

Teshuva and Personal Identity

Source 1 Leviticus 16:30

For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you; from all your sins shall ye be clean before the LORD.

Source 2 Mishna Torah, Laws of Testimony Chapter 12 (Based upon Tractate Sanhedrin 25b)

Halacha 5: When is it considered that people who lend money at interest have repented? When they tear up their promissory notes on their own volition and manifest complete regret over their actions to the extent that they do not lend money at interest even to gentiles.

Halacha 6: When is it considered that dice-players have repented? When they break their dice on their own volition and manifest complete regret over their actions to the extent that they do not even play without monetary stakes.

Halacha 7: When is it considered that those who guide the flight of doves have repented? When they break the tools they use to snare them and manifest complete regret over their actions to the extent that they do not do this even in the desert.

Halacha 8: When is it considered that merchants of produce in the Sabbatical year have repented? When the Sabbatical year arrives, they are investigated and it is discovered that they did not sell such produce. Expressing regret verbally is not sufficient. Instead, they must compose a document, stating: "I, so-and-so, the son of so-and-so, earned 200 zuz from the sale of the produce of the Sabbatical year and this sum is given as a present to the poor."

Source 3 Rav Soloveitchik, p. 65

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~~ ^{that} 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 to burn all the bridges leading to the world of sin which he has left behind him.

Source 4, Isaiah 55:7

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the man of iniquity his thoughts; and let him return unto the LORD, and He will have compassion upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

Source 5, Rav Soloveitchik, p. 65

The reference here is not to refrain from sin itself, but to avoid the path leading towards 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.

Source 6, Ezekiel 36:26

A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.

Source 7, Rav Soloveitchik, p. 65

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

Source 8, Rav Soloveitchik, p. 67

The repentance of acquittal emanates from *hessed*, abundant lovingkindness. 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 lovingkindness.

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.

Source 9, John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book 1, Chapter 27

9. Personal identity. This being premised, to find wherein personal identity consists, we must consider what person stands for; - which, I think, is a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking, and, as it seems to me, essential to it; it being impossible for any one to perceive without perceiving that he does perceive. When we see, hear, smell, taste, feel, meditate, or will anything, we know that we do so. Thus it is always as to our present sensations and perceptions: and by this every one is to himself that which he calls self: - it not being considered, in this case, whether the same self be continued in the same or divers substances. For, since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that which makes every one to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things, in this alone consists personal identity, i.e. the sameness of a rational being: and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person; it is the same self

now it was then; and it is by the same self with this present one that now reflects on it, that that action was done....

20. Absolute oblivion separates what is thus forgotten from the person, but not from the man. But yet possibly it will still be objected, - Suppose I wholly lose the memory of some parts of my life, beyond a possibility of retrieving them, so that perhaps I shall never be conscious of them again; yet am I not the same person that did those actions, had those thoughts that I once was conscious of, though I have now forgot them? To which I answer, that we must here take notice what the word I is applied to; which, in this case, is the man only. And the same man being presumed to be the same person, I is easily here supposed to stand also for the same person. But if it be possible for the same man to have distinct incommunicable consciousness at different times, it is past doubt the same man would at different times make different persons; which, we see, is the sense of mankind in the solemnest declaration of their opinions, human laws not punishing the mad man for the sober man's actions, nor the sober man for what the mad man did,- thereby making them two persons: which is somewhat explained by our way of speaking in English when we say such an one is "not himself," or is "beside himself"; in which phrases it is insinuated, as if those who now, or at least first used them, thought that self was changed; the selfsame person was no longer in that man...

22. But is not a man drunk and sober the same person? Why else is he punished for the fact he commits when drunk, though he be never afterwards conscious of it? Just as much the same person as a man that walks, and does other things in his sleep, is the same person, and is answerable for any mischief he shall do in it. Human laws punish both, with a justice suitable to their way of knowledge; - because, in these cases, they cannot distinguish certainly what is real, what counterfeit: and so the ignorance in drunkenness or sleep is not admitted as a plea. For, though punishment be annexed to personality, and personality to consciousness, and the drunkard perhaps be not conscious of what he did, yet human judicatures justly punish him; because the fact is proved against him, but want of consciousness cannot be proved for him. But in the Great Day, wherein the secrets of all hearts shall be laid open, it may be reasonable to think, no one shall be made to answer for what he knows nothing of, but shall receive his doom, his conscience accusing or excusing him.

Source 10, Rav Soloveitchik, p. 271

Sometimes, one will 'erase' certain years of a lifetime. Ex-convicts, for example, tend to completely forget the years they spent behind bars. They simply decide to erase those years from their past. 'Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him' (Genesis 40:23). He did remember, and, actually, wanted to blot out of his memory the whole unpleasant period he spent in jail, probably because he wanted to forget that he had ever been in prison.

