

"Hermann Cohen and Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik on Repentance," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 13:1-2 (2004): 213-258 [published in 2006]

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I. Introduction

The late Steven Schwarzschild, a distinguished Neo-Kantian who believed that Hermann Cohen's philosophy was or better is the true Jewish philosophy, once suggested that Cohen's "philosophical theology of repentance" had a "massive influence" on the conception of repentance developed by Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik.¹ He, alas, died, however, before writing anything further on the subject. Reinier Munk in his book, *The Rationale of Halakhic Man: Joseph B. Soloveitchik's Conception of Jewish Thought*, a revised and expanded version of his dissertation, refers to Schwarzschild's claim, stating that it "needs further investigation."² The purpose of this paper is to provide that "further investigation"

¹ Steven Schwarzschild, "The Title of Hermann Cohen's `Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism,'" *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*, Translated and with an Introduction by Simon Kaplan, 2nd Edition (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1995), p. 20. [Henceforth: RR]

² Reinier Munk, *The Rationale of Halakhic Man* (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1996), p. 128, note 3.

and to determine the extent of the influence of Cohen's philosophical theology of repentance on Soloveitchik and the limits of that influence.

I would like to use as my point of departure a question I had raised in an earlier paper of mine, "Hermann Cohen's Theory of Sacrifice in *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*."³ There I first noted that:

Interestingly and revealingly, Cohen in his discussion of repentance, sacrifice, and *shegagah*, never indicates that the gemara in *Yoma* 86b in its discussion of the statement of Resh Lakish, "Great is repentance for deliberate sins are accounted to him as inadvertent sins" concludes that this statement refers only to repentance performed out of fear (*teshuvah mi-yirah*). However, the gemara goes on to argue, the transforming power of repentance performed out of love (*teshuvah me-ahavah*) is so great that with reference to such repentance another statement of Resh Lakish applies, "Great is repentance for deliberate sins are accounted to him as meritorious deeds."⁴

I then proceeded to ask:

Now it would seem that the repentance described by Cohen in *Religion of Reason* is a type of repentance out of love and not repentance out of fear. Why then does Cohen cite only the weaker statement of Resh Lakish and not his stronger statement? Why can't he make the radical affirmation about the power of repentance out of love made by the rabbinic tradition?⁵

³ "Hermann Cohen's Theory of Sacrifice in Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism," *"Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism": Tradition and the Concept of Origin in Hermann Cohen's Later Work*, Helmut Holzhey, Gabriel Motzkin, and Hartwig Wiedebach (eds.) (Hildesheim, Zurich, New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2000), pp. 191-204.

⁴ Ibid., p. 199.

⁵ Ibid., p. 199.

But rather than answering the question there, I concluded by saying:

Since however, this paper is a discussion of Cohen's theory of sacrifice and not his theory of repentance, this is not the appropriate place to attempt an answer.⁶

In the footnote to that paragraph I went on to comment:

In this connection, it is worth noting that R. Soloveitchik bases his whole theory of repentance on precisely this rabbinic claim that repentance out of love transforms deliberate sins into meritorious deeds. R. Soloveitchik's fundamental point is that had only the written Law been revealed a person would be able to attain only the level of repentance out of fear. It is only thanks to the revelation of the oral Law that an individual can attain the higher level of repentance out of love. We may say that despite the strong influence of Cohen on R. Soloveitchik's theory of repentance, R. Soloveitchik is able to take this crucial step beyond Cohen, first, thanks to his profound rootedness in and understanding of the halakhic tradition, and, second, thanks to his creative use of Max Scheler's important and highly influential essay, "Repentance and Rebirth." But, again, a full discussion of R. Soloveitchik's view of repentance, like a full discussion of Cohen's view, must await another occasion.⁷

This "other occasion" has now arrived. I will first present Cohen's theory of repentance, then R. Soloveitchik's. In the course of so doing, I will also at several "appropriate" places in the discussion put forward a number of possible answers as to why Cohen ignores the famous statement of Resh Lakish "Great is repentance [out of love] for deliberate sins are accounted to him as meritorious deeds."

⁶ Ibid., p. 199.

⁷ Ibid. p. 199, n. 35.

II. Cohen's Theory of Repentance

As is well known, if, for Cohen, the individual discovers himself as an individual in sin, it is only the possibility of repentance, of the liberation from sin, of the self-transformation of the individual, that makes the individual into an I. As Cohen states:

Liberation from sin has to become the goal, and only through the attainment of this goal will the new I be begotten.... Liberation [from sin] is necessary for the transformation of the individual into the I.⁸

What, then, is liberation from sin, repentance for Cohen? The first step on this road to return is the sinner's own confession of guilt, his execution of punishment upon himself. For it is only this confession that prevents repentance from being a mere moral abstraction. As Cohen writes:

The confession of sin is the penance, which the sinner takes upon himself. This confession with all the agony and distress, with all the overwhelming remorse which borders on despair is the beginning of the execution of punishment which the sinner must impose upon himself, if God is to liberate him. This self-punishment is the first step on the road to return which is open to him.⁹

⁸ RR, p. 187. Cf. p. 193.

⁹ RR, p. 195. Note, however, that in this statement Cohen links remorse with confession, while on p. 203 he appears to speak of remorse as preceding confession.

To return to confession itself, this confession of guilt would, in turn, become a moral abstraction were it not connected with a public institution of worship. To begin with, in the time of Ezekiel, this public institution was the national institution of sacrifice in the Temple, though in the fullness of time, prayer in the synagogue took the place—and rightfully so of sacrifice as the public institution of divine worship connected with confession. I discussed this last point at some length in my previously mentioned paper¹⁰ and will not elaborate here. One point though, which I did not mention in that paper is worthy of note. Even in sacrifice the priest only accords expiation, a ritual cultic matter, but only God effects atonement, in the sense of reconciliation.¹¹ I will return to this point later on.¹²

The individual himself, in his confession, accepts full moral responsibility for his sin and views it as being deliberate. But in the correlation with God, which here takes place in the public, communal arena, the sin is deemed by God to be *shégagah*, to be inadvertent, and is forgiven accordingly. For in Cohen's view, "all human sin is error, [...] is wavering and vacillation."¹³ And in this connection Cohen refers to Resh Lakish's comment "Great is repentance for deliberate sins are accounted to him as inadvertent sins."¹⁴

¹⁰ "Hermann Cohen's Theory of Sacrifice," pp. 196, 202.

¹¹ RR, pp. 198-199.

¹² See below, note 27.

¹³ RR, p. 200; cf. p. 223: "all man's sin is *shégagah*."

¹⁴ See the "Annotations from Hebrew Sources", p. 467, note 44.

But, as Cohen writes:

This self-knowledge of sin is a transitional point for engendering the I, but is not the conclusion. The conclusion is the atonement that depends on the consciousness of liberation from guilt.¹⁵

Confession then, Cohen writes, "is the first step toward action, which in turn proceeds in two steps: in the casting away of sins and in the new creation,"¹⁶ that is, the creation of a new heart and a new spirit that is, in turn, a new I.

But for Cohen—and here we see the inextricable link between the religion of reason and ethics—this new heart and new spirit, this new I, "are and remain tasks."¹⁷ The new I is not a substantial self. "As little as it is possible to imagine that a new heart is formed in actuality, so little is it possible for the meaning of the new I which is to be formed to have a definite shape."¹⁸

But what is this task? Basing himself on the verse in Leviticus 11:4, "Make yourselves holy and be holy, for I the Lord am holy," Cohen defines the task as that of self-sanctification.¹⁹ And basing himself on the watchword of Rabbi Akiva—a watchword that became Cohen's watchword—"Happy are you O Israel. Who purifies you? And before Whom do you purify yourselves? Your Father in Heaven"

¹⁵ RR, p. 199.

¹⁶ RR, p. 203.

¹⁷ RR, p. 204.

¹⁸ RR, p. 204.

¹⁹ RR, pp. 204-205.

(*Yoma* 85b), Cohen identifies self-sanctification, *kedushah*, with self-purification, *taharah*.²⁰

Four features characterize this task of self-sanctification or self-purification. First, it is infinite, unending, unceasing. Self-sanctification, Cohen writes, "relates to every moment of man's life;"²¹ it is a process of continuous rejuvenation. And, Cohen adds, "In this continuous rejuvenation"—and, we may say, in it alone—"the I has its only existence and permanence."²² Again we see that for Cohen the I is not a substantial self, but an unending task.

Second, this self-sanctification or self-purification must be performed entirely by man. To cite Cohen:

Only man can actualize self-sanctification; no God can help him in this. God already effects much in giving the commandment.... But the task is put upon man. It is infinite because the solution is infinite.²³ God as a collaborator would have to bring the solution to a final end.... It would [therefore] contradict the [infinite nature of the] task if God should have a share in handling it.²⁴

²⁰ RR, pp. 223-224. As has often been observed, Cohen transposes R. Akiva's statement. In the original it read "Happy are you O Israel. Before Whom do you purify yourselves? And Who purifies you? Your Father in Heaven."

