

# SHOLEM ALEICHEM INSTITUTE

Established in Detroit over 90 years ago, we are an organization focused on our cultural heritage. We celebrate the holidays with reflections, stories, music and prayers in English, Hebrew and Yiddish

We invite you to join us at our  
**SECULAR HIGH HOLIDAY ASSEMBLIES**  
to be held at

**Steinway Piano Gallery - Recital Hall**  
2700 East West Maple Rd, Commerce Twp MI 48390  
(SE corner of M-5 and Maple)

**ROSH HASHANA**  
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 30<sup>TH</sup> 10 A.M. - 12 NOON  
**KOL NIDRE**  
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 8<sup>TH</sup> 7:30 P.M. - 9:30 P.M.  
**YOM KIPPUR**  
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 9<sup>TH</sup> 10 A.M. - 12 NOON


No Ticket Required  
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## Rosh Hashanah

essay

# Apologies are Like Cheese

ISTOCK

I recently had the opportunity to ask forgiveness. A colleague wrote me about a situation where I had “dropped the ball.” I ignored the email at first, then sighed heavily



Rabbi Moshe Givental

before opening it. The process forced me into the Hebrew month of Elul, which leads us to Rosh Hashanah. It's training for *teshuvah* — the process of turning around to face ourselves, apologize and re-commit to do better.

I've realized there are a few very different kinds of apologies, and they may be a bit like cheese, taking time to mature.

The easiest kind are when we recognize what we've done wrong as soon as we've done it and it's easy to say, “I'm sorry.” These are like the mozzarella cheese that Google tells me I can make at home in 30 minutes. It's like the cheap cheddar at the store. I like it though!

On the other end of the spectrum are apologies that I will probably never make. Think of the sometimes-wonderfully-stinky aged cheeses that cost a lot. It's just not for me. These are the apologies that I'm never going to offer. Maybe I should or shouldn't, but I know I won't.


An important sub-category here is the cultural and often gender-based expectation of apologies. These have nothing to do with who caused any harm; they're just expectations, most often put on women, expectations to apologize regardless of what happened.

This is a form of gas-lighting and a form of emotional abuse.

Some of the most poignant and fruitful apologies, however, are the kinds we know we should make, but they're hard and take time to prepare. Sometimes, like a good cheese, we take weeks, months or years to mature into preparing them.

Often, they're the apologies to close friends or family. For me, they're like the blue cheese that's just a few years aged. It's a bit hard to swallow for the average mortal, but you know a lot went into figuring out how to make it edible.

A lot is at stake in these apologies — usually our egos. Maturing oneself into making these in a way that's sincere includes preparation to repair the harm caused to the extent possible as well as a commitment to act differently. This requires a transformation of who we are. It is these apologies which make a mensch — not a perfect person, but one who strives to do good and owns up to their mistakes.

We should both hold ourselves responsible as well as cut ourselves some compassionate slack here. I know I have apologies to make that I'm still maturing into, and they may take a few more months or years. I won't let myself off the hook for working on them, but neither can I push myself too quickly because if I do, they will come out insincere and cause the people I've hurt even more pain. 

*Rabbi Moshe Givental is a local climate activist and works on behalf of social justice.*