

On Repentance



Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik

ON REPENTANCE

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With a foreword by Itzhak D. Goldberg
and an afterword by Reuven Ziegler

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Introduction

1

Man stands at the center of Rabbi Joseph Dov (Baer) Halevi Soloveitchik's religious thought. His study of man is not comprehensive, nor does it attempt to encompass the totality of human experience with the aim of identifying and establishing a typology of man and of human society.¹ According to this approach, man must be studied and judged in the light of essentially human criteria. Thus, the Rav² solidly established the typological characteristics of "Halakhic Man"³ by contrasting him with "*homo religiosus*" and "cognitive man";⁴ thus, too, he anchored his "Lonely Man of Faith"⁵ in the prototypes of "Adam the First" and "Adam

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1. On the typological categories and their problematics in the writings of Rabbi Soloveitchik, see Eugene B. Borowitz, *A New Jewish Theology in the Making* (Philadelphia, 1968), pp. 164–70. Compare Rabbi Soloveitchik's view on this matter in notes 5 and 6 below. See also Lawrence Kaplan, "The Religious Philosophy of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik," *Tradition* 14:2 (Fall 1973).
 2. Rabbi Soloveitchik is generally referred to among his many followers as "the Rav," meaning "the teacher."
 3. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, trans. Lawrence Kaplan (Philadelphia, 1983).
 4. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
 5. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith* (Jerusalem, 2012).

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the Second” as these emerge, according to him, from the two versions of the creation of man in the Torah.

The lines of demarcation between one type and another are not always clear or sharply drawn. Often, characteristics of one type will be shared by another, and though the types portrayed in the Rav’s typological system are ideas such as are often used in theoretical philosophy, he was aware that in reality the types – rarely simple, often complex – at most approximated their ideal counterparts. That he was aware of this is apparent in his comparison between the ideal “Halakhic Man” and the real “Halakhic Man.”⁶ Similarly, he occasionally noted the congruence between the different types (by way of shared traits).⁷

The publication of Rabbi Soloveitchik’s reflections on repentance seems to compel the addition to his typological categories of another type, definable along the lines of the Rav’s terminology as “Repentant Man.” Unfortunately, Rabbi Soloveitchik has not yet given a final or systematic presentation of his thought in this matter. We have at our disposal only fragmentary and disjointed evidence upon which to build our analysis. Nonetheless, it appears that “Repentant Man” may be legitimately viewed as inhabiting the highest rung of this typological ladder. To judge from the evidence, “Repentant Man” enjoys an abundance of the positive traits identified by the rabbi in the other established types, as these endeavor to express their humanity as creatures created in the Divine Image. They are at the same time possessed of independent creative powers coupled with a powerful compulsion to draw near to their Creator. In the person of “Repentant Man” these two ontological tendencies converge and become a unified perfection which propels man toward his ultimate destination – salvation.

Moreover, the depth of the personality of Rabbi Soloveitchik’s other types is measured according to criteria of the torments of duality, contradiction, doubts and struggles which issue in the emergence of “a radiant, holy personality whose soul has been purified in the furnace of struggle and opposition and redeemed in the fires of torments of spiritual

6. *Halakhic Man*, p. 139, n. 1, where the Rav deals with the typological system formulated by Edward Spranger in his book *Lebensformen* (Halle, 1922).

7. *The Lonely Man of Faith*, p. 53, n. 17: “In reality there are no pure typological structures.”

disharmony.” From the spiritual struggle which is the lot of “Repentant Man,” there emerges a perfection of personality “which for sheer brilliance and beauty is unequaled by any level attained by the simple, whole personality who has never been tried by the pangs of spiritual discord.”⁸ As Rabbi Soloveitchik asserts: “In accordance with the suffering is the wage’ (Avot 5:23) and in accordance with the split is the union!” In the rabbi’s conception of human ontology which rests, according to his own testimony,⁹ on the dialectical philosophies of Heraclitus and Hegel concerning the general process of being, and on the views of Kierkegaard, Karl Barth and Rudolph Otto concerning the religious experience and religious awareness, immense creative power is vested in the antithesis: “Conflict enriches existence, the negation is constructive, and contradiction deepens and expands the ultimate destiny of both man and the world.”¹⁰ The portrait of “Repentant Man” rests mainly upon these foundations. Should one seek a parallel in the Rav’s typological framework, it would be found in the type defined as the “Man of God,” about whom the Rav intimates that his “spiritual stature and countenance” are “chiseled and formed by the pangs of redemption themselves.”¹¹

2

If suffering creates, ennobles and toughens, and brings the soul nearer to the object of its yearning, then “Repentant Man” is the type which comes closest to attaining man’s goal, for his conception and maturation owe everything to suffering.

