

# The Word 'Now'

## Reflections on the Psychology of Teshuva

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**We wanted this Rosh Hashana issue of L'Eylah to contain something *me'inyana de'yoma*, bearing on the themes of the Days of Penitence. In the following meditation, Jonathan Sacks writes about some of the psychological processes of, and barriers against, teshuva.**

With stunning insight, the sages found truth in a single word.

In a famous verse, Moses asks: "Now O Israel, what does God your Lord ask of you?" The sages added a cryptic comment: "The word 'now' means nothing other than teshuva."<sup>1</sup>

Normally we have some clue, in the verse itself or the semantics of the word, as to the logic of the interpretation. Here, though, the evidence is slim. True, the verse could be construed as a call to repentance: it follows Moses' reminder of the golden calf, Divine forgiveness, and the second set of tablets – given on Yom Kippur, the great symbol of reconciliation. But where is the connection between the word 'now' and teshuva? What have they to do with one another?

I found illumination from a most unusual source. My father once told me how he gave up smoking, the habit of a lifetime. He said: there is only one way. You take your cigarettes or your pipe and you throw them in the dustbin. You have to decide here and now to make the irrevocable gesture.

It's an experience I have since heard recounted many times by many people. They say, in effect, that to

break any longstanding habit or dependency, there has to be decisive 'Now'. Tomorrow is the enemy of teshuva.

Of all mitzvot, indeed of all ideas in Judaism, teshuva brings us most unremittingly to the bedrock psychological truth: that we are precisely what at any given moment we will ourselves to be. No historian whose concern is to explain the past, no scientist whose business is to predict the future, can deliver this particular truth, which belongs to the radical present. Teshuva insists that we can liberate ourselves from our past, defy predictions of our future, by a single act of turning... as long as we do it now.

A history of teshuva would contain some momentous 'now's. The moment when Akiva<sup>2</sup> decided to give up his life as a herdsman in favour of study, perhaps, or when Shimon ben Lakish<sup>3</sup> turned his back on a career as a gladiator. We know little of the inner and outer realities of these moments, but we do know that both Akiva and Resh Lakish were among the most lyrical spokesmen of the power of teshuva,<sup>4</sup> and it is hard to believe that they were not speaking from deep personal experience.

Wherever we are, we can change. This is surely *hakatu hashlishi*, the third and reconciling verse between the two clashing axioms of Judaism: that God has no image, and that man is made in the image of God. The conclusion, as inevitable as it is powerful, is that man, too, has no image. Unlike all else in creation, he

has no pre-given essence, no fated and ordained character. He is only what he chooses to be; and if he so chooses, he can change.

I sometimes wonder whether this was not the very point underlying another quite bewildering comment that the sages made in connection with the same verse: "Now O Israel, what does God your Lord ask of you *but to fear God your Lord*...?"

The Talmud records the following question and answer: "Is, then, the fear of God a small thing? Indeed yes: for Moses it was a small thing."<sup>5</sup>

What a powerful question. Moses speaks as if he were making an almost trivial demand. 'What does God ask of you but...?' Yet what he asks, the fear of heaven, is the greatest, not the least, of spiritual achievements.

And what a disconcerting reply. Perhaps for Moses, greatest of all men, it was a small thing. But this is not an answer at all, rather a restatement of the problem. If Moses was speaking not to himself but *to us*, how could he imply that what came easily to him might come equally easy to anyone?

However, in the same Talmudic passage and from the same verse the sages derived one of their most fundamental propositions. "R. Hanina said: Everything is in the hands of heaven except the fear of heaven, as it is said, 'What does God your Lord ask of you but to fear God your Lord?'"<sup>6</sup>

Meaning: there is one respect in which each of us has precisely the same strength as Moses. Namely, *the*

*strength to choose.* There is no hand of heaven – no physiological, genetic, psychological or Providential compulsion – that forces us to act one way rather than another. The fear of heaven is not in the hands of heaven; therefore the fear of heaven is as live an option to us as it was to Moses. Here is indeed a thing which, if it is small for Moses is small for us.<sup>7</sup>

Or as Maimonides writes in *Hilkhot Teshuva*: “Do not believe what the fools among the nations and the senseless of Israel say: that the Holy One, blessed be He, decrees whether a person will be righteous or wicked at the moment of his creation. It is not so. *Every person may become righteous like Moses our teacher, or wicked like Jeroboam.*”<sup>8</sup>

A small thing, yet a large challenge to our imagination.

