



# **The Journey Toward Repentance and Forgiveness**

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Dr. Diamond is the author of a chapter on the rabbinic period in the *Schocken Guide to Jewish Books*, and entries in the *Reader's Guide to Judaism* and *The Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*. He is the author of *Holy Men and Hunger Artists: Fasting and Asceticism in Rabbinic Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2003). The book provides a thorough reassessment of the role that asceticism plays in rabbinic Judaism, suggesting that asceticism is more pervasive than is generally thought. Dr. Diamond has written on prayer, asceticism, and issues of environmental law and ethics. He is currently editing a commentary on *Yerushalmi Pesahim* written by the late Professor Louis Ginzberg, as well as a book on prayer. The prayer volume will address the problem of cognitive dissonance for the contemporary worshipper and will offer readings of traditional liturgy that use midrashic methodology to find meaning and relevance in these prayers for the modern Jew. Dr. Diamond has taught in a variety of settings, including Stern College, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, the 92nd Street Y, and several Ramah camps. Dr. Diamond was ordained at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University and received his doctorate in Talmud from JTS.

- I. *Teshuvah* means both to turn away from something and to turn towards something or someone.

What are the components of *teshuva*, repentance?

- 1) עזיבת החטא (*Azivat Hahet*) – Turning away from sin
- 2) וידוי (*Vidui*) – Acknowledging culpability and “naming” our sin
- 3) Acknowledging the consequences of our sin for others, materially and emotionally, including an awareness that some of the consequences of our sin cannot be undone
- 4) חרטה (*Haratah*) – Experiencing remorse and shame
- 5) בקשת מחילה (*Bakashat Mehilah*) – Asking for forgiveness, which means that one acknowledges that it is in the power of the wronged party whether or not to forgive
- 6) Offering an apology that encompasses all of the above
- 7) Making restitution when possible
- 8) קבלה על העתיד (*Kabalah al HeAtid*) – *Tiqqun* or repair through self-transformation

- II. *Mehilah* or forgiveness means to be willing not to collect a debt that one is owed

I. Teshuva

A. עזיבת החטא (*Azivat Hahet*) – turning away from sin

1. Mishnah Yoma 8, 9

<p>If a person says: I will sin and repent, sin again and repent again – such a person is not afforded the opportunity to repent.</p>	<p>האומר אחטא ואשוב אחטא ואשוב אין מספיקין בידו לעשות תשובה</p>
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2. Ta'anit 16a

<p>Rav Adda bar Ahava said: A person who has a transgression in his hand, and he confesses but does not repent for his sin, to what is he comparable? To a person who holds in his hand a dead reptile. In this situation, even if he immerses in all the waters of the world, his immersion is ineffective for him. However, if he has thrown the animal from his hand, once he has immersed in a ritual bath of forty se'a, the immersion is immediately effective for him.</p> <p>As it is stated: "He who covers his transgressions shall not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them shall obtain mercy" (Proverbs 28:13). And it states elsewhere: "Let us lift up our heart with our hands to God in Heaven" (Lamentations 3:41).</p>	<p>אמר רב אדא בר אהבה : אדם שיש בידו עבירה, ומתודה ואינו חוזר בה למה הוא דומה - לאדם שתופס שרץ בידו, שאפילו טובל בכל מימות שבעולם - לא עלתה לו טבילה. זרקו מידו, כיון שטבל בארבעים סאה - מיד עלתה לו טבילה, שנאמר ומודה ועזב ירחם, ואומר נשא לבבנו אל כפים אל אל בשמים.</p>
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B. Vidui (Vidui) – Acknowledging culpability and “naming” our sin

Maimonides, Laws of Repentance, Chapter 1 Halakhah 1

All commandments of the Torah, whether they be mandatory or prohibitive, if a man violates any one of them, either presumptuously or erroneously, when he will repent himself and turn away from his sinful way, he is obliged to confess before the Blessed Holy One even as it is said: "When a man or woman shall commit any sin..... Then they shall confess their sin which they have done ([Num. 5.6–7](#)), which is a confession of words.

Such confession is a mandatory commandment.