²¹ RR, p. 205.

²² RR, p. 205.

²³ Note the return here to the first feature.

²⁴ RR, p. 205.

Third, Repentance applies not so much to the individual sin, but to the "way" of sin. Sin, to cite Cohen, "is not an isolated unit, but something connected to the whole framework of life."²⁵ Therefore, Cohen continues:

Repentance can become thorough and serious only when it aligns each single sin with the whole frame of life.... Each particular sin must be looked upon as the embodiment of the man, as a token of his essence.²⁶

Fourth, while only man can perform self-sanctification or self-purification, it must be performed before God and directed to Him; Man provides self-sanctification or self-purification, while God provides forgiveness and pardon, which Cohen adds, are "fundamentally sever[ed] ... from the wholly mythological, original form of atonement."²⁷ Indeed, the forgiveness of sin becomes the most appropriate function of God's goodness. For Cohen, then, faith in God means trust in God's goodness, that is, trust in God's forgiveness of sin. And it is precisely this

²⁵ RR, p. 205.

²⁶ RR, p. 206.

²⁷ RR, p. 214. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 198-199, where Cohen distinguishes between expiation and atonement proper. It is the priest who "during the sacrifice" performs the various ritual functions and "symbolic acts which have the purpose of expiation." God, however, takes no part "in this performance of sacrificial expiation." On the other hand, atonement proper "is not achieved through expiation, but depends upon the self-purification for which man has to strive in his confession of sin," and it is to be effected by God. In light of Cohen's remarks in RR, p. 214, we may identify expiation with "the wholly mythological, original form of atonement" and atonement proper with God's forgiveness and pardon.

faith and trust that endows man with the confidence to undertake the arduous task of self-sanctification.²⁸

But precisely in light of Cohen's claim that it is man who performs self-sanctification or self-purification, two difficult questions arise. First, what exactly is the significance of this forgiveness? And second, why must God provide it? Cohen's own answers to these questions are less than clear. But since Andrea Poma, in his important monograph, *The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen*, discusses this issue in an exemplary manner, I will pass over it here.²⁹

Cohen succinctly and powerfully presents the essence of his conception of repentance when he states:

Redemption is liberation from sin.... "Before God [*lifne Ha-Shem*]": This is the watchword of the whole deed of repentance, of self-sanctification, and of redemption.³⁰

I would like at this juncture to briefly touch upon one point of similarity and one point of difference between Cohen's conception of repentance and that of Maimonides.

²⁸ RR, pp. 208-215. Cf. the insightful discussion of Andrea Poma in "Lyric Poetry and Prayer," *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism: Tradition and the Concept of Origin in Hermann Cohen's Later Work*, pp. 136-137; as well as my discussion in "Hermann Cohen's Theory of Sacrifice," pp. 197-198, 202, n. 42.

²⁹ Andrea Poma, *The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen*, translated from the Italian by John Denton (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1997), pp. 230-231.

³⁰ RR, pp. 230-231.

The point of similarity: Cohen's insistence that self-sanctification or self-purification must be performed entirely by man and that God does not have any share in it reflects Maimonides' insistence in *Laws of Repentance* 6:5 that God's instructing man in the way of repentance simply means that 1) He sent prophets to them to inform them of the ways of God and to turn them back to the good; and that 2) He imbued them, to begin with, with the power to study and understand. Maimonides adds that as long as a man follows in the ways of wisdom and righteousness he desires them and pursues them. Therefore, the statement, "He who comes to be purified is aided," does not mean that he is aided by God, but rather that he is naturally aided by the virtuous circle that he has created.

We may contrast this naturalistic and humanistic approach to repentance on the parts of both Maimonides and Cohen to the approach taken by the great medieval rabbinic scholar and pietist Rabbenu Yonah in his classic work, *Sha`arei Teshuvah* (*Gates of Repentance*). At the very beginning of that work Rabbenu Yonah declares:

And it has been clearly explained in the Torah that God assists penitents in such circumstances when their nature is unable to attain [the rank of repenting out of the fear and love of God]; and He will renew within them a spirit of purity to attain the rank of loving Him.³¹

As we shall see, on this point R. Soloveitchik agrees with Maimonides and Cohen and not with Rabbenu Yonah.

³¹ *Sha`arei Teshuvah* 1:1.

The point of difference. Here appearances can be misleading. In connection with his statement, "a turning away from sin is possible; man can become a new man,"³² Cohen cites Maimonides' statement in *Laws of Repentance* 2:4, "It is one of the ways of repentance that a penitent ... should change his name, as if to say that I am a different person and am not the same person who performed those [sinful] deeds."³³ Cohen, here, at first glance, would again seem to be walking in the footsteps of Maimonides. But Cohen immediately goes on to say, "This possibility of self-transformation makes the individual into an I."³⁴ Precisely at this point, so it appears to me, Cohen's thought diverges significantly, even radically, from that of Maimonides.

For Maimonides, the importance of repentance is that it is a process whereby a person changes from being a bad man to being a good one. There is no value for Maimonides, contra Cohen, in the emergence of an I, in individuality per se. For Cohen, who views repentance as an act of self-creation, creativity and self-creation are primary values. Not so for Maimonides! For him, man's perfection lies in the development of his intellect, an intellect that is objective and impersonal in nature, its function being to "distinguish between truth and falsehood ... with regard to what is of necessity."³⁵

³² RR, p. 193.

³³ See the "Annotations from Hebrew Sources", p. 466, note 38.

³⁴ RR, p. 193

³⁵ *Guide of the Perplexed* 1:2. And see, in this connection, the penetrating comments of Eliezer Goldman in his review of David Hartman's *Torah and Philosophical Quest, Da`at* 1 (1977), pp.

As we shall see, on this point R. Soloveitchik agrees with Cohen and not with Maimonides.

Before we move on to R. Soloveitchik's theory of repentance, let me attempt to provide a preliminary answer to our original question. As I had noted in my previous article, "It would seem that the repentance described by Cohen in *Religion of Reason* is a type of repentance out of love and not repentance out of fear."³⁶ Indeed, as we shall soon see, many of the features that, as we already saw, characterize repentance for Cohen, namely, separation from the path of sin, purification, forgiveness, and redemption, are explicitly linked by R. Soloveitchik with repentance out of love. The question thus arises with full force as to why Cohen is unable to affirm, as do the rabbis, that in repentance out of love deliberate sins are accounted to him as meritorious deeds.

We may suggest that given the critical role of sin, for Cohen, as a transitional point between ethics and religion, as a necessary stage in the emergence of individuality, he could not have claimed that repentance transforms deliberate sins retroactively into merits, for he would have then retroactively lost sin as that starting point. To be sure, as Poma astutely and correctly notes, "It is wrong to say that Cohen in *Religion of Reason* grounds man as an individual in consciousness of sin. He actually grounds him in consciousness of the correlation

143-144.

³⁶ "Hermann Cohen's Theory of Sacrifice," p. 199.

between sin and redemption."³⁷ But, nevertheless, sin is a critical element in the process of the emergence of man's individuality. As Cohen himself states in *Der Begriff der Religion*: "Sin is a ferment of morality, and the stage of the individual's sin is thus a *permanent part* [emphasis added] of the conceptual chain of moral man."³⁸

But if repentance transforms deliberate sins into merits, sin would retroactively turn out to be only a temporary part of that conceptual chain. To again cite Poma, "From Cohen's critical point of view, man the sinner, man who is conscious of his sin, and man who is converted and obtains redemption are inextricably linked."³⁹

III R. Soloveitchik's Theory of Repentance⁴⁰

³⁷ "Lyric Poetry and Prayer," p. 137.

³⁸ *Der Begriff der Religion* p. 65, cited in Poma, *The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen*, p. 225; and in Michael Zank, *The Idea of Atonement in the Philosophy of Hermann Cohen* (Providence, Rhode Island: Brown Judaica Series, 2000), p. 372. I would like to acknowledge here the great help I have drawn from the important monographs of Poma and Zank for my analysis of Cohen's theory of repentance.

³⁹ Poma, *The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen*, p. 225.

⁴⁰ This section is an extensively revised version of a draft that I first wrote in the early 1980s. In the interim, two studies of R. Soloveitchik's theory of repentance have appeared: Yitzhak Blau, "Creative Repentance: On Rabbi Soloveitchik's Concept of *Teshuvah*," *Tradition* 28:2 (Winter, 1994), pp. 11-18; and Eliezer Goldman, "Teshuvah u-Zeman be-Hagut shel ha-Rav Soloveitchik [= Repentance and Time in the Thought of R. Soloveitchik]" *Emunah bi-Zemanim Mishtanim*, Avi Sagi

A. Repentance out of Fear and Repentance out of Love

R. Soloveitchik never devoted a major essay to a full explication of the subject of repentance. He did, however, devote an important section of Part II of *Halakhic Man*, written in 1944, to a discussion of repentance,⁴¹ and, similarly, the conclusion of his essay "Sacred and Profane," written slightly later than *Halakhic Man*, is also devoted to that subject.⁴² Most important, from 1954-1980 R. Soloveitchik delivered an annual public discourse on repentance in Yiddish in New York City to an audience that ultimately numbered in the thousands. Several of the discourses from the 50s and 60s were transcribed, translated, and edited by Pinhas Peli and appeared in both Hebrew and English versions. Similarly, several

(ed.), (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1996), pp. 175-189. While both articles contain valuable insights into selected aspects of R. Soloveitchik's theory of repentance, neither seeks to set forth the type of comprehensive analysis attempted here.

