות של מצות. רגלים ממהרות לרוץ לרעה, יהיו רצים לדבר מצוה. לשון שקר, אמת יהגה חכו ופיו יפתח בחכמה ותורת חסד על לשונו. ידים שופכות דם, פתוח יפתח את ידו לאחיו לעניו. עינים רמות, יהי דכא ושה עינים. לב חורש מחשבות און, בלבו יצפון אמרי התורה ויהי הגות לבו תבונות. משלה מדנים בין אחים, יבקש שלום וירדפהו.

Shaarei Teshuvah 1:35 (Rabbeinu Yonah, 13th C. Spain)

The tenth principle is to improve one's actions through exactly that which one had knowingly done wrong in the past...and with all the limbs with which they did wrong, they should attempt to fulfill the commandments with them instead. And so, our Rabbis, may their memory be blessed, said that the righteous ones become acceptable through the very thing with which they sin. And they also said (Vayikra



Rabbah 21:5): If you have done piles of sins, do piles and piles of positive commandments [that correspond to them]: Feet that ran to do evil, shall run to the matter of a commandment. A false tongue, let such a person's palate utter truth, they should open their mouth with wisdom and have the Torah of kindness on their tongue. Hands that spilled blood, such a person should surely open their hand to their poor kindred. Haughty eyes, let such a person be subdued and lower their eyes. A heart that seeks thoughts of injustice, let such a person's heart hold words of Torah and the meditation of their heart be understanding. If one creates arguments between brothers, let such a person seek peace and pursue it.

Listen, Question, and Discuss:

Remember to practice “attentive silence” as you explore the following questions. (See introduction above.)

1. Rabbeinu Yonah cites a *midrash* from Vayikra Rabbah that provides numerous examples of taking body parts that are doing wrong and transforming them (and ourselves) by using them to do right. Choose a few of the examples from the text and discuss what it takes to actually make those kinds of changes.
2. Rabbeinu Yonah urges us to find something within us that is worthy and able to be transformed, even if currently it is not serving us well. What are some behaviors you would like to shift this year, either generally or in your parenting, that you can approach this way?
3. As a parent, how does this approach help you support your children in their development? What is something they do with their bodies that can be redirected? For example, if a child uses their hands to hit a sibling, now they can use their hands to give a hug.

Family Activity (intended for children ages 3-5)

Purpose

To have a child participate in a fun and active game with their family that enables them to experience setbacks and accomplishments. Related to a “doing” centered notion of *teshuvah*, this activity focuses on skills and abilities that children already possess that simply need to be adjusted or re-directed in the face of a mistake or challenge.

Preparation

1. Create three “balance beams” or pathways on the floor or carpet with painter’s tape. The “balance beams” should contain turns or zig zags, making them fun and challenging.
2. Gather 10 household items to serve as obstacles during round two of the activity.

Set the Stage

Tell your kids what to expect: “Today we have a challenge! In the room are three “balance beams.” Our job is to make our way across while keeping our feet on the tape. If you step off the tape, jump back on and keep going. Once you finish one “beam” go on to the next one and try to step off fewer times.”



Pointers

- The whole family can participate together!
- Help siblings navigate how to take turns; encourage them to start on different “beams.”
- Parents can model falling off the tape and getting back on to complete the course.
- *Round Two:* Try this again with added fun challenges. Place obstacles on the tracks using the household items you gathered.
- *Round three:* Try walking backwards.
- Conclude with enough energy to discuss the activity, around 15 minutes.

Conclusion

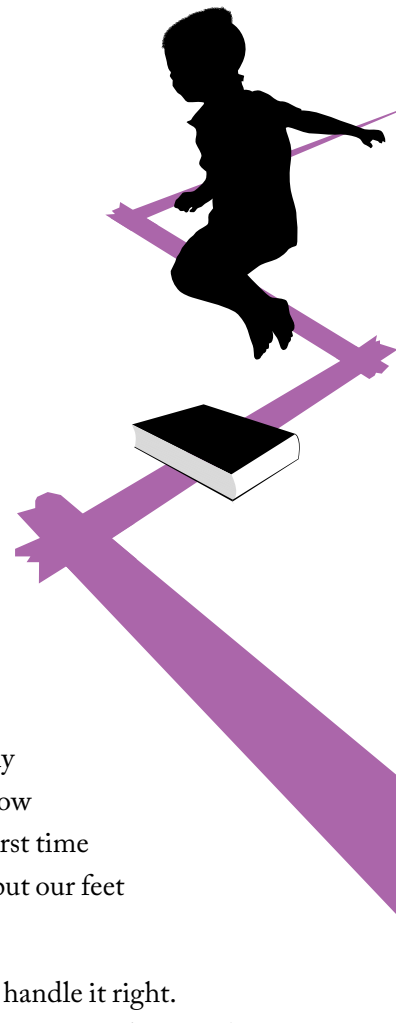
Gather the children together and conclude with an explanation and discussion:

“Keeping balance on the tape can be tough, especially with obstacles in the path! Many times, we find we’ve gone off the tape. But as you saw, it can also be fun to figure out how to stay on and get over the obstacles. Sometimes the thing that made us fall over the first time becomes our most creative accomplishment the next time. Our feet might trip us up, but our feet also allow us to get back on the tape or help us jump and stretch over obstacles.