How is the verbal confession made? The sinner says thus: "I beseech Thee, O Great Name! I have sinned; I have been obstinate; I have committed profanity against Thee, particularly in doing thus and such. Now, behold! I have repented and am ashamed of my actions; forever will I not relapse into this thing again." This is the elementary form of confession; but whosoever elaborates in confessing and extends this subject is, indeed, praise-worthy. Likewise all those who bring sin-

כָּל מִצְוֹת שֶׁבְּתוֹרָה בֵּין עֲשָׂה בֵּין  
לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה אִם עָבַר אָדָם עַל  
אַחַת מֵהֶן בֵּין בְּזָדוֹן בֵּין בְּשִׁגְגָה  
כְּשִׁיעֲשֶׂה תְּשׁוּבָה וַיָּשׁוּב מִחֲטָאוֹ  
חָיָב לְהִתְנַדָּוֹת לְפָנֵי הָאֵל בְּרוּךְ  
הוּא שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "אִישׁ אִו אֲשֶׁה כִּי  
יַעֲשׂוּ" וְגו' ([במדבר ה ו](#)) "וְהִתְנַדָּו  
אֶת חַטָּאתָם אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ" ([במדבר  
ה ז](#)) זֶה וְדוּי דְּבָרִים.

וְדוּי זֶה מִצְוֹת עֲשָׂה.

כִּי צַד מִתְנַדָּוִין. אֹמֵר אָנָּה הַשֵּׁם  
חַטָּאתִי עֲוִיתִי פָשַׁעְתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ  
וְעָשִׂיתִי כָד וְכָד וְהָרִי נַחֲמֵתִי  
וּבִשְׁתִּי בְּמַעֲשֵׂי וּלְעוֹלָם אֵינִי  
חוֹזֵר לְדָבָר זֶה. וְזֶהוּ עֵקֶרוֹ שֶׁל  
וְדוּי. וְכָל הַמְרַבֵּה לְהִתְנַדָּוֹת  
וּמֵאֲרִיךְ בְּעֵנָן זֶה הָרִי זֶה מְשַׁבַּח.  
וְכֵן בְּעָלֵי חַטָּאוֹת וְאֲשָׁמוֹת בְּעֵת  
שֶׁמְבִיאִין קָרְבָּנוֹתֵיהֶן עַל שִׁגְגָתָן  
אוֹ עַל זְדוּנָן אֵין מִתְכַּפֵּר לָהֶן  
בְּקָרְבָּנִם עַד שִׁיעֲשׂוּ תְּשׁוּבָה  
וְיִתְנַדָּו וְדוּי דְּבָרִים שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר  
"וְהִתְנַדָּה אֲשֶׁר חָטָא עָלֶיהָ"

offerings or trespass-offerings, when they offer their sacrifices, whether for their errors or for their spitefulness, find no atonement in their sacrifices, unless they repent, and deliver themselves of a verbal confession, even as it is said: "He shall confess that he hath sinned in that thing" ([Lev. 5.5](#)) So, too, are the guilty upon whom the tribunal pronounced either a sentence of death or of stripes, who find no atonement either in their death or in being lashed unless they do repent and make verbal confession. Even he, who injures his friend or causes him damages in money matters, although he makes restitution of what he owes him, finds no atonement, unless he makes verbal confession and repents by obligating himself never to repeat this again, even as is said: "Any sin that man commits" ([Num. 5.6](#)).

(ויקרא ה ה). וְכֹן כָּל מַחֲיָבֵי  
מִיתוֹת בַּיַּת דִּין וּמַחֲיָבֵי מִלְּקוֹת  
אִין מִתְּכַפֵּר לָהֶן בְּמִיתָתָן אוֹ  
בְּלִקְוֹתָן עַד שְׂיַעֲשׂוּ תְּשׁוּבָה  
וְיִתְּנֻדוּ. וְכֹן הַחֹבֵל בְּחֵבֵרוֹ  
וְהַמְזִיק מִמוֹנוֹ אֶף עַל פִּי שְׂשֻׁלָּם  
לוֹ מֵה שֶׁהוּא חָיָב לוֹ אִינוֹ  
מִתְּכַפֵּר עַד שְׂיִתְּנֻדָּה וְיָשׁוּב  
מִלְּעֲשׂוֹת כְּזָה לְעוֹלָם שְׂנֵאָמַר  
"מִכָּל חַטָּאת הָאֵדָם" ([במדבר ה](#)  
ו).

