

THE EMOTIONS OF TESHUVÁ #2

RAV SOLOVEITCHIK



1)Halakhic Man, footnote 4

This popular ideology contends that the religious experience is tranquil and neatly ordered, tender and delicate; it is an enchanted stream for embittered souls and still waters for troubled spirits. The person “who comes in from the field, weary” (Gen. 25:29), from the battlefield and campaigns of life, from the secular domain which is filled with doubts and fears, contradictions and refutations, clings to religion as does a baby to its mother and finds in her lap “a shelter for his head, the nest of his forsaken prayers” [H.N. Bialik, “Hakhnisini tahat kenafekh”] and there is comforted for his disappointments and tribulations....

Religion is not, at the outset, a refuge of grace and mercy for the despondent and desperate, an enchanted stream for crushed spirits, but a raging clamorous torrent of man’s consciousness with all its crises, pangs, and torments. Yes, it is true that during the third Sabbath meal at dusk, as the day of rest declines and man’s soul yearns for its Creator and is afraid to depart from that realm of holiness whose name is Sabbath, into the dark and frightening, secular workaday week, we sing the psalm, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside the still waters” (Ps. 23), etc., etc., and we believe with our entire hearts in the ultimate destination of homo religiosus, not the path leading to that destination.

For the path that eventually will lead to the “green pastures” and to the “still waters” is not the royal road, but a narrow, twisting footway that threads its course along the steep mountain slope, as the terrible abyss yawns at the traveler’s feet... 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.




2)“For the Love of Torah and the Redemption of the Generation’s Soul”, Besod ha-Yahid vaha-Yahad, 427-428

Even though I have been a citizen of America for many years, I have still not developed for myself the pragmatic outlook toward religion. In my opinion, faith does not come to serve the needs of man... I never attempted to explain the Torah of Israel in the categories of mental health and peace of mind and similar things, even though this approach is popular today also amongst Jewish thinkers, observant and unobservant... My soul is repulsed by all these homilies that revolve around a single topic: observance of mitzvot is good for one’s digestion, for serene sleep, for peace in the family and for social standing.

The religious act is at its core an experience of suffering. When man meets with God in one’s room, he is claimed by God for self sacrifice that is expressed through a fight with one’s primitive desires, in the breaking of his will, with the acceptance of a transcendental burden, in giving up on an exaggerated desire for meat, with removing oneself at times from the pleasant and sweet and dedication to the bitter and strange when he clashes with the secular realm, and through his yearnings for a paradoxical world that is not understood by others.

Bring your sacrifice! That is the main commandment given to a religious person. The chosen ones of the nation, from the moment that they revealed God they were involved in constant



acts of sacrifices. Hashem says to Avraham: “Take now your son, your only one, that you love, Yitzhak,” meaning, “I am claiming from you the greatest sacrifice. I want your son that is your only one and that you love. Don’t fool yourself that after you listen to my command and bring your son as an Olah that I will give you another son in Yitzhak’s place. No other son will be born to you. Your existence will collapse into unparalleled loneliness. I want your son that has no replacement. Also, do not think that you will be able to forget Yitzhak and distract your mind from him. All of your days you will think about him. I am interested in your son that you love and that you will love forever. Nights bereft of sleep you will spend and you will scratch the wounds of your soul. And with all of this I am claiming from you this korbon.

3) Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Memories of a Giant*, 286

And what he said was very simple and fundamental. Yet it had never been said before. He said, “In the past, Jewish philosophy – *machshavet Yisrael* – and *halakhab* were two different things. They were disconnected.” “In truth,” he said, “they are only one thing and that one thing is – *halakhab*.” The only way you can think Jewishly and construct a Jewish philosophy, is out of *halakhab*. He gave me one example. He said, “You have read Professor A.J. Heschel’s book called *The Sabbath*?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “It’s a beautiful book, isn’t it?” I said, “Yes.” And he said, “What does he call Shabbat? – a sanctuary in time. This is an idea of a poet, it’s a lovely idea. But what is Shabbat? Shabbat,” he said, “is *lamed-tet melakbot*, it is the thirty-nine categories of work and their *toladot*, and it is out of that *halakhab* and not of poetry that you have to construct a theory of Shabbat.” That was his example.