Four characteristic traits identify “Repentant Man” as seen by Rabbi Soloveitchik: profundity of suffering, a depth of experience, the ability to make decisions in the light of free choice, and the capacity to create.

8. *Halakhic Man*, p. 4.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*, p. 139, n. 4. Soloveitchik offers exegesis on the biblical passages, “Out of my straits I called upon the Lord...” (Psalms 118:5) and “From the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord” (Psalms 130:1): “Out of the straits of inner oppositions and incongruities, spiritual doubts and uncertainties, out of the depths of a psyche rent with antinomies and contradictions, out of the bottomless pit of a soul that struggles with its own torments I have called, I have called unto Thee, O Lord.”

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The rabbi's conception of ontology is directed to four traits which are to be found, in some measure, in the other types established and described by Rabbi Soloveitchik, but never in so concentrated a form as in his drives, his existence as a repository of the *Shekhinah*, his investiture with free choice (which allows him to adopt a new law of causation) and his penchant for salvation. God created man free. This liberty, however, does not represent an abandonment on His part. Rather man, born in the image of God, always remains, as it were, in the Divine Presence. He can never completely free himself from the religious attraction which draws him to God, which is akin to an unseverable umbilical cord.¹² Man cannot flee from God because God chose the human soul as a dwelling place much like a temple:

“The eternal God is a dwelling place” (Exodus 25:8) – what is God's dwelling place? “Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house which I have built?” ... Where is the dwelling place of the eternal God? The home of the Holy One, blessed be He, is in man, in his heart, in his soul; and He does not depart from there even when man has sinned and defiled the holy sanctuary within him. The Holy One, blessed be He, continues to dwell within the depths of the soul of the sinner: “He who dwells with them amidst their defilement.”¹³

The Holy One, blessed be He, has two dwelling places within man. He is to be found in two homes, in two sanctuaries. One is the sanctuary of feeling, in the Holy of Holies of human sentiments, such as love, wonder, mercy, goodness of heart, awe of the exalted, joy, sorrow, amazement ... The second is the sanctuary of thought. When a person thinks, when he studies Torah, when he purifies and sanctifies his intellect, the instrument of his knowledge and reason – there the Holy One, blessed be He, can be found. One dwelling place of the Eternal God is within the human heart. The second dwelling place of the Eternal God is inside the human brain.¹⁴

12. *On Repentance*, p. 27. Compare with Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, translated by John W. Harvey (N.Y., 1958), pp. i ff., on man's “creature feeling.”

13. *On Repentance*, p. 129.

14. *Ibid.*

The permanent religious affinity, the “living together” of God and man in one house, does not produce a calming or tranquilizing effect. On the contrary, “the religious act is essentially one of suffering. When man and God meet, man is called upon by the Divine to embark on a course of self-sacrifice which is manifested in a struggle against his primitive instincts, in a breaking of the individual will, in the acceptance of a ‘transcendental burden,’ in an occasional dissociation from the pleasant and attractive, and in an addiction to the bitter and the strange.... ‘Make sacrifices’ – that is the command governing the religious man.”¹⁵

The lot of the religious man is a constant, difficult and tiring struggle, not tranquility. “The beauty of religion, with its grandiose vistas, reveals itself to man not in solutions, but in problems; not in harmony, but in the constant conflict of diversified forces and trends.”¹⁶ The attainment of sanctity, according to Rabbi Soloveitchik, does not lead man to paradise, but rather to paradox.

The suffering to which man is condemned is not necessarily a punishment; rather, “suffering is there to uplift man, to cleanse his spirit and sanctify him, to purify his thought and to rid it of all manner of superficial dross and vulgar chaff, to ennoble his soul and to expand his life’s vision. In short, the function of suffering is to set right that which is distorted and defected in the human character.... Suffering appears in the world order to enhance man.... It is a time of distress for Jacob and he shall be saved out of it (Jeremiah 30:7) – i.e., out of misfortune will spring forth eternal salvation. [Man will be] uplifted to a degree incomparably above that possible in a world devoid of suffering.”¹⁷ Man’s existence in the presence of God involves suffering; man’s affinity to

15. Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik, “On the Love of the Torah and the Redemption of the Soul of the Generation,” in *Besod HaYaḥid veHaYaḥad* [In Aloneness, In Togetherness (henceforth IAIT)], ed. Pinchas Peli (Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 403–32. Cf. Pinchas H. Peli, “On Suffering in the Thought of Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik,” in *Da’at, A Journal of Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah*, no. 12, Winter 1984, pp. 48–62.

16. Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik, “Sacred and Profane: Kodesh and Chol in World Perspectives,” *Gesher*, published by Yeshiva University, Sivan 1966, vol. 2, no. 1, p. 7.

17. Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik, “*Kol Dodi Dofek*” [The Voice of My Love Calls], in IAIT, p. 339.

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God is expressed in constant sacrifice. Only through sacrifice and total subservience to God can man achieve complete freedom and salvation.

Man's subservience to God must be complete and unconditional. This decisive subordination is tantamount to total freedom in relation to the other enslavements to which man is prone. The enslavement to God – which is all-embracing – releases man from a long list of other bondages. Only when a man has one sovereign, to whom he owes unreserved allegiance, is he truly liberated and free. When a man is subservient to more than one being, he then “borders on idolatry.” What then of positive ties of loyalty, such as to children and family? The Torah instructs us to love our children with a great passion. “As a father takes pity over his children” is a common simile of compassion and love in our liturgy. Nonetheless, Rabbi Soloveitchik suggests the daring proposition that the narrative of the sacrifice of Isaac was related only in order to teach later generations that parental love must not be allowed to deteriorate into complete enslavement, i.e., into a form of idolatry.¹⁸

Man attains liberty through self-sacrifice. “Total and unreserved offering of soul and body – that is the foundation of Judaism,” asserts

18. See below, pp. 142–143. The Rav deals with this point at greater length in his essay “On the Love of the Torah and the Redemption of the Soul of the Generation” (IAIT, p. 428):

God said to Abraham: “Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest”... (Gen. 22:2). In other words, I demand of you the greatest sacrifice possible. I want your beloved and only son in sacrifice. Do not delude yourself that after obeying my command and offering up your son, I shall give you another in his place. From the moment Isaac is slaughtered upon the altar, you will remain alone and childless. No other will be born unto you. Your existence will be governed by an incomparable isolation. I want your only son, for whom no substitute exists or shall exist. Similarly, do not imagine that you will succeed in forgetting Isaac or putting him out of mind. For the rest of your days you shall brood upon his fate. I demand that son whom you love and will love forever. Your life will turn into one long epic of suffering. Nonetheless, this is the sacrifice that I demand. Of course, at the end of the experience, whose essence is dread and pain, is endless joy. At the moment Abraham removed his son from atop the altar at the behest of the angel, the suffering changed into boundless joy and the dread into eternal happiness. At the beginning of the religious experience lies the sacrifice of essence; at its end, the discovery of essence. Indeed, man cannot discover himself without the sacrifice. For man can find only that which has been lost, and none can retrieve a thing unless it has first left his keeping.

Rabbi Soloveitchik.¹⁹ Moreover, he hazards that, in essence, “it [the Torah] did not invalidate the *idea* behind it that man should sacrifice his own self”; i.e., he explains, though the Torah forbids human sacrifice and regards the phenomenon as an example of the obscene in idolatry, it does not ban the notion of self-sacrifice. In the words of the Rav, “God does not seek offerings from man, He seeks man himself.”²⁰ Rabbi Soloveitchik sees the central philosophical idea underlying the act of sacrifice explained in Maimonides’ assertion that man is the property of the Creator. Man and all his belongings, his body and soul, ideas, actions, achievements and possessions, even his wife and children – all belong not to man, but to his Creator. And if man is “the property of the Holy One, blessed be He, when he hears the voice of God calling to him, ‘Take now thy son, thine only son ... and offer him ... for a burnt offering’ ... he has no other choice than did Abraham,” but to arise and set out to obey the command. Abraham has no rights in the disposal of his son, Isaac; Isaac has no claim over Abraham. Man is free; he attains that freedom through exercising his right to self-sacrifice in the service of his Creator.