No-one who has ever attempted to change others can have failed to sense the power of resistance which is set against teshuva. ‘I’m too old’. ‘I’m not ready yet’. ‘You are asking too much’. And the rabbi who is driven to despair does well to remember the words of R. Hayyim of Zans:

“In my youth, I thought I would convert the whole world to God. I did not succeed. Instead I discovered that it would be enough to convert the people who lived in my town. I did not succeed. Instead I discovered that it would be enough to convert my family; but I did not succeed. Then I discovered that it would be enough to convert myself. I am still trying.”

One half of teshuva, as defined by Maimonides, is always easy; the other painfully difficult. The easy half is to regret the past. The difficult half is genuinely to resolve to act differently in future. On Yom Kippur, the *viddui* comes fluently to our lips: *ashamnu, bagadnu*, with every letter of the aleph-bet we have sinned. But our resolutions are hesitant. There is no note, in the liturgy for Yom Kippur, of confidence in our ability to change.

There is therefore something striking in the way Maimonides constructs his definition of teshuva: “What is teshuva? It is this: that the sinner abandons his sin, removes it from his thoughts and resolves in his heart never to repeat it... Also he should regret the past, as it is said: ‘After I returned, I regretted’.”<sup>9</sup> The order is precise: first the resolution, and only then the remorse.<sup>10</sup> For without a determination to change,

regretting the past is mere self-pity; not yet a part of teshuva.

Commentators have often been puzzled by the structure of Maimonides’ Laws of Teshuva. In the opening four chapters he outlines the nature and procedures of repentance. In chapter seven he takes up his theme where he left it at the end of chapter four. In between, striking the eye as an apparent digression, are two chapters on freewill. Maimonides calls freewill “a cardinal principle, the pillar of Torah and the commandments”.<sup>11</sup> Yet many have asked: why expound it here, at this seemingly random point?

Brilliant speculations have been offered.<sup>12</sup> There might, though, be a more modest and straightforward solution.

In the fourth chapter Maimonides outlines ‘twenty-four things which impede teshuva’.<sup>13</sup> In some cases it is a matter of the gravity of the sin, in others because the sin is such as to drive a person from the environment of teshuva. Some are sins between man and man where it is difficult to make amends; others are offences which can seem too slight to merit repentance; and yet others are wrongs which are habit-forming.

There is a sequence here, from the objective to the subjective – from impediments which lie in the nature of the offence to those which lie in its effects on the mind. Teshuva can sometimes be formidably difficult. In two different ways. It can be difficult to put things right. Or it can be difficult to *summon the will* to put things right. Psychological barriers are no less real for being subjective.

Maimonides intended his two chapters on freewill to stand as a direct continuation of chapter four. There he considered the *specific* barriers to teshuva. Now he turns to the systematic and *general* barrier: the belief that, after all, we cannot change. We are what we were destined to be. We cannot be otherwise.

This is, he says, not merely a belief held by ‘fools of the nations’ but also by ‘most of the senseless folk of Israel’.<sup>14</sup> The belief takes different forms at different times. In Maimonides’ day it came from theology and astrology. Divine providence or the influence of the stars determined the kind of person we were. In our times it comes from the social and behavioural sciences:

we are the products of environmental conditioning or genetic programming.

Why does this theory have such a perennial appeal? At all times, its intellectual force is less significant than its psychological appeal. It provides us with a retreat from responsibility; in Erich Fromm’s phrase, an escape from freedom.

The function of determinism in all its forms is to *provide us with excuses*. All excuses are ways of seeing ourselves helpless in a mesh of forces that are beyond our control. Though we may bitterly regret what has happened in our life, the responsibility lay elsewhere. We say: we did what we could, but other people, or society, or force of circumstance, defeated us. The kind of talk, in other words, to be heard at all times from politicians. Politics is the art of making convincing excuses; because politics makes the mistake Chaim of Zans warns us about – trying to change the world without changing the individuals who compose the social world. Judaism in its classic forms does not have much to say about politics: but it does regularly deliver the prophetic message that politics is secondary to morality which is dependant on a sense of responsibility which is predicated on a deep sense of human freedom.