4) *Man of Faith in the Modern World* Volume 2, pg. 92-95

There are three types of questions we may ask about any phenomenon. “Why” probes motivations to establish why things are the way they are; “how” seeks explanations as to how they function effectively; and “what” looks for interpretations to establish meaningfulness...

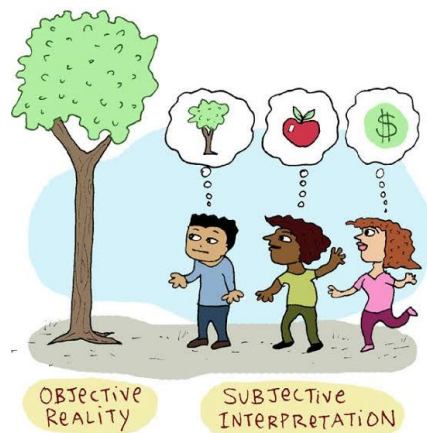
Asking “why” God issued certain commandments is seeking to comprehend the unfathomable

Asking “how” for *hukim* is also nonsensical...

Remaining is the third question, “what,” which inquires about the meaningfulness of particular *mitzvot* to the individual and society. This is a legitimate pursuit. Nay it may even be meritorious to inquire, “How can I integrate and assimilate this *mitzvah* into my religious consciousness and outlook?” What thoughts and emotions should I feel when the *Parah Adumah* chapter is read in the synagogue?” How can it help me achieve *devekut*, a greater closeness to God?”

5)The Halakhic Mind, pg. 101

In passing onward from the Halakha and other objective constructs to a limitless subjective flux, we might possibly penetrate the basic structure of our religious consciousness. We might also evolve cognitive tendencies and aspects of our world interpretations and gradually grasp the mysteries of the religious halakhic act. Problems of freedom, causality, God-man relationship, creation and nihility would be illuminated by halakhic principles.



6) כותרת להלכות תשובה

הלכות תשובה. מצות עשה אחת, והוא שישוב החוטא מחטאו לפני ה' ויתודה. וביאור מצוה זו ועיקרים הנגררים עמה בגללה בפרקים אלו

[This text describes] one mitzvah; that a sinner should repent from his sin before God and confess.

7) רמב"ם הלכות תשובה א:א

כל מצות שבתורה בין עשה בין לא תעשה אם עבר אדם על אחת מהן בין בזדון בין בשגגה כשיעשה תשובה וישוב מחטאו חייב להתודות לפני האל ברוך הוא שנאמר איש או אשה כי יעשו וגו' והתודו את חטאתם אשר עשו זה וידוי דברים, וידוי זה מצות עשה, כיצד מתודין

If a person transgresses any of the mitzvot of the Torah, whether a positive command or a negative command - whether willingly or inadvertently - when he repents, and returns from his sin, he must confess before God, blessed be, He as [Numbers 5:6-7] states: "If a man or a woman commit any of the sins of man... they must confess the sin that they committed."

This refers to a verbal confession. This confession is a positive command.

How does one confess...

8) On Repentance, "The Power of Confession," 71

Take, for example, the laws of mourning. According to the Mishna, "there is no mourning except in the heart" (Sanhedrin 6:6). Although there are specified acts related to mourning—not washing, not anointing oneself with oil, not wearing shoes, etc.—the precept can only be fulfilled within a person's heart.

The same is true of rejoicing, concerning which we have been commanded, "And thou shalt rejoice in thy feast." When the Temple in Jerusalem was in existence, the actual performance of this precept consisted of bringing sacrifices. Today it is performed by eating a festive meal with meats and wine, by wearing colorful clothes and by other deeds of this nature. But the precept cannot be fulfilled through performance of these external acts alone; its true fulfillment lies within the realm of the heart.



9) כותרת להלכות תפילה

הלכות תפילה וברכת כהנים. יש בכללן שתי מצוות עשה, אחת לעבוד את ה' בכל יום בתפילה,

[This text describes] two positive commandments:

a) Serving God daily with prayer;

10) רמב"ם הלכות תפילה פרק י הלכה א

מצוות עשה להתפלל בכל יום שנאמר ועבדתם את ה' אלהיכם

It is a positive Torah commandment to pray every day as [Exodus 23:25] states: "You shall serve God, your Lord."