Were it allowed, the Law would call for human sacrifices, but the dispensation of grace precludes this, asserting: “Ye shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd, or of the flock” (Leviticus 1:2). Animal sacrifice is allowed as a substitute for human sacrifice, but the meaningfulness of the sacrifice remains, as it were, undiminished; so in the sacrifice of Isaac, and so in all other sacrificial offerings. “Just as the sacrifice is burnt upon the altar so do we burn down, by our act of confession, our well-barricaded complacency, our overblown pride, our artificial existence. Then, and only then: ‘Be you cleansed before the Lord.’”²¹

19. Ibid.

20. See below, p. 161. Compare with Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik, *Five Sermons*, translated by David Telsner (Jerusalem, 1974), pp. 14–15. Soloveitchik here explains Deuteronomy 20:29, i.e., the means by which a Jew achieves purchase on the Almighty is through his “whole being,” *bekhol nafshekha*, as explained in Rabbi Akiva’s sermon (Berakhot 63a): “Even if it costs one’s life.” The Almighty can be reached through suffering and obstinate devotion: “In short, one reaches the Almighty through sacrifice.”

21. See below, pp. 38, 162. Compare with Rabbi A.I. Kook, *The Lights of Repentance* (Jerusalem, 1970), pp. 46–52. In general, there are many points of convergence between the thinking on repentance of the “poet of repentance,” Rabbi Kook, and the “philosopher of repentance,” Rabbi Soloveitchik, as, for example, on the problem

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Man's existential condition, in fact, means suffering, doubt, struggles with the world and within oneself. Only "Repentant Man" can attain that highest plateau to which suffering can introduce man, for the very emergence of "Repentant Man" into this world involves conscious and severe birth pangs.

3

In order to understand the concept of repentance, it is necessary to fathom the concept of sin as it emerges from Rabbi Soloveitchik's reflections on the subject of repentance. The two concepts – sin and repentance – are interlocked and bound together in a single, dialectical system, and both constitute stages through which "Repentant Man" must pass on his way to salvation.

Yom Kippur has two aspects: the experience of that day results first in atonement and, secondly, in purification; as it is written (Leviticus 16:30): "For the virtue of that day shall acquit you." Both these elements – atonement and purification – according to Rabbi Soloveitchik, are a direct consequence of sin. For in sin both elements are to be found: (a) sin binds; atonement or pardon provides a counterweight; (b) sin defiles; purification or forgiveness restores the sinner to his original state.

The sin that binds does so, much like obligation and subjection in the juridical sense. There is no sin without punishment, which in a terrestrial or in a heavenly court means pardon (*mehilah*), a word originating in laws of property. As a man foreswears (*moheh*) a sum owed to him by a friend, so God forgoes (*moheh*) and erases (*mekhaper*) the punishment which sin entails. However, the sin that defiles is of another order – the metaphysical one. It exists in the domain of man-God relations. Sin deforms and damages the innermost part of man – his soul, wherein dwells the *Shekhinah*.²²

Judicial sin, the sin that binds, is revealed to man by his intellect. Repentance of such a sin is generally undergone through calculation, through a desire to erase an obligation, or through fear of the impending punishment. Metaphysical sin, on the other hand, becomes part

of time, suffering, the individual and the community, etc. A comparative study of the two might prove enlightening.

22. See below, "Acquittal and Purification."

of man's existential experience, and the deeper the sin, the deeper the experience of repentance which follows.

Sin causes man's remoteness from God. The sinner becomes, in the words of Maimonides – whom Rabbi Soloveitchik is wont to quote – “separated from the Lord, God of Israel,” as it is written, “Your iniquities have separated between you and your God.”²³ To be sure, God remains in man also after he sins, but He is so remote that the sinner does not feel His presence at all. Only afterward he begins, sooner or later, to feel God's absence and, as a result, is beset by existential dread and fear.

Before the stage of “knowledge of sin,” which is already an integral part of the act of repentance itself, Rabbi Soloveitchik distinguishes a prior state defined as an “inner sense of sin,” which is similar to a man's feeling of an encroaching illness.²⁴ *Het, holi* (sin, illness) is a parallel concept employed by medieval Jewish philosophers, and already hinted at in the Bible (Psalms 103:3): “Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases.” It was expanded by Rabbi Soloveitchik²⁵ to explain the feeling of sin, which is the initial experience and precondition for all repentance or purification. Sin constitutes a kind of spiritual pathology. As there are pathological, physical illnesses in which the tissues cease to function normally and the cells begin to grow wild, so sin is a sign of a spiritual pathology whose outcome is the disintegration of the whole personality. As in physical disease, so in the spiritual disease of sin. Sometimes a man attempts to erase, to belittle or to deny pain, because of overt or covert fear. Pains begin to engender dread, but man's first reaction is to dismiss them or to belittle their significance. But belittling them will not diminish their importance; on the contrary, had he taken immediate action and had them treated, it is possible that a cure for his spreading illness could have been found.