All significant change in human behaviour takes place at the microcosmic, not the macrocosmic level. It belongs not to social forces or trends, but to the here-and-now of single individuals. This is the model teshuva places before us. And it is born out by any survey of halakhic priorities. The laws clustered under the heading of *darkhei shalom* (the ways of peace), for example, are not global, visionary, and political, but have to do with the tiniest fragments of human behaviour: whether a Cohen may forgo his right to be called up first to the Sefer Torah,<sup>15</sup> for instance, or whether while visiting the sick we should attend non-Jews as well as Jews.<sup>16</sup> Peace, at once the highest and most elusive of all Torah values, is to be pursued at this most seemingly trivial level, because this is the only level at which it *can* be pursued. Only in the here-and-now of single human interactions do changes take place that are more than short-lived or illusory. Teshuva in particular, and the halakhic system in general, are a discipline of shifting the



focus of our attention from the large to the small, the macrocosm to the microcosm. It is here that we change; it is here that freewill belongs.

Maimonides asks a pointed question.<sup>17</sup> Long before the exile in Egypt, God told Abraham that his descendants would be strangers in a land not their own; there they would be enslaved and oppressed. How then, asks Maimonides, was it justice for the Egyptians to be punished for mistreating the Israelites, when they were in fact only fulfilling the Divine decree, acting out a plan that had already determined, foreseen?

His answer is fundamental. There can be, he says, successful predictions of how large social groupings will behave. Determinism is indeed true at this macrocosmic level. Freedom is not an attribute of nations or masses, but of single individuals. "Each individual Egyptian who oppressed and maltreated the Israelites could have refrained had he so chosen. *For God did not make a decree concerning any specific individual*, but only informed Abraham that his descendants would be subjected to servitude in a land not theirs."<sup>18</sup> It was predictable that the Egyptians *as a nation* would act as they eventually did. But it was not predictable of any *individual* Egyptian that he would conform to the pattern.

For those who wish to build a barrier

against the challenge of freedom, excuses are therefore always to hand. It is always open to us to see ourselves as an insignificant prisoner of wider forces, a speck in the macrocosm which is not in fact free. Teshuva, by contrast, is a mental discipline in which we narrow down the focus of our attention until all that is present before us is the *individual* and the *present*, the 'I' and the 'now'.

Maimonides had to confront freewill because, despite the fact that at some level we all acknowledge its existence, there is a constant temptation to deny it. That temptation begins the moment we confront our own failures. The good we do, we are willing to take credit for; but the bad we do is *not our fault*.<sup>19</sup> This denial of freewill – the protection we seek in the making of excuses – is the great and systematic barrier against teshuva.

If Freud had given a name to this mental process he might have called it the *Elisha ben Abuya complex*.

Elisha ben Abuya was, by all accounts, one of the outstanding minds of the Mishnaic age, a colleague of R. Akiva and the teacher, no less, of R. Meir. He became, though, a rebel against tradition: an apostate. There are conflicting traditions as to the cause of his apostasy.<sup>20</sup> But on one point the various narratives are clear, and

indeed highly moving: R. Meir, his disciple, continued to be attached to this man his colleagues had shunned. Elisha was beyond the pale; so much so that frequently he is not referred to by name, but called instead *Acher*, 'the other one', the one who has forfeited his name. But Meir remained loyal to the man who had once been his master; sought out his company and still believed that he would, must, one day repent.

Against this background is set one of the most poignant scenes in the whole of the rabbinic literature.<sup>21</sup> It is Shabbat, and Elisha ben Abuya is publicly flouting the day by riding on a horse. Nevertheless, as the focus widens we see R. Meir walking assiduously behind him. Not, we are stunned to discover, to reprimand him but . . . "to learn Torah at his mouth".