11) On Repentance in the Thought and Oral Discourses of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik," translation of Al Ha-teshuva. Arranged by Pinchas H. Peli. "The Power of Confession," 75

"When one repents and turns away from his sin he is under a duty to confess," – here Maimonides is being consistent with his overall approach. Within the context of the laws themselves, he only deals with the object of repentance, with the deed...

But in the heading, in defining the precept, he emphasizes the internalized experience that is the essence of repentance, the painstaking process and soul-searching which brings man to "repent of his sin before God." And when repentance has ripened and reached full maturity, when he actually does repentance – "he shall confess." This is how repentance is indeed performed, but the fulfillment of inner repentance is a sine qua non which must precede it, for otherwise confession is not valid.

12) יומא לו:

ת"ר וכפר בכפרת דברים הכתוב מדבר אתה אומר בכפרת דברים או אינו אלא כפרת דמים, הרי אני דן נאמרה כאן כפרה ונאמרה להלן כפרה מה כפרה האמורה בשעיר דברים אף כפרה האמורה בפר דברים

§ The Sages taught in a halakhic midrash that it is written: “And Aaron is to offer his own bull as a sin-offering and atone for himself and for his household” (Leviticus 16:6). Apparently, the verse is speaking of atonement achieved through words of confession. Do you say it is atonement achieved through words, or perhaps it is only atonement achieved through sprinkling blood, as each mention of atonement associated with an offering involves the sprinkling of blood on the altar?

I will infer via a verbal analogy: Atonement is stated here, with regard to the bull of the sin-offering, and atonement is stated there, with regard to the scapegoat: “And the goat designated by the lottery for Azazel shall be left standing alive before God, to atone with it” (Leviticus 16:10). Just as the atonement that is stated with regard to the goat is atonement achieved through words, as neither is the goat slaughtered nor is its blood sprinkled on the altar, so too, the atonement stated with regard to the bull refers to atonement achieved through words.

13) On Repentance in the Thought and Oral Discourses of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik," translation of Al Ha-teshuva. Arranged by Pinchas H. Peli. "The Power of Confession," 91-

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It seems that there are two reasons why the Torah obligated the penitent to make confession.

Feelings, emotions, thoughts and ideas become clear, and are grasped only after they are expressed in sentences bearing a logical and grammatical structure. As long as one's thoughts remain repressed, as long as one has not brought them out into the open, no matter how sublime or exalted they may be, they are not truly yours; they are foreign and elusive.

But confession has still another dimension... confession is the act that brings man acquittal... Confession which is not merely a perfunctory verbalization of a set formula, but is bound up with tribulations of the soul and pangs of conscience, shall be deemed a sacrifice...

There are many things a man knows and thinks about which he does not dare bring to his lips. Man is stubborn by nature and builds fences within himself, sometimes refusing to acknowledge facts and denying harsh reality...

A man may know, without a shadow of a doubt, that he has sinned and is diverted from life's goals, having betrayed all of his values. He even knows why – but is not ready to say so openly or hear it from others... He lies awake at night and thinks about it; his soul cries out in the darkness; but in the light of day, in the eye of others, he seems happy and content. In order to hide the truth that is eating away inside of him, he continues to sin, picks up speed and rushes madly toward the brink of abyss.

Confession compels man – in a terrible state of torment – to admit facts as they really are, to give clear expression to the truth. This, indeed, is a sacrifice, a breaking of the will, a torturous negation of human nature. Both remorse and shame are involved in this process. “And teach us, O Lord our God, to confess before Thee all of our sins” – to look inward at the truth, to look ourselves straight in the eye, to overcome our mechanisms of self-defense, to smash the artificial barriers, to go against our natural inclinations to run and hide, to tear down the screen, to put into words what our hearts have already determined...

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.



14)Dr. David Shatz, “A Framework for Ish ha-Halakha,” *Turim: Studies in Jewish History and Literature Presented to Dr. Bernard Lander* Volume 2 ed. R Michael Shmidman, (New York, 1980), 196

Our analysis carries an important implication concerning Rabbi Soloveitchik's general strategy in *Ish ha-Halakha*. His philosophically inclined reader learns that when judiciously read, modern culture actually fortifies commitment. The very values which modern critics felt could be realized only by leaving the four walls of halakha, could, in fact, be achieved by

remaining squarely within them. It is as if modernity is being turned against itself; its value system is revealed not to oppose tradition, but to support it and vindicate it.

