



## THE HARDEST WORD

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*The Ziz, a clumsy and big-hearted bird, asks God for advice after accidentally destroying a vegetable garden. From this, Ziz learns the importance of an apology.*

The High Holidays of *Rosh Hashanah* (Jewish New Year) and *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement) constitute the “bookends” of the 10-day period known as the Days of Awe. Each autumn, Jews all over the world contemplate their actions of the past year, ask forgiveness from those they may have harmed, attempt to make amends, and vow to make positive changes in the coming year. This *teshuvah*—remorse, and turning around one’s behavior—is central to the effort of improving oneself and is a major aspect of the holidays. During this time of a fresh start, we strive to forgive as well as ask for others to forgive us.

*The Hardest Word* gives its young readers an opportunity to be introspective. Explore with your children why it is difficult for youngsters and adults alike to apologize. Share with your children your own feelings, and the remorse you feel when you make a mistake. It’s important for children to understand that sorry is more than just a word—it should be accompanied by a feeling of remorse, or *teshuvah*. Talk about the difficulties for anyone caught in a lie or discovered doing something improper. It can be helpful for children to realize that it’s easier to handle such times by quickly owning up and sincerely apologizing instead of dragging out a mistake. Consider role-playing scenes in which an apology is necessary with your children.

### FOLKLORE AND MYTHOLOGY

Folktales and myths have traditionally been avenues by which Jews not only pass down interesting stories, but a means to impart values and important life lessons from one generation to the next. The ziz is a fantastical creature from Jewish mythology; many cultures have similar immortal birds, including the Chinese “peng” and the Native American “Thunderbird.” The ziz has both kindly and fierce attributes: in this book, he is a somewhat awkward being, intent on doing right but not always able to do so. An important feature of the ziz’s behavior is that his actions aren’t malicious—rather they seem to result from a clumsy inability to control himself. In addition, the ziz does all in his power to make amends for his wrongdoing. Pj

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