

ADMITTING MISTAKES

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On June 2, 2010, Armando Galarraga, 28 pitched what seemed to be a perfect game, a feat only achieved twenty times in Major League Baseball's 130 year history. However, on the very last play of the game, umpire Jim Joyce, 65, mistakenly called the runner safe at first base, ruining the perfect game. After the game, understanding the mistake he had made and the implications to Galarraga, with tears in his eyes, Joyce went over to Galarraga and apologized, admitting his mistake. Galarraga graciously accepted his apology saying "Nobody's perfect. Everybody's human." They are currently writing a book together titled "Nobody's Perfect."

R. Yosef D. Solovetichik was known for his intellectual integrity when delivering a shiur (lecture). On one particular occasion, he spent the bulk of a two and half hour shiur developing a particular idea. Many questions were asked by the students during that shiur and after the shiur, R. Soloveitchik summoned one of the students and told him "you were right and I was wrong. Tomorrow we will restudy the topic based on the question you raised."

Memories of a Giant pg. 325

Admitting a mistake is not easy, and requires a certain degree of self-sacrifice that can be humiliating. Sometimes we have to admit that we are wrong even when it is questionable whether or not there was an actual error. Admitting to such an error may be the simplest solution to a problem, but may create negative consequences.

Let's look at the following scenarios

CASE ONE

Michael worked very hard to prepare for the presentation in his history class. One of his friends asked a question during the presentation, though, that caused Michael to think that his entire theory may be incorrect. While Michael has a satisfactory answer to the question that will spare him the embarrassment of acknowledging that he was wrong, deep down, he feels that in all honesty, his theory is wrong. What should Michael answer?

CASE TWO

Miriam and Esther have been ignoring each other ever since they had an argument a few weeks ago. Miriam knows that she can repair their friendship by admitting she was wrong and apologizing, but she doesn't really believe that she was wrong. Should she apologize anyway?

**CASE
THREE**

Steven and Chaim are partners in a used car dealership. A customer bought a car from them, and now claims that he was misled about the quality of the car. Steven thinks that the customer may be correct and would like to admit to the customer that they were wrong, but Chaim disagrees. If Steven does admit that they were wrong, both Steven and Chaim will lose out. What should he do?

Examining the sources

The Greatness of Admitting a Mistake

There are a number of stories in Tanach where someone is praised for admitting a mistake. For example, after the death of Aharon's children, Moshe Rabbeinu criticizes Aharon and his remaining sons for burning the remainders of a *chatat* (sin) offering and not eating it (they felt that because they were mourners, they should not eat the offering). Aharon maintained his belief that he acted correctly and following a short debate (The details are recorded in Zevachim 101a-101b) Moshe Rabbeinu concedes to Aharon:

Aharon said to Moshe: Today, [my children] offered their sin and burnt offerings before God and [died], would it be good in God's eyes had I eaten that sin offering today? Moshe heard and was satisfied [by the answer].

Vayikra 10:19-20

וַיְדַבֵּר אֶהָרֹן אֶל-מֹשֶׁה, הֲנֵן הַיּוֹם הִקְרִיבוּ
אֶת-חַטָּאתָם וְאֶת-עֹלֹתָם לִפְנֵי ה', וַתִּקְרָאנִי
אֵתִי, כָּאֵלֶּה; וְאֶכְלְתִּי חַטָּאת הַיּוֹם, הֲיִיטֵב
בְּעֵינֵי ה'. וַיִּשְׁמַע מֹשֶׁה, וַיִּיטֵב בְּעֵינָיו.
ויקרא י:יט-כ

Moshe Rabbeinu received the Torah at Sinai and was the authority on all matters of Jewish law. How is it possible for Aharon to disagree? Wasn't this law discussed at Sinai?

'He was satisfied by the answer' Moshe was not ashamed. [He could have excused himself] saying 'I never heard the law (at Sinai that a mourner does not eat that offering),' rather he said "I heard it and I forgot (about it)."

Zevachim 101b (adapted from Soncino Translation)

וייטב בעיניו לא בוש משה
לומר לא שמעתי, אלא
שמעתי ושכחתי.
זבחים קא:

Questions for the Table

- Why does the Talmud praise Moshe Rabbeinu for admitting his mistake? Isn't this something we would expect of anyone?
- Moshe Rabbeinu is praised for choosing "I heard and I forgot" over "I never heard it." Does "I never heard it" imply 'because I never heard it, it must not be true' or does it imply 'Aharon is correct and the reason I questioned him is because it was something I didn't know about'?
- Did Moshe Rabbeinu admit his mistake despite the potential for embarrassment or was he simply not concerned about embarrassment when admitting the mistake? Should we be embarrassed when admitting mistakes?

**Why was
Moshe
praised?**

It is the nature of a person to justify themselves even if they are wrong because the idea of "admitting without being ashamed" (a

היינו שבטבע האדם ללמד זכות על עצמו, אפילו שטעה כי קשה ואיום הוא הענין של