15)Halakhic Man, pg. 113

Here there comes to the fore the primary difference between the concept of repentance in Halakhah and the concept of repentance held by *homo religiosus*. The latter views repentance only from the perspective of atonement, only as a guard against punishment, as an empty regret which does not create anything, does not bring into being anything new. A deep melancholy afflicts his spirit. He mourns for the yesterdays that are irretrievably past, the times that have long since sunk into the abyss of oblivion, the deeds that have vanished like shadows, facts that he will never be able to change. Therefore, for *homo religiosus*, repentance is a wholly miraculous phenomenon made possible by the endless grace of the Almighty.

But such is not the case with halakhic man! Halakhic man does not indulge in weeping and despair, does not lacerate his flesh or flail away at himself. He does not afflict himself with penitential rites and forgoes all mortification of body and soul. Halakhic man is engaged in self-creation, in creating a new "I."
He does not...



16) קידושין מט:

על מנת שאני צדיק אפילו רשע גמור מקודשת שמא הרהר תשובה בדעתו

If one says to a woman: Be betrothed to me on the condition that I am a righteous man, then even if he was a completely wicked man she is betrothed, as perhaps in the meantime he had thoughts of repentance in his mind and is now righteous.

17)Halakhic Man, pg. 111

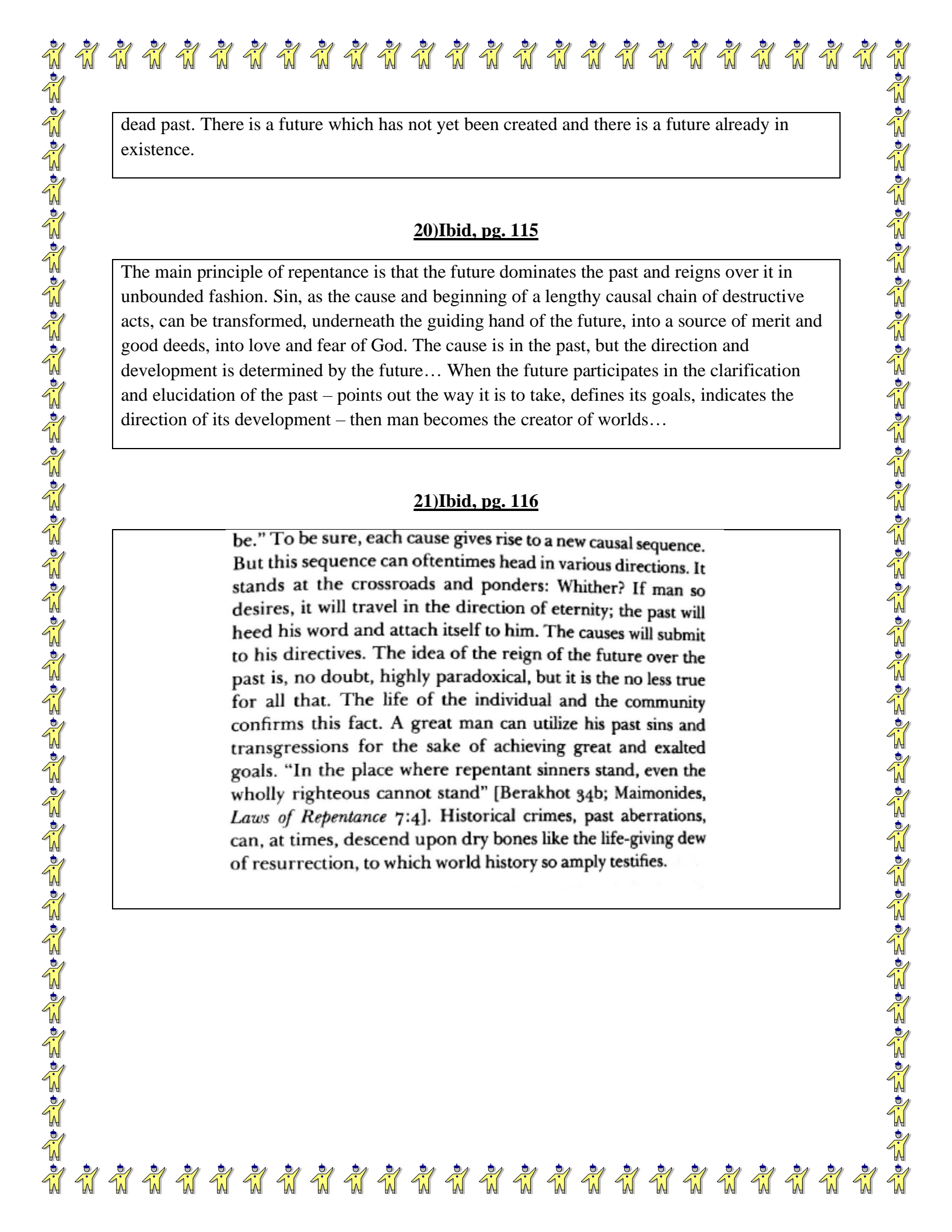
This contradiction requires examination. But in truth the Halakhah has posited two separate laws, two distinct principles,¹²⁰ with reference to repentance and its function. (1) Repentance may serve to divest the sinner of his status as a *rasha*, a wicked man. (2) Repentance may serve as a means of atonement like other means of atonement—sacrifices, the Day of Atonement, afflictions, death, and such like. The lack of verbal confession prevents repentance only from serving as a means of atonement, but it does not prevent it from divesting a sinner of his status as a *rasha*. Thus if one transgresses a negative command-

