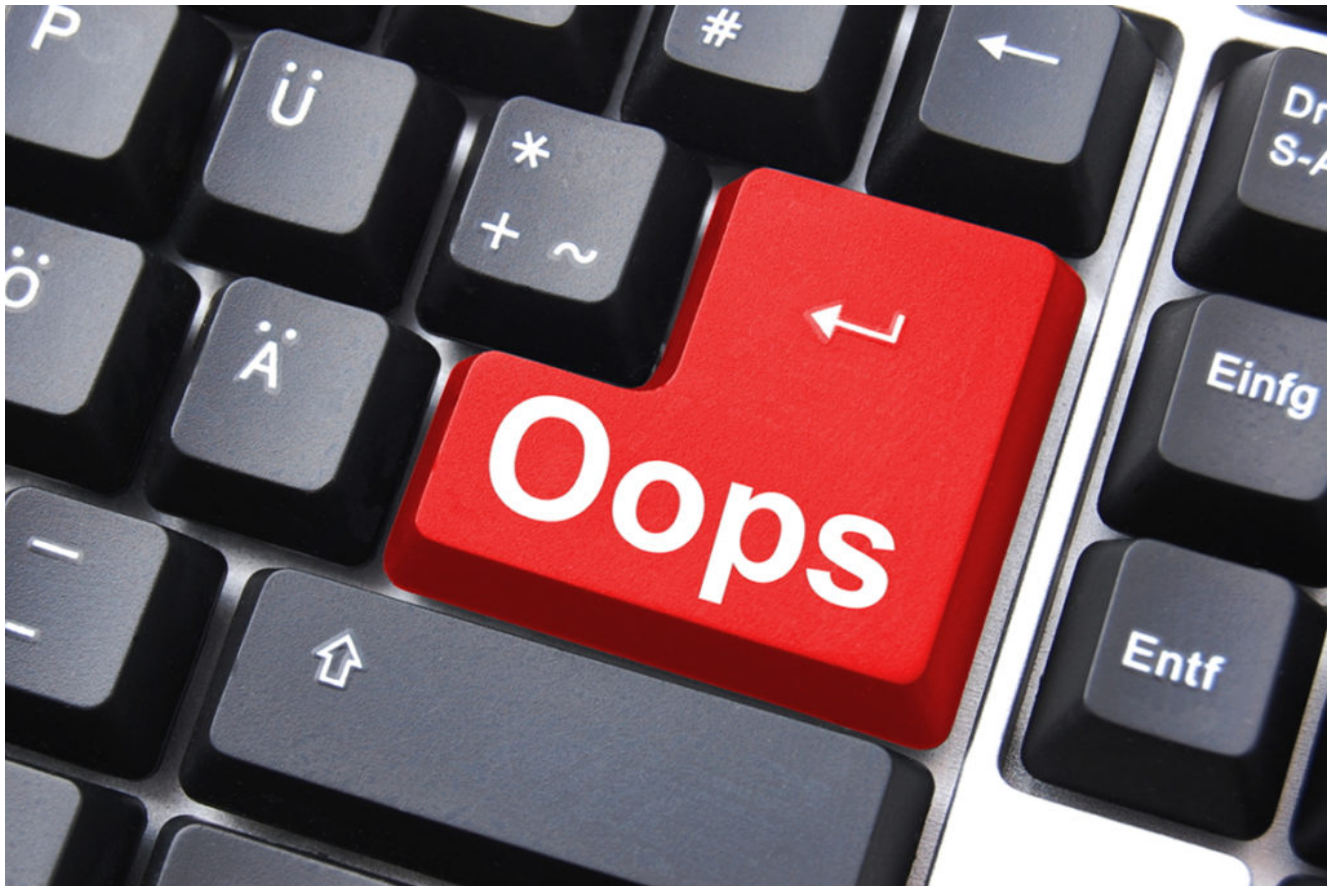


# You Are Bigger Than Your Mistakes

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The students of the Baal Shem Tov were often ridiculed for their allegiance to their rebbe. But they stood strong, committing themselves to serve God.

One student of the Baal Shem Tov would eat only on Shabbat. He would secretly refrain from food and drink for the rest of the week as he immersed in study and prayer. Once, during such a fast, he felt extremely ill. He felt as though he would expire if he didn't put something in his mouth. The only food available was the matzah set aside for the communal *eiruv*. It was kept safe in a glass case in the synagogue, but the young man couldn't help himself. He ate the matzah.

When the town's opponents of Chassidut realized the matzah was

missing, they searched for it. When they didn't find it and inferred that only this student could have eaten it, they were delighted. They publicly insulted him and mocked him as a lowly thief. "What kind of a lowlife would eat food that was set aside for a religious purpose for the community? Is it the one who calls himself so religious?" Wherever he went, the abuse followed him. Eventually, this man couldn't take it any more and did the unthinkable: he left the Jewish faith.

When this sad story was recounted to Reb Noson, he made a poignant comment: "He only fell because he didn't have enough encouragement. He should have thought to himself, 'It's true that I ate the matzah, and I feel ashamed for it. But it's not as if I ate non-kosher food. Is it such a crime to eat communal matzah when in need? Why does this failing make me so bad?'"