⁴¹ *Ish ha-Halakhah* first appeared in the journal *Talpiyyot* 1:3-4 (1944), pp. 651-735. Subsequently the essay was published in the volumes, *Be-Sod ha-Yahid ve-ha-Yahad*, ed. Pinhas Peli (Jerusalem: Orot, 1976), pp. 37-188; and *Ish ha-Halakhah -- Galui ve-Nistar* (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1979), pp. 11- 113. For an English translation, see *Halakhic Man*, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983, translated by Lawrence Kaplan. All page references are to the English translation. The section on repentance is Part 2:III, pp. 110-117.

⁴² "Sacred and Profane: *Kodesh* and *Hol* in World Perspectives," *Gesher* 3:1 (1966), pp. 5-29.

of the essays from the 70s have appeared in both English versions, edited by Arnold Lustiger, and Hebrew versions, edited by Moshe Krone.⁴³

If we combine various of the crisscrossing and interweaving themes and motifs regarding repentance developed by R. Soloveitchik in *Halakhic Man*, "Sacred and Profane," and a number of the discourses on repentance, a rich, profound, and comprehensive picture of Soloveitchik's conception of repentance emerges. Indeed, by putting together the pieces that need to be put together, by making the connections that demand to be made, certain new and often startling insights into the nature of repentance that until now had only been implicit in R. Soloveitchik's thought come to light.

The primary distinction with which R. Soloveitchik operates in his discussions of repentance is the distinction between repentance out of fear (*teshuvah mi-yirah*) and repentance out of love (*teshuvah me-ahavah*), which, as we have seen, the gemara in *Yoma* 86b draws in order to resolve the apparently conflicting statements of Resh Lakish, "Great is repentance for deliberate sins are accounted to him as inadvertent sins" (repentance out of fear), and "Great is repentance for deliberate sins are accounted to him as meritorious deeds" (repentance out of love). If we connect R. Soloveitchik's scattered statements on

⁴³ Pinhas Peli, *Al Ha-Teshuvah*, Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1979 [= *On Repentance in the Thought and Oral Discourse of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1996]; Moshe Krone, *Yemei Zikaron*, Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1986; Arnold Lustiger, *Before Hashem You Shall be Purified: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik on the Days of Awe*, Edison, New Jersey: Ohr Publishing, 1998.

the subject, we find the following contrasting themes and motifs clustered about repentance out of fear and repentance out of love, as set out in the chart below.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ This chart is based upon *Halakhic Man*, Part 2:III; "Sacred and Profane;" the essays "Kapparah ve-Taharah" [= "Absolution and Purification"], "Bi`ur ha-Ra o Ha`alato" [= "The Extirpation or Sublimation of Evil"], "Ha-Yahas beyn Teshuvah li-Behira Hofshit" ["The Relationship between Repentance and Free Will"], and "Kapparah, Yissurim, ve-Geulah [= "Absolution, Suffering, and Redemption"], all of which are to be found in *Al Ha-Teshuvah* [= *On Repentance in the Thought and Oral Discourse of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik*]; and an as yet unpublished Discourse on Repentance that R. Soloveitchik delivered in 1969. The distribution of the themes in the above mentioned works is as follows: Confession (*Vidui*), Absolution (*Kapparah*), God's mercy // Inward repentance, Being divested as of one's status as a *rash`a*, Self-Creation, Deliberate sins transformed into meritorious deeds (*Halakhic Man*); Absolution, Extirpation of evil, Sacrifice and Ritual, God's mercy, God as a remote transcendent Deity accessible only through cultic mediation // *Taharah*, Deliberate sins transformed into meritorious deeds, Self-Creation, God as our "Father, Companion, and intimate Counsellor" directly accessible to man without any cultic mediation ("Sacred and Profane"); Absolution (*Kapparah*), Pardon, Sacrifice and Ritual, Separation from a particular sin, God's mercy // Purification (*Taharah*), Being divested of one's status as a *rash`a*, Self-Creation, Inward Repentance, Separation from the path of sin, God as our Father, Redemption, God's justice ("Absolution and Purification"); Repentance out of Fear, Extirpation of evil, Deliberate sins transformed into inadvertent ones, God passing over sin, Absolution (*Kapparah*) // Repentance Out of Love, Sublimation of evil, Deliberate sins transformed into meritorious deeds, God uplifting sin, Purification (*Taharah*) ("The Extirpation or Sublimation of Evil"); Repentance out of Fear, Extirpation of evil, Deliberate sins transformed into inadvertent ones, Absolution (*Kapparah*) // Repentance Out of Love, Sublimation of evil, Deliberate sins transformed into meritorious deeds, Self-Creation (*Yezirah*) Forgiveness (*Selihak*) ("The Relationship between

REPENTANCE OUT OF FEAR

REPENTANCE OUT OF LOVE

Confession (*Vidui*)

Inward repentance

Separation from a particular sin

Separation from the path of sin

Extirpation of evil

Sublimation of evil

Deliberate sins transformed
into inadvertent ones

Deliberate sins transformed into
meritorious deeds

God passing over sin

God uplifting sin

Absolution (*Kapparah*)

Purification (*Taharah*)

Pardon (*Mehilah*)

Forgiveness (*Selilah*)

Repentance and Free Will"); Absolution (*Kapparah*), Pardon (*Mehilah*), God's mercy (*Hesed*) // Purification (*Taharah*), Forgiveness (*Selilah*), Redemption ("Absolution, Suffering, and Redemption"); God's mercy (*Hesed*), Written Torah// God's justice (*Din*), Oral Torah ("Discourse on Repentance, 1969").

God's mercy (*Hesed*)

God's justice (*Din*)

God as a remote transcendent
Deity accessible only through
cultic mediation

God as our "Father, Companion, and Intimate
Counsellor"

Written Torah

Oral Torah

Sacrifice and Ritual

Purification (*Taharah*)

Being divested of one's status as
a *Rash`a*

Self-Creation (*Yezirah*)

Redemption (*Geulah*)

Cleaving to God (*Deveikut*)

Let us now, using these themes and motifs,⁴⁵ attempt a full and rounded picture of these two types of repentance, as R. Soloveitchik sees them.⁴⁶

What is repentance out of fear, and what does it achieve? The person who repents out of fear recognizes the fact that he has sinned. He regrets his past misdeed and resolves not to commit it again in the future. He thereby fulfils his halakhic requirement of repentance. But his repentance is limited to one particular sin, a single isolated action. He experiences remorse for that particular sin, he puts that particular sin behind him, as he seeks to extirpate the evil, to blot out the past deed from his consciousness. But, otherwise, he is unchanged. His whole personality, his whole mode of living, his entire spiritual makeup is the same as before. He has separated himself from a particular sin, but not from the path of sin. He has turned away from the particular sin, but has not experienced a turning of his whole being. For his repentance derived not from any profound self-evaluation, from any penetrating and shattering introspection. Rather he sensed after the sin an obscure feeling of dissatisfaction, discomfort, and disillusionment. He dimly heard, without full understanding, a voice proclaiming in his inner ear that his end would be bitter indeed. And trembling, filled with fear, he repents.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ The only themes that will not be discussed for the present are Written Torah and Oral Torah. The discussion of the connection between Repentance out of Fear and the Written Torah and Repentance out of Love and the Oral Torah will be reserved for section IIIC of this paper.

⁴⁶ Since this is a composite portrait woven together from the motifs found and developed in the works listed in note 43, individual references will not be given except where deemed necessary.

⁴⁷ "Kapparah ve-Taharah, pp. 28-29;" "Ha-Yahas beyn Teshuvah li-Behira Hofshit," pp. 218-22;

He repents, but does not change. He is the same as before he sinned. There is fear before this accusing voice, but there is no understanding, and, most of all, no love. Nevertheless, despite the fact the repentance was out of fear, he has still fulfilled his halakhic obligation; and if he performs the required ritual act of confession, God, in His infinite mercy, will grant him atonement, absolution.