C. Acknowledging the consequences of our sin for others, materially and emotionally, including an awareness that some of the consequences of our sin cannot be undone

Bava Mezia 58b

The Gemara relates that **the *tanna*** who recited *mishnayot* and *baraitot* in the study hall **taught a *baraita* before Rav Naḥman bar Yitzḥak: Anyone who humiliates another in public, it is as though he were spilling blood.** Rav Naḥman bar Yitzḥak **said to him: You have spoken well, as we see that** after the humiliated person blushes, **the red leaves his face and pallor comes** in its place, which is tantamount to spilling his blood. **Abaye said to Rav Dimi: In the West, i.e., Eretz Yisrael, with regard to what mitzva are they particularly vigilant?** Rav Dimi **said to him: They are vigilant in refraining from humiliating others, as Rabbi Ḥanina says: Everyone descends to Gehenna except for three.**

תני תנא קמיה דרב נחמן בר יצחק  
כל המלבין פני חבירו ברבים כאילו  
שופך דמים אי"ל שפיר קא אמרת  
דחזינא ליה דאזיל סומקא ואתי  
חוורא אמר ליה אביי לרב דימי  
במערבא במאי זהירי אי"ל באחוורי  
אפי דאמר רבי חנינא הכל יורדין  
לגיהנם חוץ משלשה

D. חרטה (*Haratah*) – Experiencing remorse and shame

R. Eliyahu Dessler (-1953), *Mikhtav Mei-Eliyahu*, Vol. 5, pp. 241-242

<p>It is clear that in order to ascend in the present [i.e., to rise above the sins of the past] one must regret one's actions in the past...In the <i>Şedah la-Derekh</i> of R. Menahem of Zerah it is written that <i>teshuva</i> consists of three components: leaving the path of sin, regret and bitterness, and acceptance for the future. It is the depth of regret that brings about change. One can rise above one's sins only if one's regret is robust. Without this, even if one leaves behind sinful behavior one will still feel the happiness that one experienced in the moment of one's sin; if so, where is one's ascension. Regret is an essential tool for rising above one's sins.</p>	<p>ברור הוא שכדי שתהיה עלייה בהווה צריכה להיות חרטה על העבר...ובצידה לדרך לר' מנחם בן זרח כתוב ששלשה דברים יש בתשובה: עזיבת דרך החטא, חרטה והתמרמרות, וקבלה להבא. עמקות החרטה היא שפועלת השינוי. דרך העלייה תתקיים רק אם חרטתו חזקה. בלי זה אם גם יעזוב החטא ישמח שהיתה לו בשעת חטאו, ואיה עלייתו? החרטה היא כלי המלאכה לעלייה.</p>
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E. בקשת מחילה (*Bakashat Mehilah*) – Asking for forgiveness, which means that one acknowledges that it is in the power of the wronged party whether or not to forgive

1. Laws of Repentance, Chapter 2 Halakhah 9

Teshuvah and Yom Kippur only for sins between man and God; for example, a person who ate a forbidden food or engaged in forbidden sexual relations, and the like. However, sins between man and man; for example, someone who injures a colleague, curses a colleague, steals from him, or the like will never be forgiven until he gives his colleague what he owes him and appeases him.

[It must be emphasized that] even if a person restores the money that he owes [the person he wronged], he must appease him and ask him to forgive him.

Even if a person only upset a colleague by saying [certain] things, he must appease him and approach him [repeatedly] until he forgives him.

אין התשובה ולא יום הכפורים  
מכפרין אלא על עבירות שביין  
אדם למקום כגון מי שאכל דבר  
אסור או בעל בעילה אסורה  
וכיוצא בהן. אבל עבירות שביין  
אדם לחברו כגון החובל את  
חברו או המקלל חברו או גוזלו  
וכיוצא בהן אינו נמחל לו לעולם  
עד שיתן לחברו מה שהוא חבב  
לו וירצהו. אף על פי שהחזיר לו  
ממון שהוא חבב לו צריך  
לרצותו ולשאל ממנו שימחל לו.  
אפלו לא הקניט את חברו אלא  
בדברים צריך לפייסו ולפגע בו  
עד שימחל לו. לא רצה חברו  
למחל לו מביא לו שורה של  
שלשה בני אדם מרעיו ופוגעין  
בו ומבקשין ממנו. לא נתרצה  
להן מביא לו שניה ושלישית. לא  
רצה מניחו והולך לו וזה שלא  
מחל הוא החוטא. ואם היה רבו  
הולך ובא אפלו אלו פעמים עד  
שימחל לו :



