



# We All Make Mistakes

I know people who are perfectionists. They *must* do everything right. An error is intolerable and a failure is catastrophic. This becomes a way of life. They judge themselves very harshly, and because of this, they think others judge them harshly too.

What baffles me is, how can a person say the *al chet* 10 times on Yom Kippur and still think a human being can be perfect? G-d provided *Teshuva* precisely because human beings are fallible.

Of course it is wrong to sin, but “There is no *tzaddik* on earth who does only good and never sins” (Kohelet 7:20). If one has made a mistake, one should do sincere *teshuva*, but not see oneself as a failure because one erred.

Perfectionism is doomed to fail because no human being can be perfect.

Perfectionism may be the result of being put down by parents, or by parents having unrealistic expectations of their children. Or one suffering

from low self-esteem from whatever cause may try to redeem himself by being perfect. Inasmuch as this is impossible, his low self-esteem is worsened when he makes a mistake.

Perfectionists are often extremists. Ironically, a perfectionist may resign himself to doing nothing, because if you do nothing, you can't fail. They may never realize their potential because they cannot risk failing at anything.

Or, a perfectionist may become an overachiever, in the effort to prove to parents and self that one is a worthy human being.

There is a difference between a high-achiever and an overachiever. The model of a high achiever is a nursing mother, who has milk to give and can become very uncomfortable if the child does not nurse. She is relieved when the child nurses, but her milk is replenished, she is again uncomfortable.

I had teachers who loved to teach. They had knowledge and wished to

impart it to others. A high-achiever is driven by the urge to perform and produce, because one has the potential to do so.

Not so the overachiever, who is driven to prove to others that he is not a failure, or to compensate for an unwarranted self-esteem. The overachiever is never satisfied. He can exhaust himself in the futile search for perfection.

We should regret our sins, and do a thorough soul-searching for why and how it was possible for us to sin. We ask G-d every morning for His protection. “Do not bring us to the hands of error, not to the hands of transgression and sin.” We are assured that if we try our utmost, He will assist us in avoiding error and sin.

Progress, not perfection, is the key.

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