What is the nature of this absolution? Essentially it is an act of waiver, of pardon, on God's part. God, in His mercy, pardons man his guilt; He waives the debt that the sinner owes him as a result of the sin he committed. Each sin, by definition, makes man liable to God for punishment. But, just as in the realm of civil law a man can waive a debt that another owes him, so God, in His mercy, may waive the punishment to which the sinner has made himself liable. This, as we have emphasized, is an act of mercy on God's part. For in terms of strict justice, why should the sinner be absolved? He sinned. The sin is an objective act that cannot be undone, or at least not through repentance out of fear. Nevertheless, God chooses to pass over the transgression; in His infinite patience and tolerance He averts His eyes from transgressors. Because the sinner repented God accounts the sin performed deliberately as though it had been performed inadvertently. In His mercy, He treats the matter as though the sinner had not realized the full seriousness, gravity, and horror of sin. And, yet, even though the deliberate sin is accounted as inadvertent, or, rather, precisely because it is still

Halakhic Man, p. 113.

accounted as inadvertent, the absolution is not complete. Therefore, God, in a *second* act of mercy, provides sacrificial, cultic, ceremonial rites whereby the sinner can obtain full absolution from the sin, which is now, as a result of repentance out of fear, considered inadvertent. As R. Soloveitchik emphasizes, this absolution (*kapparah*) is "theological, transcendent, and non-rational." It is only as a result of "cultic worship acts" that man can be brought into "contact with a transcendent, incomprehensible divinity," and receive absolution. For, from a rational standpoint, how can God simply erase the past? In this respect, as R. Soloveitchik freely admits, the absolution granted to the sinner who performs repentance out of fear and subsequent cultic rites is simply a Jewish expression of the universal phenomenon of absolution, a phenomenon familiar to Christians as well as Jews.⁴⁸

It is in contrast to repentance out of fear, as R. Soloveitchik presents it, that his portrait of repentance out of love stands out in bold relief. The sinner who repents out of love does not merely separate himself from a particular sin, but turns aside from the path of sinners. He is not satisfied with merely repenting of a particular misdeed, but remaining otherwise unchanged. Rather he puts his whole previous way of life, all his previous spiritual conceptions and attitudes behind him. For his concern is not with this or that isolated sin that he committed, but with the type of person that he was that he could commit such sins. It does not suffice, in his view, to pluck this or that noxious spiritual weed from his being. Rather what is

⁴⁸ "Sacred and Profane," pp. 24-25.

necessary is to transform that sick and unwholesome spiritual soil in which such weeds could take root and flourish. For his repentance derives from love of God, that love of God that yearns for His closeness and presence. And the sinner who repents out of love realizes that it was not so much this or that particular sin that separated him from God as much as his whole mode of existence, of feeling, of perception, his general spiritual blindness, callousness, and insensitivity. And he knows that only a repentance of being, a repentance which accomplishes a transformation of self can admit God back into his world, that very God whom he had, through his own behavior and attitudes, expelled. Here the Hebrew word "teshuvah" should be translated not as "repentance," but rather, in accord with literal meaning, as "turning." The sinner had turned away from God. Now he turns toward Him. And as he makes that turn there is, and necessarily must be, a shift in his entire spiritual stance and posture.

What then does the sinner who repents out of love do? He performs two acts, each one dialectically related to the other. First, as we have said, he transforms his whole personality. He engages in a process of self-sanctification and self-purification, and creates within himself a new heart and spirit. Second, he does not merely extinguish his past but transforms it, uplifts it so that it may serve as a positive source of good. And these two acts or processes, as noted, are dialectically related. For the repentant sinner in transforming his past discovers that in so doing he is transforming his whole personality, he finds himself building and creating a new self precisely out of the ruins of the old one. Conversely, it is

his self-transformation that enables him to so thoroughly transform his past. We will examine this process of self-transformation later on, but first let us examine its results.

To start with, the sinner who repents out of love extinguishes the quality of guilt that had attached itself to his personality. To phrase it in halakhic terms, he divests himself of his status as a *rash`a*, as a wicked person. And, so R. Soloveitchik argues, being divested as of one's status as a *rash`a* is independent of obtaining atonement. Thus he notes that Maimonides rules that confession is an indispensable preliminary for obtaining atonement. "The sinner does not obtain atonement until he confesses."⁴⁹ On the other hand, Maimonides rules that if a man tells a woman "Be thou betrothed unto me on condition that I am a completely righteous person," then even if he was a completely wicked person up until that very moment, she is doubtfully betrothed to him, for perhaps he had thoughts of repentance in his heart.⁵⁰ Now certainly here the man did not confess, and, therefore, he could not obtain atonement for his sins. Nevertheless, he is divested of his status as a *rash`a*, for repentance per se suffices to divest him of that status, even if unaccompanied by confession, which is required only for the purpose of obtaining atonement.⁵¹

⁴⁹ *Laws of Repentance* 1:1.

⁵⁰ *Laws of Marriage* 8:5, based upon *Kiddushin* 49b.

⁵¹ For this analysis, see *Halakhic Man*, pp. 110-111, and, in particular, the very acute halakhic analysis in notes 119 and 120 (pp. 159-160). R. Soloveitchik in note 120 attributes this distinction between repentance and confession to the *Minahat Hinukh*, commandant 364. The reader should

But not only does this change of status not require the obtaining of atonement as a preliminary stage, but it goes far beyond the obtaining of atonement. Thus R. Judah the Prince rules that Yom Kippur confers atonement even upon those who did not repent on that most solemn of days.⁵² Nevertheless, even according to this view, so R. Soloveitchik argues, the person who did not repent on Yom Kippur, though he had obtained atonement as a result of the intrinsic holiness of the day, would still remain a *rash`a*. Consequently, if he had committed a sin before Yom Kippur which would have disqualified him to be a witness, he would remain so disqualified even after Yom Kippur, despite his having obtained atonement.⁵³

But more. This mode of repentance does not only divest the sinner of his status as a *rash`a*, does not only extinguish the quality of guilt that had attached

note, however, that the *Minahat Hinukh* formulates his distinction in two different ways and R. Soloveitchik essentially relies upon and develops the second formulation. This distinction was first suggested by R. Soloveitchik in a letter he wrote to his uncle, R. Menahem Krakoswsky in 1932. See *Iggerot Ha-Grid Ha-Levi* (Jerusalem, 2001), pp. 23-24. Note, as well, that R. Isaac Hutner, at the beginning of essay 27 in *Pahad Yitzhak: Yom ha-Kippurim* (New York: Gur Aryeh Institute, 1978), pp. 224-225, draws precisely the same distinction, indeed using the very same terminology as does R. Soloveitchik and the very same examples. See below, note 53.

⁵² *Yoma* 84b

⁵³ *Iggerot Ha-Grid Ha-Levi*, p. 23; and "Kapparah ve-Taharah," p. 18. This argument is not to be found in *Halakhic Man*, but it is a logical, indeed necessary, extension of R. Soloveitchik's thesis as developed there. For a similar argument, see R. Isaac Hutner, *Pahad Yitzhak: Yom ha-Kippurim*, p. 225.

itself to his personality, but it purifies and sanctifies him. Indeed, we may say that for R. Soloveitchik repentance out of love is identical with the process of self-sanctification and self-purification. As a result of repentance out of fear the sinner is granted absolution so that his liability is waived. Repentance out of love purifies the sinner from the defilement brought about by sin. Here, however, we must distinguish the link connecting repentance out of fear with absolution from the link connecting repentance out of love with purification. The absolution obtained as a result of repentance out of fear is granted by God Himself in a transcendent act of grace. The purification accomplished by repentance out of love is accomplished by man himself. It is an act of self-purification, performed by man and only by him. As R. Soloveitchik states: "Purification is conditional upon drawing near and standing directly before God.... The act of purification is something each man must perform by himself, each man in his own heart."⁵⁴ In sum, if the conferring of absolution follows upon repentance out of fear, the process of purification, as we have already stated, is identical with repentance out of love.

And yet more. While repentance out of fear is only able to reduce deliberate sins into inadvertent sins, repentance out of love can transform deliberate sins into meritorious deeds. And here again, we must distinguish the link connecting repentance out of fear with the transformation of deliberate sins into inadvertent sins from the link connecting repentance out of love with the transformation of deliberate sins into meritorious deeds. As a result of repentance

⁵⁴ "Kapparah ve-Taharah, p. 19.

out of fear God, in His infinite mercy, accounts deliberate sins as inadvertent ones. But in performing repentance out of love it is the individual himself who, through "an absolutely decision of the will and intellect,"⁵⁵ transforms his deliberate sins into meritorious deeds. Indeed, again analogous to what we said before, if the transformation of deliberate sins into inadvertent ones follows upon repentance out of fear, transformation of deliberate sins into meritorious deeds is identical with repentance out of love. In sum, repentance out of love = self-purification (*taharah*) = the transformation of deliberate sins into meritorious deeds.