Source 11, Tzidkat Hatzadik, 99

A sign of complete teshuva is when the person cannot remember his sin at all. So is it written in Tractate Baba Metzia (58b), that you shouldn't say to a baal teshuva, 'Remember [your previous deeds] etc.' And similarly Hashem, Blessed is He, doesn't remind the complete baal teshuva [of his previous deeds], and, consequently, the baal teshuva no longer remembers himself. For all of the powers of man come from Hashem, Blessed is He ... And so too the powers of cognition and memory; and, if Hashem, Blessed is He, doesn't overflow to him and remind him, he will not remember.

And, in Tana D'bei Eliahu Raba, [we're taught] that, in the future, the Holy One Blessed be He will say, 'I do not remember his sins, and they do not rise up in my heart.' And our sages have said [in Shir Hashirim Rabba] that the Holy One Blessed be He is the heart of Israel ... consequently, [the sins] also won't rise up in the heart of man – and this is a fraction of the world to come.

All the while that person hasn't arrived to the depths of this sort of teshuva, which is the purpose and completion of atonement, he will not be at ease, and of this King David, peace be upon him, spoke, 'Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity ... For I know my transgressions.' A person has to say to himself, 'my sin is ever before me' (Psalms 51:5).

Source 12, Psalm 51

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness. O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.

Source 13, Rav Soloveitchik, p. 271-2

An 'operation' of this sort is not easily carried out. A man of fifty or sixty years of age can by no means erase in a moment a third, or a half, or even three-quarters of his life. What, then, should he do, if wants to repent at this stage of his life? Can he go on identifying himself with those years of sin? If he does so, it is as if he admits the existence of evil and acknowledges it as one of his permanent personality traits.

Source 14, Bernard Williams, 'The Self and the Future'

Let us now consider something apparently different. Someone in whose power I am tells me that I am going to be tortured tomorrow. I am frightened, and look forward to tomorrow in great apprehension. He adds that when the time comes, I shall not remember being told that this was going to happen to me, since shortly before the torture something else will be done to me which will make me forget the announcement.

This certainly will not cheer me up, since I know perfectly well that I can forget things, and that there is such a thing as indeed being tortured unexpectedly because I had forgotten or been made to forget a prediction of the torture: that will still be a torture which, so long as I do know about the prediction, I look forward to in fear. He then adds that my forgetting the announcement will be only part of a larger process: when the moment of torture comes, I shall not remember any of the things I am now in a position to remember. This does not cheer me up, either, since I can readily conceive of being involved in an accident, for instance, as a result of which I wake up in a completely amnesiac state and also in great pain; that could certainly happen to me, I should not like it to happen to me, nor to know that it was going to happen to me. He now further adds that at the moment of torture I shall not only not remember the things I am now in a position to remember, but will have a different set of impressions of my past, quite different from the memories I now have. I do not think that this would cheer me up, either. For I can at least conceive the possibility, if not the concrete reality, of going completely mad, and thinking perhaps that I am George IV or somebody; of being told that something like that was going to happen to me would have no tendency to reduce the terror of being told authoritatively that I was going to be tortured, but would merely compound the horror. Nor do I see why I should be put into any better frame of mind by the person in charge adding lastly that the impressions of my past with which I shall be equipped on the eve of torture will exactly fit the past of another person now living, and that indeed I shall acquire these impressions by (for instance) information now in his brain being copied into mine. Fear, surely, would still be the proper reaction: and not because one did not know what was going to happen, but because in one vital respect at least one knows what was going on – torture, which one can indeed expect to happen to oneself, and to be proceeded by certain mental derangements as well.

Source 15, Tractate Yoma 86b

Resh Lakish said: Great is repentance, for because of it premeditated sins are accounted as errors, as it is said: Return, O Israel, unto the Lord, thy God,' for thou hast stumbled in thy iniquity. 'Iniquity' is premeditated, and yet he calls it 'stumbling' But that is not so! For Resh Lakish said that repentance is so great that premeditated sins are accounted as though they were merits, as it is said: And when the wicked turneth from his wickedness, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby! That is no contradiction: One refers to a case [of repentance] derived from love, the other to one due to fear.

Source 16, Rav Soloveitchik, p. 275

In light of this, Resh Lakish's comments which were cited earlier can now be understood. 'Great is repentance that causes premeditated sins to be accounted as errors.' Resh Lakish was here referring to repentance by means of which sin is annihilated. Such repentance erases sins, but it has no creative power and does not germinate or give life to anything new. Premeditated sins are accounted as errors, as though they never took place at all. They are wiped away. But in his second comment Resh Lakish said that 'repentance is so great that premeditated sins are accounted as though they were merits,' and here he was referring to repentance by means of which sin is elevated and exalted. This motivates man to fulfil the precepts with a vigor and a zest lacking before he sinned and causes him to study Torah in a different manner.

Source 17, Mei Shiloach, Parshat Ki Tavo

'Telling' or *hagada* in Hebrew, hints at difficult things. With this he will say difficult things before the Cohen. He hints to him that even though the Cohen works in the Holy Temple and he works in the fields, nevertheless, when this soul of Israel reaches the place of the Temple and brings *bikkurim*, first fruit offerings, then it becomes perfectly clear that any place and action, no matter how simple, was done in a state of *kedusha*, it was like the service of the Cohen.