18)Ibid, pg. 112

knows all secrets will bear witness to this act of creation) Verbal confession is directed toward precipitating the bestowal of atonement. Atonement, however, is only a peripheral aspect of repentance. Its central aspect is the termination of a negative personality, the sinner's divesting himself of his status as a *rasha*—indeed, the total obliteration of that status. "Some of

19)Ibid, pg. 113

He does not fight shadows of a dead past nor does he grapple with deeds that have faded into away into a distance. Similarly, his resolve is not some vacuous decision made with regard to an obscure and distant future that has not yet arrived... There is a living past and there is a



dead past. There is a future which has not yet been created and there is a future already in existence.

20)Ibid, pg. 115

The main principle of repentance is that the future dominates the past and reigns over it in unbounded fashion. Sin, as the cause and beginning of a lengthy causal chain of destructive acts, can be transformed, underneath the guiding hand of the future, into a source of merit and good deeds, into love and fear of God. The cause is in the past, but the direction and development is determined by the future... When the future participates in the clarification and elucidation of the past – points out the way it is to take, defines its goals, indicates the direction of its development – then man becomes the creator of worlds...

21)Ibid, pg. 116

be.” To be sure, each cause gives rise to a new causal sequence. But this sequence can oftentimes head in various directions. It stands at the crossroads and ponders: Whither? If man so desires, it will travel in the direction of eternity; the past will heed his word and attach itself to him. The causes will submit to his directives. The idea of the reign of the future over the past is, no doubt, highly paradoxical, but it is no less true for all that. The life of the individual and the community confirms this fact. A great man can utilize his past sins and transgressions for the sake of achieving great and exalted goals. “In the place where repentant sinners stand, even the wholly righteous cannot stand” [Berakhot 34b; Maimonides, *Laws of Repentance* 7:4]. Historical crimes, past aberrations, can, at times, descend upon dry bones like the life-giving dew of resurrection, to which world history so amply testifies.

22) Dr. Daniel Rynhold and Dr. Michael J. Harris, “Modernity and Jewish Orthodoxy: Nietzsche and Soloveitchik on Life-Affirmation, Asceticism, and Repentance,” *Harvard Theological Review* 101:2 (2008), 284

Thinkers like Soloveitchik thus develop their religious worldview in a manner that simply does not conform to Nietzsche’s depiction of religion as a life-denying crutch for the weak and insipid. Rather, they write of a religion that is life-affirming and gives expression to many central Nietzschean “virtues” such as courage, creativity and the sublimation rather than extirpation of the passions.