If as a result of repentance out of fear God waives the liability the sinner has incurred (*mehilah*), as a result of repentance out of love God truly forgives man his sins (*selilah*). Moreover, as we have noted, unlike the act of waiver on the part of God with respect to the man who repents out of fear, which is an act of mercy, God's act of forgiveness with respect to the man who repents out of love is not an act of mercy, of grace, but an act of justice. For has not the repentant sinner in turning and returning to God out of love transformed his sins into a source of good? Is he not a different person from the sinner he once was? Is he not a new person? God here does not have to avert His eyes from the sin. For the sin, in truth, no longer exists. It has been transformed by the repentant sinner into a source of merit. God therefore does not have to pass over the sin; rather He, together with the repentant sinner, lifts up the sin. And the God who forgives the

⁵⁵ *Halakhic Man*, p. 112.

person who repents out of love his sin is not a transcendent incomprehensible Deity, but rather "God as our Father, Companion, and intimate Counsellor."⁵⁶

In light of the above we can understand why Soloveitchik insists that self-purification (*Taharah*) as opposed the act of absolution (*Kapparah*) is not dependent on any cultic rites. R. Soloveitchik, like Cohen, would often cite the famous watchword of Rabbi Akiva: "Happy are you O Israel. Before Whom do you purify yourselves? and Who purifies you? Your Father in Heaven," and interpreted it as follows:

[This statement of Rabbi Akiva was uttered] in Yavneh, the first Yom Kippur in exile, [when] the Jews were left without the Temple and its ceremonial rites for Atonement (*Kapparah*). The Jewish community was perplexed and disconsolate.... They could not see how to dispense with all the [sacrificial rites] which used to take place in the Temple on the Day of Atonement. The act of *Teshuvah* was closely associated in their minds with all these external and ceremonial acts. How can the Jew obtain absolution ... before God without the intercession and worship forms of the high priest?...

Then rose Rabbi Akiva, the majestic *metzahek*, the unswerving "optimist," and he said: Indeed we have been bereft of the temple and its divine dispensation of grace for atonement of sin. But we have lost only *Kapparah*, atonement and penitence, but not *Taharah*, purification. The act of *Kapparah* will not be as complete and perfect now as it was when the cultic worship acts of the High Priest brought man into contact with transcendent and incomprehensible divinity. But we Jews have brought another message of *Teshuvah* to man, that of *Taharah*.... The act of *Taharah*... awakens a creative force that shapes a new and loftier personality. There is no place here for worship or sacrifices.

⁵⁶ "Sacred and Profane," p. 27.

The performance of *Taharah* is not directed at transcendent divinity but at God as our Father, Companion, and intimate Counsellor who does not require any mysterious cult ceremonies or sacrifices. This *Taharah* is based on an intimate relationship between man and God, creature and Creator, son and Father. And this communion of God-man has not been affected by the loss of outward ceremonial rites.⁵⁷

What is the basis of R. Soloveitchik's claim that *Kapparah* is dependent upon the Temple and its ceremonial rites, while *Taharah* is not? I would suggest the following. We have seen that R. Soloveitchik links *Kapparah* with repentance out of fear. But we have further seen that repentance out of fear suffices only to the extent that God, *in His mercy*, accounts the sin performed deliberately as though it had been performed inadvertently. But precisely because the deliberate sin is accounted as inadvertent, the *Kapparah* is not complete. God therefore in a *second* act of mercy provides sacrificial, cultic, ceremonial rites whereby the sinner can obtain full *Kapparah* for the sin, which is now, as a result of repentance out of fear, considered inadvertent.⁵⁸ However R. Soloveitchik links *Taharah*, the

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp.26-27; Cf. "Kapparah ve-Taharah, pp. 19 –20; and "Bi`ur ha-Ra o Ha`alato," pp. 186-187.

⁵⁸ See Jacob Milgrom, *Cult and Conscience* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), pp. 117-124. "The repentance of the sinner, through his remorse and confession, reduces his intentional sin to an inadvertence, thereby rendering it eligible for sacrificial expiation.... Confession is the legal device to convert deliberate sins into inadvertencies thereby qualifying them for sacrificial expiation." And, as Milgrom acknowledges (p. 117, n. 431), his analysis of this biblical teaching was anticipated by the noted nineteenth century biblical commentator, S. D. Luzzato in *Ha-Mishtadel* on Lev.5:1.

unending process of self-purification with repentance out of love, and repentance out of love transform deliberate sins into meritorious deeds. Moreover, it is man himself, to be sure "standing before God," who so transforms them. While the Temple was still standing the sacrifices symbolized that radical act of self-transformation whereby an old self died and a new self was born, paradoxically out of the very transformation of the old self.⁵⁹ However, even after the Temple was destroyed and the Jews were bereft of cultic ceremonies and sacrifice, man himself, through the act of *Taharah*, self-transformation and self-purification, is still able to transform deliberate sins into meritorious deeds. God's forgiveness, *as an act of justice*, is thereby assured, and there is no need for cultic ceremonies and supernatural grace.

But at this point a problem arises. We have just seen that R. Soloveitchik asserts that the *Kapparah* obtained as a result of repentance out of fear flows from God's mercy, while the *Selihak* obtained as a result of repentance out of love, that is as a result of the act of *Taharah*, is an act of justice on God's part. But we have also just seen that R. Soloveitchik asserts as well that God as the source of *Kapparah* relates to man as "transcendent and incomprehensible divinity," while the *Taharah* resulting in *Selihak* is "directed at ... God as our Father, Companion, and intimate Counsellor." But do not these two assertions give rise to a paradoxical conclusion? It is the God of mercy who is the "transcendent and incomprehensible divinity," while the God of justice who is "our Father,

⁵⁹ "Bi`ur ha-Ra o Ha`alato," pp. 164-168.

Companion, and intimate Counsellor." Would not precisely the opposite seem more reasonable? It should be the merciful God who is close to us, while the stern God of justice who is distant removed and transcendent. But it is precisely here, I would claim, that R. Soloveitchik reveals the greatness of halakhic Judaism and himself as a true halakhic man.

In Judaism, as R. Soloveitchik understands it, man's link to God is established primarily through the medium of Torah and halakhah, that is an ordered rational structure, wholly accessible, indeed handed over, to man's intellectual comprehension, all the laws of which are justice and righteousness, wisdom and truth. As R. Soloveitchik states:

The approach to God is made possible by the halakhah. Primarily, halakhic man cognises God via his Torah, via the truth of halakhic cognition. There is truth in the halakhah, there is a halakhic epistemology, there is a halakhic thinking "the measure thereof is longer than the earth" (Job 11:9). There is a Torah wisdom "that is broader than the sea" (ibid.). And all of these are rooted in the will of the Holy One,... the revealer of the Law. This approach is ... a theoretical-normative one. It is via this ideal [halakhic] world ... that man approaches God. We require neither miracles nor wonders to prove the existence of God, for the halakhah itself bears witness to its Creator.⁶⁰

Therefore, in Judaism the God who is manifest via the halakhah, the God to whom man is linked through the halakhah in an indissoluble bond, is precisely God as the God of truth and righteousness. It is to this aspect of God that halakhic man finds himself irresistibly drawn, it is God in this guise whom halakhic man

⁶⁰ *Halakhic Man*, pp. 85-86.

experiences as "Father, Companion, and intimate Counsellor," and not God in His function of bestower of incomprehensible benevolence.

To return to R. Soloveitchik's portrait of repentance out of love: repentance out of love is not just an act of *Taharah*, of self-transformation and self-purification; it is also an act of self-creation. As R. Soloveitchik states:

A person is creative; he was endowed with the power to create at his very inception. When he finds himself in a situation of sin, he takes advantage of his creative capacity, returns to God, and becomes a ... self-creator and self-fashioner. Man through repentance creates himself, his own "I."⁶¹

Even more striking, repentance out of love is a redemptive act. And in light of what we have said it is a redemptive act wherein man redeems himself. As R. Soloveitchik declares in a remarkable passage: "The sinner who returns in repentance [out of love] become his own messianic king, and redeems himself from the pit-of -captivity of sin." For, as he immediately goes on to explain, the true redemptive act, whether on the personal or the national level, "does not seek to liquidate the evil, but rather to transform the evil into good, the sin into holiness, the hatred into love."⁶² We must therefore expand our previous equation to read as follows: repentance out of love = self-purification (*taharah*) = self-sanctification = the transformation of deliberate sins into meritorious deeds = self-creation = self-redemption.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 113.

⁶² "Ha-Yahas beyn Teshuvah li-Behira Hofshit," p. 236.

And finally, for R. Soloveitchik, the man who repents out of love not only redeems himself, but also cleaves to God; indeed, he becomes a dwelling place for the Shekhinah. This claim would appear to follow from an equation that R. Soloveitchik himself draws in *Halakhic Man*: "the realization of the Halakhah = contraction [of the divine Presence into the world] = holiness = creation [of worlds]."⁶³ For if we maintain, as indeed R. Soloveitchik does in *Halakhic Man*, that the idea of man as creator in Judaism refers not just to man as creator of worlds, but first and foremost to man as the creator of himself,⁶⁴ we must modify this equation to read: repentance out of love = self-sanctification = self-creation = contraction of the divine presence within one's own self.⁶⁵

At this juncture let us pause to see to what extent R. Soloveitchik's conception of repentance accords with that of Cohen and to what extent the former's conception departs from the latter's.