“Similarly, sometimes we encounter challenges in life, and we make a mistake, or don’t handle it right. When challenges and mistakes happen, we can think about what trips us up and how to use it to do something better instead, just like we did when we got back on the tape. This is an important reminder that we can take a mistake and change it into something great.”

Open the Floor for a Conversation

- Share about a time you lost your patience and yelled; encourage children to talk about times when they did not share or take turns.
- Model the lesson of taking the very same body part and redirecting it towards something positive.
 - If I lose my patience and yell, I can instead use my voice for laughter to diffuse a stressful situation or to express what I am feeling at the moment.
 - If I grab or hold onto a toy with my hands, I can use my hands to set a sand timer to measure each person’s turn.



Returning to the Mark

Practicing *Teshuvah* as a Family

Allison Cook

During the High Holidays we take stock of our actions. We can think about our mistakes—*hataim*, sins (singular *heit*)—as moments when we “missed the mark or target.” *Teshuvah*, sometimes translated as repentance, comes from the word to return. We can think of this process as returning to the mark, to the right path, getting ourselves back on target.

Maimonides (12th century rabbi and philosopher) spells out four steps of *teshuvah* to teach us how we might return from our *hataim*, actions that went astray, that hurt ourselves, others, or our environment.¹

1. Recognize and stop the hurtful action.
2. Verbally confess the hurtful action—say you are sorry to the person you have hurt.
3. Regret the action—think about how the action has hurt you or others.
4. Determine not to do it again—what is the plan for not doing this again? Perhaps you will be in a similar situation; how might you handle it differently?

We can practice doing *teshuvah* together for *hataim* that we know we did or *hataim* that we might have done without being aware. All of us, parents and children, miss the mark at least sometimes. How lucky we are to have a path toward *teshuvah* to make it right!

Text Study for Parents and Children in Elementary and Middle School

משנה תורה לרמב"ם, הלכות תשובה ב:ב

ומה היא התשובה? הוא שיעזב החוטא חטאו ויסירו ממחשבתו ויגמור בלבו שלא יעשהו עוד שפאמר, "יעזב רשע דרכו" וגו' (ישעיה נה:ז). וכן יתנחם על שעבר שפאמר, "כי אחרי שובי נחמתי" (ירמיה לא:יח). ויעיד עליו יודע תעלומות שלא ישוב לזה החטא לעולם שפאמר, "ולא נאמר עוד אלהינו למעשה ידינו" וגו' (הושע יד:ד). וצריך להתנדות בשפאתו ולומר ענינות אלו שגמר בלבו:

¹ The exact number and order of Maimonides' steps are an area of rich discussion. The steps indicated here are based on Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's reading of Maimonides, as found in his work "On Repentance." For those interested in the larger discussion, see Rabbi Mordechai Baruch Carvalho's *Meira Dakhya* on Maimonides Hilkhos Teshuvah 1:1 and Rabbi Moshe Shternbuch's *HaDerekh LiTeshuva* on Maimonides Hilkhos Teshuvah 2:2.



Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance 2:2

What constitutes *teshuvah*? That one who has done wrong should abandon their sin and remove it from their thoughts, resolving in their heart never to commit it again, as it is stated, “May the wicked abandon their ways....” (Isaiah 55:7). Similarly, they must regret the past, as it is stated, “After I returned, I regretted” (Jeremiah 31:18). The One who knows the hidden will testify concerning them that they will never return to this sin again, as it is stated, “We will no longer say to the work of our hands: ‘You are our gods’” (Hoshea 14:4). They must verbally confess and state these matters which they resolved in their heart.

Listen, Question and Discuss

Remember to practice “attentive silence” as you explore the following questions. (See introduction above for more on “attentive silence.”)

1. What are the four steps of *teshuvah* that emerge from this text. (They may not occur in the order you expect them to! You may want to peek at the list above for Rav Soloveitchik’s summary of Maimonides’ four steps.)
2. What additional insights occurred to you about the process of *teshuvah* as you read Maimonides?
3. Of the four steps, which feels most **important** to you? Why?
4. Which feels the most **difficult**? Why? How can you as a family support one another in those harder steps?
5. What step might you add for yourself personally?