Heretic teacher and faithful disciple pass along the road, and the narrative suddenly plunges into a quite new dimension of irony. Meir, the guardian of tradition, has become so immersed in the conversation that he has not noticed that they have passed beyond the outskirts of the town and are nearing the limits of the *techum*, the boundary beyond which one may not walk on Shabbat. Acher, the apostate, has seen this; and the following interchange takes place:

Jewish Wedding – under the "Chupah" 1889





*Acher:* Meir, turn back. I have measured the distance we have walked by the paces of my horse, and we have reached the Shabbat limit.

*Meir:* You, too, turn back.

The invisible *techum*, the boundary beyond which one may not walk, has become an immediate symbol of the line between two worlds, faith and heresy, Judaism and alienation.<sup>22</sup> Elisha ben Abuya, momentarily more sensitive than his disciple to the fateful character of their journey, tells Meir that he must turn back. Meir, instantly seizing on the fact that his teacher has just disclosed that tradition and conscience have not yet deserted him, invites Elisha to turn back with him: to repent.

Elisha hears the double-entendre, and replies with a staggering confession of his personal tragedy.:

*Acher:* Have I not already told you? I heard a voice from behind the veil<sup>23</sup> say: "Return ye backsliding children" – all except Acher."

Heaven has decreed. The gates of teshuva are open to everyone – except Elisha ben Abuya. I, says Elisha, cannot repent.

Are we meant to believe that Elisha is telling the truth, that in fact he *has* received the heavenly No? In a sense, the question is massively irrelevant. For even if he were telling a sort of truth, this is the kind of prophetic message one is duty-bound not to believe. Elsewhere the Talmud portrays an encounter between King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah tells the king that he is going to die and have no share in the world to come. Hezekiah asks the prophet to help him repent. Isaiah replies: "The doom has already been decreed." Hezekiah tells him: "Son of Amoz, finish your prophecy and go. For I have this tradition from the house of my ancestor (David): Even if the sword is already sharpened and resting on your neck, do not stop praying."<sup>24</sup> There are some counsels of despair that are not to be heeded, even if they come from a prophet at the behest of heaven.

True or false, Elisha ben Abuya is saying what he wants to believe: that he is helpless, that he cannot turn for the gates have been locked against him. This is a classic paradox of wish-fulfilment, a self-justifying prophecy.<sup>25</sup> If we believe that we cannot change, then we never will. We will be proved correct. *But it was not true.*

What gives the story its mythic power is that there is something of Elisha ben Abuya in all of us. We acknowledge that, in some abstract sense, people can change. The last decade and a half has given us ample examples, in what has already come to be known as the Teshuva Generation. Yeshivot in Israel – Or Sameach, Esh HaTorah, Har Zion – are full of individuals who have made more radical changes in lifestyle than any in recent Jewish history. Behind the beards are people who, not long before, were drop-outs, shut-outs or left-outs.<sup>26</sup> But that, for us, always turns out to be someone else: I am not like that. I cannot change. This is the Elisha ben Abuya complex: the voice which says that the gates are open, but not for us.

I remember my first private audience with R. Menahem Mendel Schneersohn, the Rebbe Sh'lita of Lubavitch. In the course of a long conversation I used the phrase – a classic in the vocabulary of excuse-making – "In the situation in which I find myself . . ." The Rebbe allowed the sentence to get no further. "No-one ever *finds* himself in a situation," he said. "He *places* himself in a situation. And if he placed himself in this situation, he can place himself in another situation."

It was a moment of penetrating truth: I was never again able to make that excuse to myself and believe it. The excuse is overwhelmingly tempting. We all make it on Kol Nidrei night. It is written into the liturgy, in the prayer *Kein anachnu beyadacha*: "Like clay in the hand of the potter, like stone in the hand of the mason, so are we in Your hand."<sup>27</sup> The theme of the prayer is simple. The wrong we do is forgivable, because the *yetser* (the inclination which prompts us to wrong) has been planted in us by God Himself and we should therefore be excused for the havoc it plays with our lives. "Remember the covenant; do not look upon the *yetser*", we pray. But this is a speech from counsel for the defence. It is the kind of thing we may say to God; not the kind of thing we can say to ourselves.<sup>28</sup>

The power to turn back is never taken away from us. In our own defence we may say prayers that suggest otherwise. Like Elisha ben Abuya we may even enlist a voice from heaven to support our claim that for us the way is closed. But it never

is. These are barriers of the mind; barriers that Maimonides was relentless in tearing down. "Since we have freewill, and whatever wrong we do, we do of our own accord, it is fit that we turn in teshuva . . . since we have the power *now* to do so."<sup>29</sup>

The story of Elisha ben Abuya is of a man who felt that he could not liberate himself from his past. Equally powerful is the feeling we can have, in moments of despair, that we cannot liberate ourselves from our future.