<p>If his colleague does not desire to forgive him, he should bring a group of three of his friends and approach him with them and request [forgiveness]. If [the wronged party] is not appeased, he should repeat the process a second and third time. If he [still] does not want [to forgive him], he may let him alone and need not pursue [the matter further]. On the contrary, the person who refuses to grant forgiveness is the one considered as the sinner.</p>	
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## 2. Pirke Avot 4, 18

<p>Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar said: Do not try to appease your friend during his hour of anger; Nor comfort him at the hour while his dead still lies before him; Nor question him at the hour of his vow; Nor strive to see him in the hour of his disgrace.</p>	<p>רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן אֶלְעָזָר אוֹמֵר, אַל תִּרְצֶה אֶת חֲבֵרְךָ בְּשַׁעַת כַּעַסוֹ, וְאַל תִּנְחַמְנוּ בְּשַׁעַת שְׁמִיתוֹ מִטָּל לְפָנָיו, וְאַל תִּשְׁאַל לוֹ בְּשַׁעַת נְדָרוֹ, וְאַל תִּשְׁתַּדַּל לְרְאוֹתוֹ בְּשַׁעַת קִלְקֻלָּתוֹ :</p>
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F. קבלה על העתיד (*Kabalah al HeAtid*) – *Tiqqun* or repair through self-transformation

1. Laws of Repentance 7, 6

<p>Great, indeed, is repentance for it brings man nigh to the Shekinah, even as it is said: "Return, O Israel, unto the Lord thy God" (<a href="#">Hosea, 14.2</a>); and it is further said: "Yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord" (<a href="#">Amos, 4.6</a>); and it is yet again said: "If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the Lord, yea, return unto Me" (<a href="#">Jer. 4.1</a>), as if saying: "If thou wilt turn in repentance ye will cleave unto Me". Repentance brings near the far apart. But yesterday this sinner was hateful to the presence of God, scorned, ostracized and abominate, and to-day he is beloved, desirable, companionable and a friend.</p>	<p>גְּדוֹלָה תְּשׁוּבָה שְׁמִקְרַבֶּת אֶת הָאָדָם לְשִׁכְיָנָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "שׁוּבָה יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ" (<a href="#">הושע יד ב</a>). וְנֶאֱמַר <a href="#">עמוס ד ו</a> "וְלֹא שִׁבַּתְּם עָדִי נְאֻם ה'". וְנֶאֱמַר "אִם תָּשׁוּב יִשְׂרָאֵל נְאֻם ה' אֵלַי תָּשׁוּב" (<a href="#">ירמיה ד א</a>). כְּלוּמַר אִם תִּחְזֹר בְּתְשׁוּבָה בִּי תִדְבֹק. הַתְּשׁוּבָה מְקַרְבֶּת אֶת הַרְחֹקִים. אֲמֵשׁ הִיָּה זֶה שְׁנֵאוֹי לְפָנַי הַמָּקוֹם מִשֶּׁקֶץ וּמִרְחָק וְתוֹעֵבָה. וְהַיּוֹם הוּא אֶהוּב וְנֶחְמָד קְרוֹב וְיָדִיד.</p>
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2. C.S. Lewis, Christian theologian and author

I think that if God forgives us, we must forgive ourselves. Otherwise, it is almost like setting up ourselves as a higher tribunal than Him.

II. *Mehila*/forgiveness

A. Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance, 2.10

<p>It is forbidden for a person to be cruel and refuse to be appeased. Rather, he should be easily pacified, but hard to anger. When the person who wronged him asks for forgiveness, he should forgive him with a complete heart and a willing spirit. Even if he aggravated and wronged him severely, he should not seek revenge or bear a grudge.</p>	<p>אָסוּר לְאַדָּם לְהִיּוֹת אַכְזָרִי וְלֹא יִתְפַּיֵּס אֶלָּא יִהְיֶה נוֹחַ לְרָצוֹת וְקָשָׁה לְכַעַס וּבְשִׁעָה שְׂמֵבִיקֵשׁ מִמֶּנּוּ הַחוּטֵא לְמַחֵל מוֹחֵל בְּלֵב שָׁלֵם וּבְנִפְשׁ חֲפִצָּה. וְאַפְלוּ הַיָּר לוֹ וְחָטֵא לוֹ הַרְבֵּה לֹא יִקָּם וְלֹא יִטֹר.</p>
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B. Leviticus 19:17-18