The comparison between sin and pathological illness is complemented by the comparison between sin and mourning. The Torah says of the sin of the Golden Calf: “And when the people heard these evil tidings, they mourned: and no one put on his ornaments” (Exodus 33:4). In the wake of this sin there descended upon the people a strong sense of mourning.

23. Ibid., p. 193.

24. Ibid., p. 81.

25. Ibid., p. 117ff.

Acquittal and Purification

Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement – has a double function. The first is *kapparah* – acquittal from sin or atonement: “For the virtue of this very day shall acquit you of sin” (Leviticus 16:30). This was expressed in the prayer recited by the High Priest in the Holy Temple: “Please grant acquittal for sins.”

The second aspect of Yom Kippur is *taharah* – catharsis or purification. As it is written: “For the virtue of this very day shall acquit you of sin, to cleanse you...” This, too, was brought out in the Yom Kippur Temple service. The High Priest pronounced to the assembled people: “Before God, be you cleansed.”

These two motifs recur repeatedly in all the prayers said on Yom Kippur. “Acquit us... pour cleansing waters upon us...”

Both of these elements, acquittal and purification, are a direct response and remedy for the ontological effects of sin. This is because sin places man under the burden of culpable liability and it defiles him as well.

In order to understand the concepts of *kapparah* and *taharah*, one must find out what is meant by liability and defilement which are brought about by sin.

Sin and its punishment are born together. No sin goes without its retribution, whether it be meted out by a terrestrial or a celestial court.

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The belief in reward and punishment is fundamental to Jewish belief: “A man who says that the Holy One, blessed be He, is lax in the execution of justice shall be disemboweled, for it is stated, He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are judgment” (Baba Kama 50a). And in the Torah it is written: “Know therefore that the Lord thy God is the faithful God who keeps covenant and shows mercy to those that love Him and keep His commandments to a thousand generations, and repays those that hate Him ... to destroy them” (Deuteronomy 7:9). Jewish creed is based on the belief in reward and punishment and on the conviction that sin is by no means a transitory phenomenon that passes by, leaving no trace and incurring no liability. Sin and punishment are always linked together. If you will, the very definition of sin is that it is an act that entails paying a penalty. If punishment exists, it is because sin does too.

Kapparah means forgiveness or withdrawal of claim. This is a legal concept, borrowed from the laws of property. Just as one may release his fellow man of a debt owed to him, so may God absolve one of penalty to which he is liable due to sin. *Kapparah* removes the need for punishment.

We find the first instance of *kapparah* in the story of the sin of Cain (Genesis 4:7). “If you shall do better,” God admonishes Cain, “the punishment will be carried over,” and if you do not, “sin (punishment) crouches at the opening.” The punishment is linked, understandably, to the sinful act. The Bible also speaks of the removal of sin. The prophet Nathan said to King David (2 Samuel 12:4): “The Lord has also removed your sin, you shall not die.” The medieval Bible commentator, Rashi, while explaining the verse in Genesis 32:21, observed that “whenever the term *kapparah* is used in connection with a matter of trespass and sin ... it has the connotation of wiping away and removal.” That is to say, a barrier is set up through which punishment may not pass. By means of *teshuvah* (repentance) and *kapparah* man puts a protective covering between himself and the punishment for his sin. According to Rashi, the words “*kapparah*” and “*kofer*” (indemnity payment) are derived from the same Hebrew root *k-f-r* and have a common signification. Punishment is not a self-negating phenomenon; an indemnity must be offered and paid in order to withdraw the liability claim. That

indemnity payment is made through *teshuvah* itself. *Kapparah* is the result of the payment of this “ransom” which releases and redeems man from punishment.

All this concerns the liability incurred by the sinner. The moment acquittal is granted and punishment wiped from the books, man’s liability is terminated.