A life may have been mapped out for us – by parental expectations, a particular kind of education, a choice of career that now seems irrevocable. Someone was always writing our future, anticipating a course that we would tread. This too is a barrier to teshuva, particularly when those expectations are too low.

The extreme case – and it concerns a drama central to the reading of the first day of Rosh Hashana – is the *Ishmael syndrome*.

I first came across a full sense of the Ishmael syndrome, and its relation to rabbinic remarks about the law of the 'stubborn and rebellious son' some years back, when a congregant asked me the following question.

Throughout the month of Ellul and the days of teshuva, we read Psalm 27: *Le-David Hashem Ori Ve-yishi*. The Psalm contains a strange line: "Though my father and mother reject me, the Lord will receive me."<sup>30</sup> This line had always puzzled him. Which Jewish parent had ever rejected his or her own son? And why did we say this verse at this time of the year?

I reminded him of Ishmael. Born to Abram and Hagar, Ishmael was the fruit of Sarai's despair at being able to have a child of her own. Even before he was born, he was caught in a web of antagonisms. Sarai drives Hagar, pregnant, away. An angel sends Hagar back, but not without telling her that conflict will be the ongoing fate of her son: "His hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand against him".<sup>31</sup>

Ishmael is born. Abraham is attached to him. But his existence seems like a reproach to Sarah, and when she gives birth to Isaac she asks Abraham to send him away. Reluctantly, he does so.

The scene we read on Rosh Hashana unfolds. Hagar and her child are in the desert. Their water is gone. She hides Ishmael under a bush, too



pained to watch him die. And at the penultimate point, "God heard the boy weeping. God's angel called Hagar from heaven and said to her: What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid. God has heard the boy's voice *there where he is*. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation."<sup>32</sup>

The voice breaks in on an almost unbearable moment. Ishmael has been rejected, in turn, by Sarah, then Abraham, then Hagar. He was born, as it were, to the wrong parents. He has no share in the destiny mapped out for the seed of Abraham. His tears on the point of death, though they are tears of a child, belong almost to *objective despair*. There is no place for him in the story.

The angel represents, therefore, a mercy as radical as it is total. "Though my father reject me, the Lord will receive me." *"There is no rejection which includes God's rejection."*

The episode is no mere isolated story. It has halakhic reverberations. The Torah does not flinch from examining the circumstances in which the seemingly impossible might happen again: in which Jewish parents might deliberately reject a child. It describes a procedure to be followed in the case of a 'wayward and rebellious son', a delinquent whose parents confess, 'He does not listen to us' and whose prescribed penalty is death.<sup>33</sup>

What conceivable logic, what *justice*, could attach to this law? The child envisaged by the Torah is 'a glutton and a drunkard'. Clearly he has few saving graces. But is this sufficient to warrant the ultimate rejection of the death sentence? R. Jose ha-Gelili thought it was. "Did the Torah decree that the rebellious son be brought before the Bet Din and stoned merely because he ate a *tartemar* of meat and drank a *log* of Italian wine? Rather, *the Torah foresaw his ultimate destiny*. For in the end, after dissipating his father's wealth, he would still seek to satisfy his accustomed wants, but being unable to do so, he would go forth to the cross-roads and rob. Therefore the Torah said: Let him die while yet innocent and let him not die guilty."<sup>34</sup>

The wayward and rebellious son is punished not as an *actual* but as a *potential* criminal. It is not what he is, but what he will become. If he begins like this, how will he end? "The Torah foresaw his ultimate destiny".

This is logic of a kind; the logic of pre-emption and deterrence.