Family Activity (intended for elementary & middle school kids)

Purpose

The following activity allows families to practice *teshuvah* in an open and supportive way together. It is an embodied exercise that provides a physical experience of “getting back on target” and sets the stage for some rich reflection.

Preparation

1. On poster board or cardboard, create a large drawing of a target (about 2 to 3 ft.). Hang it on the wall. (Keep the tape available for the activity.)
2. Create four paper signs in the shape of stepping-stones to signify Maimonides’ four steps of *teshuvah*: **Recognize, Say Sorry/Confess, Regret, Plan for the Future**. Tape them on the floor creating a path that leads you to the target.
3. Cut out the “Four Steps of Teshuva Cards” and “List of Common Mistakes Cards” at the end of this supplement.
4. List 2-3 ways that you have missed the mark this year or in the past week or month. Write each *heit* on a separate index card or post-it note. Each person should hold their cards/notes during the activity.



Activity Instructions

Gather around the target. Say you are all going to get to do *teshuvah* or practice doing *teshuvah* together. Review what each of the steps of *teshuvah* means. A parent should first demonstrate the activity below to model the steps. Afterward other family members will follow the same steps.

1. Recognize

- Choose a *heit* card and read it aloud saying: “This is one of the ways I have missed the mark.” Explain the story of the situation of missing the mark.
- Tape or stick it on the target on the wall away from the center to represent visually that this action missed the mark.
- Go stand on the line marked “recognize” farthest from the target and take a quiet minute to recognize the hurtful action.

2. Confess/Say Sorry

- Take the next step toward the target and acknowledge the *heit* out loud and apologizes for it.

3. Regret

- Step forward and share how your action had negative consequences and why you do not want to repeat it.

4. Plan for the Future:

- On the next stepping-stone, discuss how you will avoid doing that action again.
- When you reach the target, turn the card over (so the writing is now hidden). On the back of the card write a positive action you will take as part of your plan.
- Tape it to the center of the target, with your future intention showing out.

Conclusion and/or Reflection:

We **all** miss the mark sometimes and commit *hataim*. *Teshuvah* is a process that enables us to get back on track. Some of Maimonides’ steps might be harder for us, but we are here to support one another.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What is something you learned about the idea of *heit* and *teshuvah*?
2. What new understanding do you have about yourself and/or a member of your family?
3. What element(s) of the *Yamim Noraim* (High Holidays) can serve as supportive practices for the *teshuvah* you explored today (e.g. the sound of the *shofar*, specific *tefillot* or Torah readings)?



Cut-out Cards

For "Returning to the Mark" Activity

Kids' list of common mistakes:

- ☐ I excluded someone from play and made them feel bad.
- ☐ I was mean to a sibling.
- ☐ I was not generous with my toys and possessions and did not share.
- ☐ I did not follow my parent's directions.
- ☐ I talked back or was disrespectful to my parents or teachers.
- ☐ I did not take care of my room/house/ environment.
- ☐ I did not stick up for someone when they needed my help.
- ☐ I wasted food or materials.
- ☐ I did not make good choices about taking care of myself, like brushing my teeth, eating healthy food, going to bed on time, getting exercise.

Parents' list of common mistakes:

- ☐ I did not listen to others.
- ☐ I was quick to anger or get frustrated.
- ☐ I yell too much.
- ☐ I was distracted from important people and issues in my life.
- ☐ I did not stick up for someone who needed my help.
- ☐ I was not generous with my money or material possessions.
- ☐ I did not honor my parents as well as I could have.
- ☐ I was not honest.
- ☐ I did not take care of my surroundings and the environment.
- ☐ I did not make good choices about taking care of myself well, like brushing my teeth, eating healthy food, going to bed on time, getting exercise.

Maimonides Four Steps of *Teshuvah*

- Recognize the Sin
- Confess/Say Sorry
- Regret the Sin
- Plan for the Future

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Selected Sources on *Teshuvah*, from the PoP Text Studies

רבינו יונה, *שערי תשובה* א:לה

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Rabbeinu Yonah, *Shaarei Teshuvah* 1:35

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Collaborating Writers from Pedagogy of Partnership, Powered by Hadar

Dr. Orit Kent is the co-founder and co-director of the Pedagogy of Partnership. She has worked as an academic, teacher, researcher and community organizer and is co-author of the award-winning book, *A Philosophy of Havruta*. A graduate of Yale University, she earned an Ed.M. in Teaching and Learning from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a doctorate in Education and Jewish Studies from Brandeis University.

Allison Cook is the co-founder and co-director of the Pedagogy of Partnership. She has published numerous scholarly and popular articles on relationship-based learning and has developed frameworks and tools for educators. Allison earned her Ed.M. in Teaching and Learning from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and M.A. in Jewish Studies from Hebrew College.

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