<p><sup>17</sup>You shall not hate your kinsfolk in your heart. Reprove your kinsman but incur no guilt because of him.<sup>18</sup>You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen. Love your fellow as yourself: I am the Lord.</p>	<p>(יז) לֹא־תִשְׁנֵא אֶת־אָחִיךָ בְּלִבְבְּךָ הוֹכַח תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת־עַמִּיתְךָ וְלֹא־תִשְׂא עָלָיו חֲטָא :          (יח) לֹא־תִקֹּם וְלֹא־תִטַּר אֶת־בְּנֵי עַמְּךָ וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ אֲנִי ה' :</p>
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C. Babylonian Talmud Tractate Yoma 23a

<p>...for it has been taught: What is revenge and what is bearing a grudge? If one said to his fellow: "Lend me your sickle", and he replied "No", and tomorrow the second comes [to the first] and says: "Lend me your axe!" and he replies: "I will not lend it to you, just as you would not lend me your sickle" — that is revenge. And what is bearing a grudge? If one says to his fellow: "Lend me your axe," he replies "No", and on the morrow the second asks: "Lend me your garment", and he answers: "Here it is. I am not like you who would not lend me [what I asked for]" — that is bearing a grudge</p>	<p>...דתניא : איזו היא נקימה ואיזו היא נטירה? נקימה, אמר לו : השאילני מגלך, - אמר לו : לאו. למחר אמר לו הוא : השאילני קרדומך! - אמר לו : איני משאילך, כדרך שלא השאלתני - זו היא נקימה. ואיזו היא נטירה? אמר לו : השאילני קרדומך! - אמר ליה : לא. למחר אמר לו : השאילני חלוקך! - אמר לו : הילך, איני כמותך, שלא השאלתני - זו היא נטירה...</p>
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...Has it not been taught: Concerning those who are insulted but do not insult others [in revenge], who hear themselves reproached without replying, who [perform good] work out of love of the Lord and rejoice in their sufferings, Scripture says: "But they that love Him be as the sun when it goes forth in its might" (Judges 5:31)?

[That means,] indeed, that he [may] keep [his anger and/or hurt feelings because of having been wronged] it in his heart [though without taking action].

But didn't Rava say: With regard to whoever forgoes his reckonings with others for injustices done to him, the heavenly court in turn forgoes punishment for all his sins?

Indeed, even a scholar who is insulted must forgive insults, but that is only in cases where his antagonist has sought to appease him, in which case he should allow himself to be appeased toward him.

תניא : הנעלבין ואינן עולבין ,  
שומעין חרפתן ואינן משיבין ,  
עושין מאהבה ושמחין ביסורין  
- עליהן הכתוב אומר ואהביו  
כצאת השמש בגברתו!

לעולם דנקיט ליה בליביה.

והאמר רבא : כל המעביר על  
מדותיו - מעבירין לו על כל  
פשעיו! - דמפייסו ליה ומפייס.

D. דוד אליקים בשבקיין, ברוגז רחם תזכור עמ' נח

David Bashevkin, *In Your Time of Anger Remember to be Compassionate*

דברים שבלב אינם דברים

כתוב בגליוני הש"ס להג"ר ר' יוסף ענגיל קידושין מט: ד"ה ודברים, וז"ל:

"המבייש את חברו ומחל לו בפיו אע"פ שלא מחל לו בלבו אמרינן

ביה דברים שבלב אינם דברים".

...If someone humiliates someone else and he says that he forgives him, even though he has not forgiven him in his heart we say that what is in the heart is of no consequence [i.e. it does not nullify the act of forgiveness]

E. Mishnah Avot – "Sayings of the Fathers"

<p><a href="#">Joshua</a> ben Perahiah and <a href="#">Nittai the Arbelite</a> received [the oral tradition] from them. <a href="#">Joshua</a> ben Perahiah used to say: appoint for thyself a teacher, and acquire for thyself a companion and judge all men with the scale weighted in his favor.</p>	<p>יהושוע בן פרחיה וניתאי הארבלי קיבלו מהם. יהושוע בן פרחיה אומר, עשה לך רב, וקנה לך חבר; והוי דן את כל האדם לכף זכות</p>
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F. Psalms 103:14

<p>For He knows how we are formed; He is mindful that we are dust.</p>	<p>כִּי־הוּא יָדַע יִצְרָנוּ זְכוֹר כִּי־עָפָר אֲנַחְנוּ:</p>
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