As I already indicated, many of the features that R. Soloveitchik links with repentance out of love, namely, separation from the path of sin, purification, forgiveness, and redemption, characterize, for Cohen, repentance in general. Moreover, as our presentation should have made clear, R. Soloveitchik agrees with Maimonides and Cohen, as opposed to Rabbenu Yonah, that self-sanctification or self-purification must be performed entirely by man and that God does not have

⁶³ *Halakhic Man*, p. 109.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁶⁵ I will return to the connection between a person's repenting out of love and his becoming a dwelling place for the Shekhinah in section IIIC of this paper.

any share in it. Finally, it is also clear that R. Soloveitchik agrees with Cohen, as opposed to Maimonides, in judging creativity and self-creation to be primary values and in viewing repentance as an act of self-creation.

Particularly striking, both Cohen and R. Soloveitchik sharply contrast *Kapparah*, cultic, ritual expiation, and *Taharah*, self-purification, deprecating the former, while glorifying the latter. Of course, Cohen as a liberal Jew sees Judaism as moving in an evolutionary fashion from *Kapparah*, accorded by the priest, to *Taharah*, as a result of which God himself effects atonement in the sense of reconciliation; consequently, for him, the sacrificial service in the Temple with its emphasis on *Kapparah* is left behind entirely in the progressive advance of Judaism as a religion of reason. R. Soloveitchik, by contrast, as a leading spokesman for traditional rabbinic Judaism, places the Temple with its emphasis on the *Kapparah* attained through "the cultic worship acts of the High Priest" and the creative inward act of *Taharah* "based on an intimate relationship between man and God, creature and Creator, son and Father" side by side. Yet, at the same time, it is clear that R. Soloveitchik agrees with Cohen in elevating *Taharah* over *Kapparah*, inasmuch as he links *Taharah* as a naturalistic, inward, creative act of self-purification with repentance out of love, while he links the *Kapparah* attained through the sacrificial, cultic, ceremonial rites with repentance out of fear.

Precisely here, I would argue, the philosophical side of R. Soloveitchik clearly emerges. Scholars have debated whether R. Soloveitchik belongs more to

the camp of the philosophers or to the camp of the mystics.⁶⁶ But one good test, in my view, in determining to which of the two camps a particular thinker belongs is to examine that particular thinker's attitude toward sacrifices. Mystics and such mystically inclined philosophers as Judah Halevi view the sacrificial service in an exceptionally positive light as constituting the mystery, par excellence, of Judaism.⁶⁷ On the other hand, philosophers, the most notable example being Maimonides, view the sacrificial service as a rather inferior, material, and outward form of divine worship.⁶⁸ On this critical issue, as I believe my analysis demonstrates, R. Soloveitchik comes down clearly on the side of the philosophers. To be sure, R. Soloveitchik, like Maimonides and unlike Cohen, sees the sacrificial service as binding and obligatory and only temporarily suspended, but that cannot

⁶⁶ The reader may wish to contrast my approach to this question with that of Rivka Horwitz, as set forth in articles which appeared back to back in *Emunah bi-Zemanim Mishtanim* (above n. 40). See Rivka Horwitz, "Yahasos shel ha-Rav Soloveitchik le-Havayah ha-Datit ve-li-Mistorin" [R. Soloveitchik's Attitude towards Religious Experience and Mysticism"], pp. 45-74; and Lawrence Kaplan, "Motivim Kabbaliyyim be Haguto shel ha-Rav Soloveitchik: Mashma`uttiyim o `Itturiyyim?" ["Kabalistic Motifs in the Thought of R. Soloveitchik: Substantive or Decorative?"], pp. 75-93.

⁶⁷ See *Kuzari* 2:25-28 and 3:11. For an analysis of the Zohar's teaching(s) concerning sacrifices, see I. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, Vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1975), pp. 187-213. However, as Tishby shows (pp.213-215), the author of *Ra`aya Mehemna* and *Tikkunei Zohar*, with his radical spiritualizing tendencies, displays a highly ambivalent attitude toward sacrifices.

⁶⁸ *Guide* 3:32

change the fact that all three stand together in their generally deprecatory attitude toward sacrifices as well as in placing the inward service of the heart as expressed in repentance and prayer on a higher level than the sacrificial service.

Regarding one critical aspect, however, R. Soloveitchik's characterization of repentance out of love differs from Cohen's characterization of repentance in general. For R. Soloveitchik, as we have seen, repentance out of love leads not only to redemption—on this point R. Soloveitchik is still following Cohen—but also to *devekut*, to cleaving to God, to becoming a dwelling place for the *Shekhinah*. But it is precisely this claim on the part of R. Soloveitchik that Cohen, if he is to remain true to his philosophy, must deny. For Cohen the gap between God and man can never be overcome. Rather, God as the infinite moral ideal can only be asymptotically approached in the never-ending process of the individual's moral self-transformation.

We are now in a position to offer yet another answer to our original question as to why Cohen is unable to affirm, as do the rabbis and as does Soloveitchik in their wake, that in repentance out of love deliberate sins are accounted to the repentant sinner as meritorious deeds. For to say that the individual via repentance out of love can transform deliberate sins into meritorious deeds is to say that via repentance out of love the individual, if only for a brief moment, is able to bridge the gap between himself and the moral ideal. But it is precisely the possibility of bridging this gap that Cohen must deny.

III. B The Dynamics of Repentance out of Love

While we have pieced together the various elements in R. Soloveitchik's conception of repentance out of love, we have yet to understand how, for him, repentance out of love is truly possible. How can man in returning to God out of love transform and uplift his past, how can he transform his deliberate sins of the past into a source of future merit and holiness? Is not the past irretrievably past? And, for R. Soloveitchik, repentance out of love is by its very nature accessible to man's understanding. Unlike the absolution obtained as a result of repentance out of fear, the self-purification that is identical with repentance out of love is a rational psychological process.

As I noted briefly in an earlier article,⁶⁹ R. Soloveitchik in approaching this issue of the nature of repentance out of love in its psychological and phenomenological aspects relies heavily, as he himself admits,⁷⁰ on Max Scheler's classic essay "Repentance and Rebirth."⁷¹ For both Scheler and R. Soloveitchik, in order to understand true repentance we must distinguish between two modes of

69. "The Religious Philosophy of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik," *Tradition* 14:2 (Fall, 1973), pp. 43-64.

70 *Halakhic Man*, Notes 125 and 127 (p. 161).

71 "Reue und Wiedergeburt," *Vom Ewigen im Menschen* (Leipzig, 1921), pp. 27-59; ["Repentance and Rebirth," *On the Eternal in Man*, trans. Bernard Nobel (London, 1960), pp. 35-65. All page references are to the English translation.

time: 1. "objective time wherein natural events take place," to use Scheler's phrase,⁷² or "the simple experience of unidimensional time... operating in the physical realm" to use R. Soloveitchik's terminology;⁷³ and 2. "the temporal life-streams [related] to our permanent personal self"—Scheler,⁷⁴ or "time as grounded in the realm of eternity"—R. Soloveitchik.⁷⁵

In objective physical time the past is irrevocably past, the future not yet here. It is a uniform, one-dimensional, one-directional continuum. However, as far as our spiritual existence is concerned, "every single life moment corresponding with just one indivisible point of objective time, contains within itself its three extensions: the experienced past, the present being experienced, and the future, whose ingredients are constituted by awareness, immediate memory and immediate expectation."⁷⁶ The man who abides in the shadow of eternity knows of a "simultaneous past, present and future." He is intimately acquainted both with "a past that persists in its existence, that does not vanish and disappear, but ... enters into the domain of the present and links up with the future," and with "a future that is not hidden behind a thick cloud, but reveals itself now in all its beauty and majesty..., a future [that] drawing on its own hidden roots infuses the past with strength and might, vigor and vitality." For him, "both past and future

72 Ibid., p. 39.

73. *Halakhic Man*, p. 115.

74 "Repentance and Rebirth," p. 39.

75 *Halakhic Man*, p. 115.

76 "Repentance and Rebirth," p. 40.

are alive, both act and create in the heart of the present." For him, "past, present, and future merge ...together, [resulting] in a new three-fold time structure ...adorned with a splendid unity."⁷⁷

But how may this living past be transformed? Here Scheler and R. Soloveitchik differ. For Scheler, the past may be transformed only if man focuses on it and it alone. The direction is wholly retrospective. In Scheler's view, the events of the past continue to live on and affect the present and future course of events. The sins and misdeeds of the past engender the quality of guilt that accretes to one's soul. It is this guilt that in its sicklied luxuriant growth smothers all of man's creative and positive powers. But this guilt derives its ongoing power, its deadly and deadening force, precisely because man's evil past which gave rise to this guilt in the first place is unremembered, evaded, ignored, indeed actively, if unconsciously, suppressed. Here Scheler agrees with Freud that the past exerts its dominion over us not through its being remembered but through its being repressed. Guilt is most effective in wreaking its havoc on the vital core of man's person precisely when man is unaware of its existence. Indeed, as Scheler points out, "one of the most mysterious ways in which guilt works is that it provides its own concealment and blunts all sensitivity to its existence."⁷⁸ Man in repenting engages in an active, directed act of memory that serves to bring to light the submerged, yet ever active past. The past is no

⁷⁷ *Halakhic Man*, p. 114.