However, sin also has a polluting quality. The Jewish view recognizes a state of “impurity of sin” (*tum’at haḥet*). The entire Bible abounds in references to this idea of self-pollution, contamination, rolling about in the mire of sin. This impurity makes its mark on the sinner’s personality. Sin, as it were, removes the divine halo from man’s head, impairing his spiritual integrity. In addition to the frequent appearance of this idea in Scripture and in the homiletical teachings of the Aggadah, we also find many concrete references to the “impurity of sin” in the Halakhah (Jewish law).

An Israelite who has transgressed suffers a reversal in his legal status. Should a man commit a prohibited act and be charged with stripes or capital punishment, not only does he have to pay the penalty for his sins, he is also discredited as a witness in a court of Jewish law. This does not constitute further punishment but is rather indicative of a change in his personal status. As a result of sin, man is not the same person he was before. Every man is presumed acceptable as a credible witness. Natural truthfulness is, to my way of thinking, an integral part of man’s character. The moment a person sins he lessens his own worth, brings himself down and becomes spiritually defective, thus foregoing his former status. Sin deprives man of his natural privileges and unique human attributes. He is subjected to a complete transformation as his original personality departs, and another one replaces it. This is not a form of punishment, or a fine, and is not imposed in a spirit of anger, wrath or vindictiveness. It is a “metaphysical” corruption of the human personality, of the divine image of man.

The communists speak of the commission of “error” and of “deviation,” but have no concept of sin. Error carries no implication of metaphysical impurity or of psychic pollution. An “error” is a legal, rational term which must be distinguished from “sin” which harms the inner quality of man and has a deep and far-reaching effect on his being.

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Indeed true *teshuvah* not only achieves *kapparah*, it should also bring about *taharah* from *tum'ah* (spiritual pollution), liberating man from his hard-hearted ignorance and insensitivity. Such *teshuvah* restores man's spiritual viability and rehabilitates him to his original state.

And sometimes it makes man rise to heights he never dreamed he could reach.

PURIFICATION IMPOSSIBLE BY PROXY

According to Rabbi Judah HaNasi, commonly known as Rabi, the Day of Atonement procures acquittal of sin even for those who have not repented individually (Yoma 84b). The question arises: May a Jew who has sinned, and, as a result, been discredited as a witness in a court of law, be accepted as a qualified witness on the day after Yom Kippur, even if he has not personally repented? The emphatic answer is: No. *Kapparah* affects the removal of punishment. The "indemnity payment" shields man from divine anger and wrath. However, his personality remains contaminated, and this condition may be remedied only through ritual "immersion," that is, by wholehearted repentance. *Kapparah* is possible even when an individual has not repented: but without personal repentance *taharah* is unthinkable.

Kapparah is principally connected to the bringing of sacrifices, and in the Holy Temple the prescribed time for offerings were the daylight hours. Ritual purification, in contrast, begins with nightfall, at the "sanctification of the day" – that time when, according to Jewish law, a new day is born.

Purification is conditional upon our drawing near and standing directly "before God," and as such it is a spiritually uplifting experience.

There are two forms of confession on Yom Kippur: a communal, public confession and personal, private one. After the destruction of the Temple, the communal recitation of confession by the synagogue reader was substituted for that of the High Priest. However, the intimate, personal type of confession of a broken man, directed inward to himself, remained exclusively in the area of individual responsibility. This is the confession that brings about purification. The communal confession, which is for *kapparah*, should be said together with the synagogue reader.

However, it is impossible to appoint an intermediary in order to achieve self-purification as it is by definition clearly a personal obligation. It is absurd from the point of view of Jewish law for a ritually impure person to send an appointed agent to immerse himself in the former's behalf. No one can grant another power of attorney to deliver him from a state of impurity and restore him to a state of holiness.

This is the way it was in the time of the Temple where the High Priest would "direct his attention to those who were assembled" and say, in effect: "We, the Temple priests, are engaged in the performance of those precepts which concern the sacrificial service of the day of Yom Kippur whereby acquittal of sin, *kapparah*, is granted. However, the act of purification is something you must perform by yourselves, each man in his own heart." And he would then say: "Be you cleansed!"

For this reason, the confession of the *Minhah* (afternoon) service on the eve of Yom Kippur, whose purpose is purification, is not recited by the synagogue reader, for "one cannot appoint an intermediary for purification." Every Jew must enter within the "holiness of the day" as an individual and stand as he is "before God." As the nightfall of Yom Kippur approaches, each person listens to the inner voice that calls on him to "be cleansed."