However, not all the sages shared this view. R. Shimon bar Yochai firmly declared: There never was and never will be a 'wayward and rebellious son'.<sup>35</sup>

What was at stake between R. Shimon and R. Jose? A Midrash conjectures a conversation between God and the angels when the young Ishmael was crying at the point of death:

The ministering angels rose to accuse (Ishmael). They said, 'Lord of the Universe, here is someone who will one day slay Your children with thirst. Will you now provide him with a well?'

He said to them, 'What is he *now*, righteous or wicked?' They said, 'Righteous'.

He said to them, 'I judge man *only as he is at the moment*.'<sup>36</sup>

Ishmael was rescued *ba-asher hu sham*, 'there, where he is'. Meaning: for what he is now, an innocent child; not for what he might predictably become. In this exchange, the angels argue the case of R. Jose ha-Gelili: Let the Torah foresee his ultimate destiny and act accordingly. God rejects the argument. Man is judged only for what he is, not for what he might become. So Ishmael is saved. And so, too, though the law of the 'wayward and rebellious son' represents a kind of justice, it is not Divine justice. And on that basis R. Shimon bar Yochai rests his faith that the law never was or will be put into effect.

For at the heart of teshuva is the faith in human freewill which makes *no destiny inevitable*. The judge, and even the parent, may see in the delinquent child a potential criminal, and reject him accordingly. But this rejection – along with *all* rejection – discounts human freedom and the perpetual possibility of turning. Neither aggadah nor halakhah allow this rejection to stand: "If a completely wicked man says, 'Behold you are betrothed to me on condition that I am righteous,' she is betrothed: he may have contemplated teshuva."<sup>37</sup>

Neither the angels nor R. Jose ha-Gelili were guilty of some monumental heartlessness. We do judge people on the basis of certain expectations of character and continuity. We do condemn and reject them on the basis of a predicted future. It is simply that teshuva cuts across this entire frame of reference. No future is inevitable, for where we will be is dependent on *ba-asher hu*

*sham*: the direction we *now* choose to face.

If Elisha ben Abuya was haunted by his past, Ishmael was haunted by his future, which seemed on all reasonable expectations to be non-existent. This too is a universal of certain moods of despair. "Though my father and mother reject me, the Lord will receive me." The verse answers a persistent nightmare with the most radical assurance. The 'now' of teshuva is stronger than any human rejection, any pre-scripted future.

"Seek the Lord while He may be found; call on Him while He is near" – Rabbah b. Abbuha said, these are the ten days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.<sup>38</sup> Did Rabbah mean that there were some days when God was near and others when He was distant? Surely "Teshuva and prayer are *always good*"?<sup>39</sup> The Ten Days of teshuva bring us close because they induce a mood that is difficult, perhaps impossible, to sustain throughout the year. Our careers, relationships, lifestyles, and self-images are predicated upon a past and an anticipated future. This is what gives human character its stability.

The Jewish calendar gives us, though, the charmed moment – the *eit ratzon* – when the past no longer seems compelling and the mapped future no longer unavoidable. For ten days we inhabit the 'now' which means nothing other than teshuva. This is what gives human character its monumental freedom – this, and the Divine faith that we will use it to return.

#### Notes

1. Deut. 10:12; Bereishith Rabbah 21:6. On the 'now'ness of teshuva, see Maimonides, Commentary to M. Avot 1:13; M. T. Teshuva, 2:1, 3:4, 7:2.

2. On Akiva's metamorphosis: B. T. Ketubot 62b, Nedarim 50a.

3. On Resh Lakish's early life: J. T. Gittin 4:9, Terumot 8:5; B. T. Baba Metzia 84a, Gittin 47a.

4. See M. Yoma 8:9 for Akiva's response to teshuva after the destruction of the Temple (beautifully commented upon in Soloveitchik, *Al Ha Teshuva*, pp. 19-20); B. T. Hagigah 15a.

And see B. T. Yoma 86b: "Resh Lakish said: Great is teshuva for through it deliberate sins are accounted as merits". However in J. T. Peah 1:1 and Bamidbar Rabbah 10:1, this view is attributed to his mentor, R. Johanan.

