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"Do Jews have a different sense of sin from other people?"

Response by Rabbi Peter Schweitzer

The simple answer is that Judaism has taught that sins are linked to behavior – to a violation of God's commandments – and not to a state of being. In contrast with other views, we are not born sinners, but, by virtue of the human condition and our free will, we are bound to act sinfully from time to time. The corollary may be more important: that we have the capacity to fix our sins through repentance and atonement

But not all Jews think alike about these matters. The more interesting observation is that this "textbook" answer doesn't work for secular, cultural or humanistic Jews who comprise half the Jewish population. For us, there is no commanding deity who has issued a set of commandments for us to uphold or neglect. Rather, *mitzvot* are the self-imposed commandments that we place upon ourselves. Sins and transgressions – which we regard as God-connected notions – are not a standard part of our vocabulary. We talk, instead, about wrong-doings, the errors of our ways, the missteps and bad choices we make. We don't turn to a God for forgiveness or atonement. We need to look inside for that. And, most important, we need to consider how we can change our ways for the good, knowing full well that we will fall short over and over.