⁷⁸ "Repentance and Rebirth," p. 54.

longer repressed but remembered. And being remembered, it loses its hold over man. "For remembering is the beginning of freedom from the covert power of the remembered thing and occurrence. It is precisely by being remembered that experiences ... become detached from the center of the self ... and lose their direct impact."⁷⁹ Repentance then is "a purposeful movement of the mind aimed at whatever guilt has accumulated in a human being,"⁸⁰ a movement that creates a profound awareness of the psychic quality of guilt accreting to the human soul and thereby annihilates that guilt.

But what happens after repentance has extinguished the dark workings of guilt? Here Scheler appears to waver. On the one hand, Scheler argues that a spontaneous moral regeneration will take place once "the life-nerve of guilt's action and continuance"⁸¹ is killed by repentance. "Life [will] begin with a spontaneous virginal beginning.... Young forces ... dormant in every soul ... unhampered [now] by the tangled growths of oppressive guilt ... will rise up of their own accord."⁸² On the other hand, Scheler argues that "repenting is equivalent to reappraising part of one's past life and shaping for it a mint new-worth and significance."⁸³ Here it would seem that it is not enough that a person

79 Ibid., p. 41.

80 Ibid., p. 53.

81 Ibid., p. 42.

82. Ibid., p. 42.

83 Ibid., pp. 41-42.

extinguish the guilt that is the “dark work of the [evil] deeds in the very soul,”⁸⁴ but that he must transform the significance of these past deeds. To be sure, this can be done. As Scheler argues:

There is no part of our past life, which ... might not be genuinely altered in its meaning and worth through entering our life's total significance as a constituent of the self-revision that is always possible.... [Every] event lying in the past has the capability of directly affecting every future event...; the total efficacy of an event is in the texture of life, bound up with its full significance and final value; [therefore] every event of our past remains indeterminate in its significance and incomplete in its value until it has yielded all its potential effects..Before our life comes to an end the whole of the past, at least with respect to its significance, never ceases to present us with the problem of what we are going to make of it. For no sooner does a section of objective time enter into the extension-category of our experience that we know as our past than it is deprived of that fatality and completion which past events in nature possess. As past this time content becomes 'ours'—is subordinated to the power of the personal self.⁸⁵

We have returned here to our starting point, the two conceptions of time. But while Scheler demonstrates that it is possible for man to “shape for [his past] a mint new-worth and significance,” he does not tell us how man concretely is to do this. How does one, through the power of the “personal self,” transform the negative past into a positive future? To be sure, Scheler states that “perfect repentance even raises man above the state of innocence into a higher existence which but for prior sin and subsequent repentance, would have been

84 Ibid., p. 55.

85 Ibid., pp. 40-41.

unattainable.”⁸⁶ And—in what can appear only as a bitter irony to the Jewish reader—Scheler, the Jew turned Catholic, in his abysmal ignorance of (or, perhaps better, his pathological attitude to) Judaism,⁸⁷ contends that this central rabbinic doctrine, “particularly characterizes the Christian concept of repentance”⁸⁸ – but he does not explain how a person, through perfect repentance, can actually rise to this level.

R. Soloveitchik, like Scheler, believes that the past, as far as a person’s spiritual existence is concerned, is not wholly determined, complete, and unalterable. To be sure, every cause has its effects, every event its repercussions – R. Soloveitchik does not advocate a total rejection of determinism—but the individual can mould and shape the effect of his past deeds.⁸⁹ But for R. Soloveitchik, unlike Scheler, it is not primarily through awareness of and remorse

86. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

87. See Gershom Scholem’s highly revealing insights in *From Berlin to Jerusalem* (New York: Schocken, 1980), p. 136 into Scheler’s attitude toward his Jewishness. As Scholem discloses, though both of Scheler’s parents were “good Jews from Bavarian Jewish families,” he liked to create bogus genealogies for himself, inventing for himself a Protestant mother or father as the occasion demanded. The *Encyclopedia Judaica* article on Scheler (Vol. 14, Col. 952) in attributing to him an “upper middle-class Protestant father”—“a distinct touch, that!—is just one of the latest victims of Scheler’s “pathological [albeit] amusing” fabrications, and needs to be corrected accordingly.

88. “Repentance and Rebirth,” p. 63.

89. *Halakhic Man*, pp. 116-117.

over the past that a person can shape that past but rather through the attainment and possession of a future that is already living in the present and that is thus able to enter into and give direction to that past. R. Soloveitchik thus defines repentance as follows:

1) a retrospective reflection upon the past, separating out that which is living in it from that which is dead; 2) a vision of the future in which one distinguishes between a future that is already present and one that has not as yet been "created"; 3) an examination of the cause located in the past in the light of the future, thereby determining its direction and destination.⁹⁰

And even more concisely: "The main principle of repentance is that the future dominate the past and reign over it in unbounded fashion."⁹¹

For R. Soloveitchik, then, repentance has as its aim the transformation of the past, the rectification and elevation of evil, but the mode of accomplishing this transformation, rectification, and elevation is not so much contrition over the past as resolve for the future.

How are we to explain R. Soloveitchik's divergence from Scheler on this crucial point?

On one level, in terms of external influences, we may attribute this divergence to the influence of Martin Heidegger on R. Soloveitchik. As I noted in a

90. Ibid., p. 115.

91. Ibid., p. 115.

previous article,⁹² R. Soloveitchik's conception of repentance is very similar to Heidegger's conception of time. For Heidegger, as one scholar has observed:

The basic tense of existential-time is future. It moves not from past through present to future, but out of the future through the past to the present. Reaching out to the future it turns back to assimilate the past that has made the present.⁹³

Moreover, not only is the similarity between the two conceptions striking but R. Soloveitchik specifically refers to Heidegger's *Being and Time* in the notes to *Halakhic Man*.⁹⁴ The influence then is undeniable.

Nevertheless, merely to explain the difference between Scheler and R. Soloveitchik in terms of external influences and the literary history of ideas would be to rest content with superficialities. For in the case of any great thinker who is influenced by another the question to be asked is: What are the internal problems and issues with which the thinker is confronted, what are the basic structures and dynamics of his thought that allow him, indeed compel him, to absorb certain

92. "The Religious Philosophy of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik," p. 63, n. 63.

93. Marjorie Grene, "Heidegger," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol.3, edited by Paul Edwards, (Glencoe: Free Press, 1967), p. 461. For Heidegger's conception of the future, see the index to *Being and Time*, translated by Joan Stambaugh (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1996), under "Future, futural." The following statements are typical: "In a way, having-been arises from the future" (p. 299); "[The] primary meaning [of existentiality] is the future" (p. 301); "Primordial and authentic temporality temporalizes itself out of the authentic future, and indeed in such a way that, futurally having-been, it first arouses the present. The primary phenomenon of primordial and authentic temporality is the future" (pp. 302-303).

94. See *Halakhic Man*, notes 4 (p. 141) and 147 (p.164).

influences and reject others? A truly great thinker is more than the sum total of the intellectual influence operating upon him. Rather, he draws upon these influences in a creative and innovative way, always maintaining his own identity, uniqueness, and originality. It follows that the primary reasons for R. Soloveitchik's divergence from Scheler must be internal and structural in nature.

Negatively, we can view R. Soloveitchik's position as a response to and correction of the weakness in Scheler's position that I noted earlier. As I indicated, Scheler's analysis may be faulted for not accounting precisely for the medium whereby an individual shapes for his past life "a mint new-worth and significance." For R. Soloveitchik, it is the living, present ever-active future revealing itself in the here-and-now that constitutes the medium whereby this process of shaping can take effect.

The future imprints its stamp on the past and determines its image.... The cause is interpreted by the effect, moment a by moment b. The past by itself is indeterminate, a closed book. It is only the present and the future that can pry it open and read its meaning.⁹⁵

More important, positively, R. Soloveitchik's position should be seen as a careful and profound attempt to explain and justify, in phenomenological terms, the halakhic conception of repentance. In the light of R. Soloveitchik's analysis, all three constituent elements of the halakhic definition of repentance: recognition of sin, contrition over the past, and resolve for the future receive their just philosophic and phenomenological due.

95. *Halakhic Man*, p. 115.

But in a more general sense I would like to argue that R. Soloveitchik's conception of repentance, wherein the person transforms his past by first turning to the future is not just an attempt to give philosophic expression to halakhic categories through creatively and selectively drawing upon both Scheler and Heidegger, but, even more fundamentally, reflects and expresses his basic religious sensibility and outlook. R. Soloveitchik emerges here, as elsewhere in his writings, in his true stature as a great Lithuanian Gaon, as the outstanding representative in our time of the great Mitnaggdic tradition associated with the Gaon of Vilna, Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin, and Rabbi Hayyim of Brisk, who not only personally embodies that tradition but has raised it to the level of self-consciousness, has given it philosophical voice, so that it can speak in universal religious and phenomenological terms.