5. B. T. Berakhot 33b, Megillah 25a.



6. B. T. Berakhot 33b, Niddah 16b.

7. See the interesting comment of R. Josiah Pinto (1565-1648) to *Ein Yaakov*, Berakhot ad loc. Different resolutions are given by Maharsha and *Anaf Yosef*, ad loc; R. Barukh Epstein, *Torah Temimah* to Deut. 10:12.

8. M. T. Teshuva 5:2.

9. M. T. Teshuva 2:2; the proof-text is from Jeremiah 31:18, part of the haftarah for the second day of Rosh Hashana.

10. Maimonides also includes the resolution to change in his formulation of the *viddui* in M. T. Teshuva 1:1: "How does one confess? By saying: I beseech you, O God, I have sinned, I have acted perversely, I have transgressed before you and have done such and such. I am contrite and ashamed of my deeds and I will never do this again." (On the difficulties raised against this formulation by R. Menahem Krakovski, *Avodat HaMelekh* ad loc, see the enlightening comments of R. Nahum Rabinovitch, *Yad Peshuta*, Teshuva 1:1, 2:8.)

Note that Maimonides changes the order in the two rulings: in his text of the confession, remorse precedes resolution; in his definition of teshuva, resolution precedes remorse. In characteristic style, R. Soloveitchik maintains that Maimonides is talking about two different kinds of teshuva: in the first chapter he speaks of *emotional* repentance, which begins with remorse, a sense of mourning or sickness or spiritual malaise. In the second chapter he speaks of *intellectual* repentance, less spontaneous than the former, which begins with the knowledge that one has acted wrongly and only later proceeds to take on the emotional colouration of remorse (*Al HaTeshuva* pp. 101-145).

Alternatively and more simply one might note that Maimonides is always careful to distinguish repentance itself from confession, which is its verbal expression. Though he insists that they share the same elements, they do not necessarily do so in the same order: the sequence of a mental process is not necessarily the same as its articulation (cf, *Moreh Nevukhim* III, 21).

11. M. T. Teshuva, 5:3; see *Shemoneh Perakim*, ch. 8; *Moreh Nevukhim* III, 36.

12. R. Soloveitchik suggests, again, that Maimonides is speaking about two different kinds of teshuva. In the first four chapters he expounds the 'repentance of expiation' which concerns putting right particular wrongs, and which is triggered not by freedom but by a series of natural responses to sin. In the seventh chapter he treats of 'repentance of redemption' which involves the radical restructuring of the personality, and so presupposes human freedom in its deepest sense (*Al HaTeshuva*, pp. 191-235).

This distinction is also brilliantly treated by R. Abraham Isaac Kook in *Orot HaTeshuva*.

R. Kook, however, does not read it into Maimonides' text.

R. Nahum Rabinovitch (*Yad Peshuta*, Teshuva, introduction) suggests that Maimonides was confronting what seems to be a *contradiction* between teshuva and freewill. Freewill implies that a mental act of choice is a cause but never an effect of other causes. This presupposes that time is irreversible; for were time to be reversed, what is now a cause would become an effect. However, teshuva does change the past – it 'turns past sins into merits' and hence reverses the flow of time. Maimonides was therefore forced to confront and resolve the tension between the two ideas.

13. The list is taken from Alfassi (Rif, Yoma 982). See Maimonides, *Responsa* (Blau) p. 216.

14. M. T. Teshuva 5:2. In the Mishne Torah, Maimonides has no hesitation in using strong language to deride those who hold false philosophical positions: see Avodah Zarah 11:16, Teshuva 8:6. There is, however, no fallacy to which he devotes so much space to its refutation as the denial of freewill.

15. B. T. Gittin 59b. The sages instituted that on a Shabbat or festival, when the synagogue is crowded, a Cohen may not forego his right to be called first. For if he were to do so, there would be arguments, each person claiming that he should be called first; or that the Cohen had showed undue favouritism in allowing X to take his place instead of Y (Rashi ad loc; Rambam to M. Gittin 5:8).

