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Who wronged you this year? Who said something, or did something that hurt you? Have they apologized? If I were betting, I would bet no.

For most of us, there are no two words more difficult to say than, "I'm sorry."

Why? Why is it so hard for us to say? Why is it so hard for us to apologize?

Consider the story of former Cincinnati Reds baseball player and manager Pete Rose. Fourteen years after he was convicted of gambling on baseball games, after more than a decade of denying and stonewalling, Rose finally admitted that the charges were true. He went on to say:

"I'm sure that I'm supposed to act all sorry or sad or guilty now that I've accepted that I've done something wrong. But you see, I'm just not built that way. So let's leave it like this: I'd like to apologize that it happened and I'm sorry for all the people, fans and family it hurt. Let's move on."

While Rose did say the words "I'm sorry," no one mistook his statement for an apology. After all, "I would like to apologize" is no more an actual apology than saying "I would like to lose weight" is a diet.

Why is it so hard to apologize, so hard to say, "I'm sorry?"

One reason is we like to keep score. We like to think of things in terms of winners and losers and apologizing means they've won and we've lost.

We worry that an apology will give our spouses, our parents, our bosses, or our friends ammunition to use against us.

We fear apologizing is a sign of weakness and that our children or co-workers might lose respect for us.

But the truth is, an apology disarms the ammunition. "I'm sorry" shows strength and character, not weakness. An apology wins respect, it doesn't lose it.

Maybe apologizing is so hard because it requires us to be honest with ourselves, to admit our faults, to overcome our stubbornness and conquer our foolishness.

It's hard to face our faults, to admit that we're not perfect, that we've made mistakes. But the truth is we aren't just victims but also perpetrators. While we're waiting for the apologies of others, they're waiting for ours too.

We Jews know what it's like to wait for an apology. For 60 years we waited and wondered how the Vatican could have remained silent as our *bubbies* and *zaydes* were lead like sheep to the slaughter. But little more than a decade ago, an apology changed everything.

After years of working to improve relations between Jews and Catholics, meeting with Jewish leaders, establishing diplomatic relations with Israel, visiting concentration camps and synagogues, Pope John Paul II apologized for the Church's role in the Holocaust.

"We deeply regret the errors and failures of those sons and daughters of the Church," the Pope said. "[For we are a Church that] deplores the hatred, persecutions and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews at any time and from any source…the spoiling seeds of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism must never again be allowed to take root in any human heart."

Millennia of tension between Jews and the Catholic Church were not erased by the Pope's words. The Vatican's silence during the Holocaust was not forgotten because of an eloquent apology. But an apology created a possibility—the possibility that this new century, this new millennium, might be different than the last—an apology transformed the relationship between Jews and the Church.

That's the magic of an apology. It doesn't change the past, it changes the future. Not just the future of countries and corporations but of our relationships, our lives, our jobs, our marriages, our families can also be transformed with two simple words: "I'm sorry."

Ruth Hancock had to wait 30 years for that.

"I struggle to recall more than just a few happy times with my father," Ruth shares.

"As a teenager, when I really needed a father's guiding hand, my parents split and then he was gone for good. Eventually he remarried, and a great person was added to my life: his new wife Elizabeth. Leave it to a woman to know how to rebuild a relationship with a man. And Liz did.

When he was diagnosed with cancer, I knew time was precious. Deep within, I yearned to share some close, intimate time with my dad before it was too late so I called Liz and planned a visit.

My heart was in my throat as I walked into the living room and saw him sitting on the couch, gray and frail. The golfer, the World War II dollar-a-year man, the successful business tycoon, transfigured by illness. We sat in silence for a while, looking at one another. He took a deep breath, and in a surprisingly strong and steady voice, spoke: 'Somewhere I've heard you can't change what you don't acknowledge,' he began.

'So here goes. I know I've fallen way short of being a good father to you,' he said. 'My own life and desires got in my way. I owe you an apology. So, before the man upstairs lets me go home, I need to say: I am so sorry. There are so many things I should have done that I didn't. I'd like to lay the blame on someone else—but there isn't anyone. The buck stops here. I can only hope you have enough love to indulge me and forgive your old man for all the times he's failed you even though I know I don't deserve it.' Then he paused as tears choked his voice. 'I've always loved you. It's a love you can take to the bank,' he said. 'I guess that's all.'

None of it completely answered my childhood questions about why he'd found the demands of fatherhood so difficult," Ruth reflects. "But the adult daughter, mother and wife I'd become could understand what the child could not. His words were medicine to me. I felt healed."

It took cancer for Ruth's father to be honest with himself, admit his faults and apologize. It took six Popes and 60 years for the Vatican. What will it take for us? What will it take for us to say those two simple words: "I'm sorry?"

Who have we wronged this year? Who did we hurt with our words or behavior? Have we apologized to them?

We're all waiting for someone to apologize to us. But we all also have someone waiting for an apology from us. We all have unfinished business, and unfinished business, despite what we might think, is not about the past, it's about the future.

"I'm sorry" is not about the past; it's about the future. It's about who we are and who we want to be. That's what the High Holy Days are really all about—who are we and who do we want to be?

Will we apologize, admit our faults, acknowledge our shortcomings and vow to be better, or will we merely hold on to yesterday's ways?

We have ten days to say "I'm sorry." Ten days to change the future by recognizing the past. Ten days to make sure that this year will truly be a *shanah tovah*, a good and *new* year.