

A Rabbinic Perspective *By Rabbi Seymour Rosenbloom*

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The other day I called a local office to speak to someone. The person who answered asked me my name, and before she transferred, she said to me: "By the way, I have a daughter who will soon become Bat Mitzvah in another synagogue, and she is very nervous. One of my friends gave me an article that you wrote. I don't know where it appeared, but it was entitled 'What If I Make a Mistake?' I just want to tell you how much it meant to me and how it put my mind at ease." I confess I had not thought about that Newsletter article in years, but was touched that it was still making the rounds, and bringing reassurance to current B'nai Mitzvah and their families. So I decided to reprint it, and you will find it below.

What If I Make a Mistake?



When I meet with youngsters who are about to be *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah*, I ask them how they feel. Invariably, they tell me that they are excited and nervous. "What are you nervous about?" I ask. They respond, "Well, all those people! What if I make a mistake? I am afraid I won't do it perfectly!"

As I sit talking to these wonderful, bright, spirited youngsters, I ask myself, who told them that they have to do it perfectly? Who instilled in them the idea

that they cannot make a mistake? What kind of life are they being prepared for when the expectation of perfection is laid upon them?

If a young person is to grow into a mature adult, he or she must know that it is permissible to try and to fail. The ability to fail at an endeavor and not to be crushed by it is a prerequisite for growth and real achievement.

Once in a while, a youngster does flub it on the *bima*; he or she loses the place, forgets the melody, freezes in front of hundreds of people, or is overcome by nervous laughter. Invariably, they compose themselves, sometimes with the help of the cantor or rabbi, and they go on.

I often think these are the lucky ones. For they learn an important lesson about the ability to go on in spite of errors and setbacks — that they don't have to be perfect. Human perfection is illusory. The quest for perfection leads some to lifelong unhappiness and blunted achievement.

Let's teach our children differently. Let's teach them that being an adult does not mean getting it perfect, but rather developing the confidence to risk without the fear of failure and to go on to new achievement.

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