16. B. T. Gittin 61a.

17. M. T. Teshuva 6:5. *Shemoneh Perakim*, ch. 8.

18. M. T. Teshuva 6:5.

19. Compare the dream in which R. Ashi interrogates King Manasseh. R. Ashi: 'If you were so wise, why did you serve idols?' Manasseh: 'If you had been there, you would have caught up the skirt of your cloak and run after me.' (B.I. Sanhedrin 102b). In another age Manasseh would have made a first-rate sociologist.

20. See B. T. Kiddushin 39b, Hagigah 14b, 15b, Y. T. Hagigah 2:1, Kohelet Rabbah 7:8.

21. B. T. Hagigah 15a. Compare Y. T. Hagigah 2:1, Kohelet Rabbah 7:8.

22. The figure of Elisha ben Abuya became a literary archetype for the tensions experienced by Haskalah Jews breaking away from Judaism. See Isaac Deutscher, *The Non-Jewish Jew*, and Milton Steinberg, *As a Driven Leaf*.

23. An expression for something overheard in heaven. See B. T. Berakhot 18b; Yoma 77a; Baba Metzia 59a.

24. B. T. Berakhot 10a.

25. Another touching example of heavenly vision as wish-fulfillment is given in B. T. Berakhot 28a. Rabban Gamliel had ruled that no student 'whose inside was not as his outside' should enter the Bet HaMidrash. When he was deposed as Nasi, the doors of the Bet HaMidrash were opened, and many hundreds of benches added, "Rabban Gamliel was distressed. He thought, 'Perhaps, God forbid, I have withheld Torah from Israel. He was granted

a dream, in which he saw white casks full of ashes (i.e. the new disciples were not, in fact, worthy of admission). But it was not so. He was only shown the dream to set his mind at rest."

Some of the sages recognised wish-fulfillment as a major component in dreams. "R. Jonathan said: A person is shown in a dream only what is suggested by his own thoughts" (B. T. Berakhot 55b).

In particular, this interpretation was given to the second Divine communication to Balaam, where he is told he may travel to Balak, having been told at first that he may not. "The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: Villain, I do not desire the destruction of the wicked. But since you are bent on going to your own destruction, rise up and go." (Bamidbar Rabbah 20:11). The sages based on this incident the axiom: "Man is led down the path he wishes to pursue" (B. T. Makkot 10b).

26. For a detached account of the phenomenon, see Janet Aviad, *Return to Judaism: Religious Renewal in Israel*, University of Chicago Press, 1983.

27. Routledge *Machzor*, p. 39. The prayer is built on the phrase in Jeremiah 18:6. See also Isaiah 29:16, 45:9, 64:7; Job 10:1-9.

28. Note how Rashi treats the idea: "The fear of heaven is entrusted to man that he should be the one to prepare his heart for it, even though it lies within God's power to direct our hearts to Him, as it written, 'Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel'" (Rashi to Megillah 25a). The verse in Jeremiah does not therefore refer to actuality, but to possibility. Compare Maimonides, *Guide*, III, 32: "I do not say this because I believe that it is difficult for God to change the nature of every individual person. On the contrary, it is possible, and it is in His power, according to the principles taught in Scripture. But it has never been His will to do it, and it never will be."

The use of the idea, in seeking forgiveness, that we are 'clay in the potter's hand' belongs to the general logic of *melammed zechut*, or of finding a *pitchon peh*. See B. T. Berakhot 32a, Sukkah 52b, where Jeremiah's verse is counted among the three texts without which Israel would have been left defenceless.

29. M. T. Teshuva 5:2.

30. Psalm 27:10.

31. Genesis 16:12.

32. Genesis 21:17-2.

33. Deuteronomy 21:18-21.

34. B. T. Sanhedrin 72a. See M. Sanhedrin, 8:5.

35. B. T. Sanhedrin 71a. However, R. Jonathan dissents: There was such a case, 'I saw him and sat on his grave'. See also Y. T. Sanhedrin 8:1, where any attempt to rationalise the command is rejected.

36. Bereishith Rabbah 53:14; see B. T. Rosh Hashana 16b; Y. T. Rosh Hashana 1:3.

37. B. T. Kiddushin 49b; M. T. Ishut, 8:5.

38. Isaiah 55:6; B. T. Rosh Hashana 18a.

39. M. T. Teshuva 2:6.