The Mishnah teaches us: "Rabbi Akiba said: Fortunate are you, Israel! Who is it before whom you become clean? And who is it that makes you clean? Your Father who is in heaven" (Yoma 8:9).

It seems certain that Rabbi Akiba said this soon after the fall of the Second Temple. To understand the full meaning of his words, we must try to picture the mentality and broken spirit of the Jews in that first year after the destruction of the Temple. Yom Kippur had arrived and suddenly the people realized that there would be no sacrificial service, the High Priest could not enter the Holy of Holies, there was no incense, no public celebration for the High Priest as he emerged from the holy place. They were deprived of the entire sacred service which took place on Yom Kippur when the Temple was standing. They felt that all they cherished was lost and that there was no hope of repairing the damage. It seemed as though they would remain plunged forever within the deep darkness enclosing them. It was then that Rabbi Akiba declared: "Fortunate are you, O Israel, before whom do you cleanse

yourselves?” You may achieve a state of spiritual cleanliness even without the sacrificial service of the High Priest. Comply with the directive “*Be cleansed before God*” and this will suffice. Come and stand “before God.” Sense His nearness and you will be cleansed.

“Who cleanses you? Your Father in heaven. For just as a ritual immersion purifies the unclean, so does the Holy One, blessed be He, cleanse Israel...” Man must come before God and enter into the sanctity of Yom Kippur in the same manner that he immerses himself in a ritual bath. He must enter wholly without any interposition, not excluding any part of his being.

“Before God be cleansed!” “For the virtue of this day shall acquit you of sin to cleanse you.” In Hebrew the syntax of the phrase “will acquit you of sin *to cleanse you*” has the same implication as the verse in Genesis which says, “which God created *to do*,” meaning that which God created and made; so, too, in this case, it may be read as saying, “He will acquit you of sin and cleanse you.”

THE PATH OF SINNERS AND THE PATH OF SIN

The main feature of repentance is confession. There are, as stated before, two categories of confession: one, whose purpose is *kapparah*, and the other which has as its goal *taharah*. Although their liturgical formulation is identical, repentance of acquittal is actually quite different from repentance of purification.

The Talmud lists those who are disqualified as credible witnesses and mentions dice players (including checkers players), usurers and gamblers on pigeon races among them. The Talmud then poses the question: “Dice players ... when are they considered to have repented? When they break up their checkers and undergo a complete reformation, to the extent that they will not play even as a pastime ... And a usurer? ... When he tears up his credit slips and undergoes a complete reformation refusing to lend on interest, even to an idol worshiper. Pigeon trainers: that is those who race pigeons When may they be reinstated? When they break up their pegmas (pigeon traps) and undergo a complete reformation to the extent that they will not practice their vice, even in the wilderness” (Sanhedrin 25b; cf. Maimonides’ formulation, Laws of Testimony, Chapter 1, Sections 5–8).

The above violations center on the prohibition of theft and robbery. Why, then, is not repentance considered an accomplished fact as soon as the sinner regrets his wrongdoings and ceases to engage in those fraudulent, thieving practices? Playing dice for free, lending money with interest to an idol worshiper and setting up a pigeon trap in the desert are not forbidden by law. Why is not the repentance of these sinners a “complete return” until they literally break their dice, tear up their loan contracts and dismantle their pigeon traps?

It is interesting to note that Maimonides did not deal with this issue under the Laws of Repentance, but rather within the Laws of Testimony. This is because readmissibility as a witness depends upon the achievement of purification from sin which involves much more than repentance which brings acquittal, dealt with in the chapter on the Laws of Repentance. All that is required for acquittal is the sinner’s regret of past actions and his resolution not to return to his folly.

However, repentance of purification necessitates a complete breaking away from the environment, the contributing factors and all the forces which created the atmosphere of sin. For repentance of purification, which restores man to his primary condition of integrity, man is required to break the dice, tear up the deeds and burn all the bridges leading to the world of sin which he has left behind him.

Thus we see that there are two levels of separation – the first, from sin and the second, divergence from the path leading to sin. Sin is not created *ex nihilo nihil*. Evildoing is the product of a certain atmosphere, of favorable conditions – flattery of men in positions of power, indolence, imagined or real fear, weakness or spinelessness; such is “the path of sin.”

Even when we do not actually commit a wrongdoing, we often find ourselves on the “path of sin.” Along the sides of this road, sin is permitted to bud, flower, bear fruit and take root. Like any other organic creation, sin requires an environment in which it can flourish, absorb nourishment, and thrive under the warm rays shining down upon it, as does a sprouting tree.

For acquittal of sin (*kapparah*), remorse is sufficient. Only a person who actually commits a transgression needs to seek *kapparah*. However, in regard to purification, abandoning the act of sin is only a partial remedy. Refraining from sin in accordance with what is specifically

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forbidden in the law is necessary, but more than that is demanded. One must turn away from any temptation to walk in the “path of sin” – “Let the wicked man leave off his way and the man of evil deed his thoughts...”

The reference here is not to refrain from sin itself, but to avoid the path leading toward it and away from it. The verse does not speak of “sinful thoughts” but just of “thoughts” which means man’s entire way of thinking, his world concept, the intellectual obscurity and emotional ambivalence which combine to create sin and then cast man within it as though into a dungeon.

“A new heart and a new spirit” come about only by means of departure from the path of sin, which is considered complete return, while separation from sinful acts is all that is necessary in order to achieve *kapparah*, acquittal.

ABUNDANT LOVING-KINDNESS AND TRUTH

In the teachings of the Kabbalah there is a discussion whether, when a man repents and has his sin retroactively erased, it is derived from the divine attribute of loving-kindness or that of judgment; is it due to the divine attribute of mercy or that of truth and justice?

Scripture and the teachings of our Sages contain statements which support both sides of the argument. An example of repentance being accepted due to the quality of loving-kindness is demonstrated in the case of Menashe, King of Israel, “for whom the Holy Blessed One tunneled an underpass beneath the throne of glory,” though he did not meet the criterion of strict judgment. And in the Jerusalem Talmud the very possibility of repentance is attributed directly to the Holy One. For God is good and upright, therefore He instructs sinners in the right path (Psalms 25:8). They inquired of Wisdom, “What is the punishment of a sinner?” Wisdom said, “Evil pursues the wicked.” They asked Prophecy, “What is the punishment of the sinner?” Prophecy said to them, “The sinful soul shall die.” They asked the Holy One, and He said, “Let him return and be forgiven” (Jerusalem Talmud, Makkot 2:6).

In the Torah, repentance appears several times, but it is mainly elaborated on in the incident of the Golden Calf, where we find the thirteen divine attributes which are recited in the prayers of Yom Kippur, the day of divine compassion. They include “abundant loving-kindness

and truth” from which we may infer that repentance not only is due to loving-kindness but is also related to the divine attribute of truth.

As a matter of fact, repentance encompasses both of these principles. The repentance of acquittal emanates from *hesed*, abundant loving-kindness. If a man regrets his sin but does not yet abandon the path of sin, he is not considered cleansed of the pollution within him. His decision not to sin was probably motivated by the fear of punishment. Even so, the Holy Blessed One accepts his repentance and acquits him. Certainly, this may be considered the work of the attribute of loving-kindness.

In contradistinction, repentance which fills the qualifications of the attribute of strict judgment and truth can only be achieved through complete purification. This repentance is acceptable, for the sin which polluted man disappears as though it never existed, since man has proven himself to be, what is considered in the words of Maimonides, “another person.” It is as though he has undergone a complete transformation. How, then, can sins committed by someone else be counted against him? Through repentance of purification man is reborn and he gains a new heart, a renewed spirit, another outlook on life and different horizons. One man enters the bath of ritual immersion and another emerges from the water. The sinful person emerges as a pure one. And, indeed, our Sages have pointed out that changing one’s name is especially beneficial for penitents.

A TIME TO SPEAK AND A TIME TO BE SILENT

If one visits the home of a penitent and sees that the dice are still on the table, the dove-cotes still standing in a corner and the usurious loan deeds still lying in a drawer, then it is obvious that he has not as yet broken his will so as to allow for rehabilitation. He has not as yet reordered his environment or changed his habits. Even so, one may ask what brought about his return to God in the first place? Why doesn’t he sin and lapse into his folly again?

It seems certain that his return was not promoted by his conscience. Had he given a full account of his deeds and faced all the implications of his behavior, he would undoubtedly have reached the spiritual level of repentance of purification. However, it is evident we are speaking of someone who attained only repentance of acquittal. What