In this regard, to view repentance primarily through the prism of contrition, as does Scheler, to focus exclusively upon the past, is alien to the spirit of halakhic man as R. Soloveitchik both portrays him and embodies him. Scheler's approach to repentance in its total emphasis upon contrition is all too reminiscent of the Musar school, which R. Soloveitchik subjects to a very sharp and stringent critique in *Halakhic Man*.⁹⁶ For R. Soloveitchik, the prime fault of the Musar program, particularly in the version propagated by R. Isaac Blaser, is that it tends to get mired and stuck in the past, that it gives rise to a sense of gloom, melancholy, depression, and despair among its adherents, so inimical to the sense of dignity

96. Ibid., pp. 74-76.

and responsibility that characterizes the halakhic individual.

One must not waste time on spiritual self-appraisal, on probing introspections, and on the picking away at the "sense" of sin. Such a psychic analysis brings man neither to fear nor to love of God, nor, most fundamental of all, to the knowledge and cognition of the Torah. The Torah cannot be acquired in a state of melancholia and depression. Man's entire psychic being must be committed to the regime of the cognition of Halakhah, and it is through such service that man can be saved from experiencing despair. The disjunctive emotions of fear and anxiety, if not rooted in Halakhah, can give rise to destructive consequences that will far outweigh any putative gains.⁹⁷

To be sure, the halakhah requires contrition as part of repentance; it requires that we focus upon and transform our past. But the vantage point from which we attain our focus, the medium whereby that transformation takes place, is the future, a future comprised of the study of Torah and the performance of commandments.

In this respect it is striking that the one essay on repentance by a Lithuanian Gaon that gives philosophical and phenomenological voice to the Musar point of view, "Repentance" by Rabbi Yehiel Yaakov Weinberg,⁹⁸ leans heavily on Scheler throughout, particularly with regard to identifying repentance almost entirely with contrition. Indeed it is striking that R. Weinberg in his essay hardly ever speaks about resolve for the future. Rather R. Weinberg accepts the Musar

97. *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.

98. "Repentance," *Lifrakim* (second abridged edition, Jerusalem, 1967), pp. 121-138.

doctrine of Rabbi Isaac Blaser, which sees contrition as the key to repentance.⁹⁹ He then proceeds to raise against it the very same philosophical and psychological objections cited by Scheler¹⁰⁰ and then justifies the necessity and effectiveness of contrition in almost exactly the same terms as Scheler.¹⁰¹ We may say then that it

99. See R. Isaac Blaser, "Contrition: The Fundamental Principle of Repentance," *Kokhvei Or* (Jerusalem, 1974), p. 136, where he declares: "The fundamental principle of repentance is contrition as opposed to abandoning the sin. Except without abandoning the sin there can be no contrition." And compare *Sha`arei Teshuvah* 1:11.

100. Compare R. Weinberg's discussion of the various modern critiques of repentance ("Repentance," pp. 122-124) with Scheler's presentation of those same critiques ("Repentance and Rebirth," pp. 36-36, 48-52). The dependence is obvious.

101. R. Weinberg, toward the beginning of his essay (p. 126), refers to Scheler's essay but this single reference by no means reveals the full extent of Scheler's influence on R. Weinberg. Indeed, large parts of R. Weinberg's essay are in truth (surprisingly unacknowledged) Hebrew paraphrases of Scheler's essay. In addition to the parallel pointed out in the previous note, the following parallels stand out: R. Weinberg's discussion of "memory" (pp. 127-130) relies heavily on Scheler's analysis of the "peculiar nature which memory plays in the act of repentance" (pp. 43-46); his conception of the nature of the effects of sin (p.131) calls to mind Scheler's discussion of guilt as a *quality*, not a feeling" (pp. 54-55); his notion of the rectification of sin (p. 132) is a paraphrase of Scheler's description of repentance as an "attack upon guilt" (p. 50); his discussion of renewing the past (p. 134) derives from Scheler's discussion of the subject (pp. 39-40); his analysis of the indeterminate nature of past events (p. 134) is a paraphrase of Scheler's views on this issue (p. 40); finally, R. Weinberg's discussion of the different levels of man's soul and his use of this notion to deal with the issue of repentance and causality (p. 137) is derived directly from Scheler's very profound and penetrating remarks on this matter (pp. 46-

was R. Weinberg's Musar inclinations that made him so open to accepting Scheler's general approach to repentance without any serious modifications.

In contrast, then, to this Musar approach to repentance, with its almost exclusive focus on contrition and its slighting of resolve for the future, R. Soloveitchik's approach attempts to do justice to all the constituent elements of the halakhic definition of repentance and hold in balance its two-fold emphasis on the prospective glance to the future and the retrospective glance to the past.

We have seen that for R. Soloveitchik the future, as a result of the act of repentance, determines the meaning of the past, that it changes its vectorial force. But if in examining repentance as a transforming force, we focus not so

47). In light of the above, I believe it would not be unfair to say that R. Weinberg's essay is, in effect, a free reworking of Scheler's essay, garnished and decked out with appropriate rabbinic references, particularly at the essay's beginning and end, and thereby suitably "Judaized." In general, Scheler's statement in the "Preface" to the second edition of *On the Eternal in Man*, about the "keen interest and comprehensive criticism" (p. 15) his work received in Jewish theological and philosophical circles is fully borne out by the striking fact that the three major, twentieth-century philosophical treatments of repentance by outstanding rabbinic figures, namely, "Repentance" by R. Weinberg, *Halakhic Man* by R. Soloveitchik, and "Grundgedanken der Religionsphilosophie Max Schelers" by R. Joseph Wohlgemuth, *Festgabe für Jacob Rosenheim*, ed. Heinrich Eisenmann (Frankfurt-am-Main: J. Kaufmann, 1931), pp.19-71, all explicitly acknowledge their debt and indeed are deeply indebted to Scheler's essay.

much on the dimension of time, but rather more on the sin itself, its roots and effects, we may ask how, for R. Soloveitchik, can man's sinful drives, the sin itself and its defiling effects, be transformed into a source of good. With regard to this question, R. Soloveitchik offers three distinct answers.

The first answer focuses on the results of sin. Sin will inexorably sever a man from God, but precisely in the moment of separation, he may yearn for God as he has never yearned before and so achieve a relationship of closeness that he never achieved before.

'The Lord appears to me from afar' (Jer. 31:2). Man, when God is close, is blind. As long as the Creator is near, as long as the Shekhinah is hovering about, man does not sense the shining happiness streaming from this wondrous closeness, man does not feel the secret vigor, joy, and bliss that flow spontaneously from God's nearness.... Consequently, man sins; God departs and leaves man alone. Only then does lonely man comprehend the magnitude of his loss and he nostalgically reaches for God.... God becomes visible to man only from a distance.... God allures and fascinates man from the infinite, uncharted lanes of the Beyond.... The sinner sees from afar and the distance intensifies his longing.... The distance enchants, capturing his heart and drags him on, on.... And then he runs. He runs faster than he used to run before he was separated from God. It is the strength of yearning that breaks forth after it had been suppressed for so long that drives him on with a mighty force to the Infinite One.¹⁰²

102. This citation is a composite, fashioned by my weaving together passages from "Sacred and Profane," pp. 23-26; "Peleitat Sofreihem" [= "A Eulogy for R. Hayyim Heller Z"L"], *Be-Sod ha-Yahid ve-ha-Yahad*, pp. 261-264 (translated into English by Shalom Carmy in *Shiur`ei Ha-Rav*, pp.8-9); and "A Eulogy for the Talner Rebbe"; "The Extirpation or Sublimation of Evil," pp. 177-183.

In a word, sin, precisely because it alienates man from God, can paradoxically, through man's resolve, become a source for a more intimate relationship with God than existed before the sin.

However, for R. Soloveitchik, it is not simply the sense of alienation, of loss, resulting from the sin that can be transformed into a source of good. The sin itself, or rather man's sinful drives, can also be so transformed. This happens in two distinct, dialectically interrelated ways.

First, the negative, destructive, aggressive drives that previously led man to sin are now transformed into powerful positive drives that lead him to righteousness. Sin gives free rein to negative drives to wreak havoc. But, at the same time, in so doing it uncovers and brings to the surface powerful reserves of energy, albeit in negative form, of which man may have been unaware. Through repentance, man rather than repressing these mighty, if chaotic, forces, rather than driving them back into the depths of the psyche, instead tames them and channels them into constructive paths. Through the transforming act of repentance, then, out of the sin itself a new powerful spiritual personality is born.¹⁰³

But second, the reverse takes place.¹⁰⁴ Man, after he has sinned, after

103. See "Sacred and Profane," p. 27; "The Extirpation or Sublimation of Evil," pp.183-184. A similar approach may be found in R. Kook, *Orot ha-Kodesh* 9:7, 11:6, 12:5, and 14:6; and Jakob J. Petuchowski, "The Concept of Teshuvah in the Bible and the Talmud," *Judaism* 17 (1968), pp.183-184.

104. This discussion is based on *Halakhic Man*, pp.114-117, and, in particular, upon "The

he experiences the shipwreck of his existence, through a mighty act of free will creates himself anew. Indeed, for R. Soloveitchik, this act of self-creation is the act of will par excellence. Man can be the architect of his own personality, may fashion his own internal spiritual dynamic. He may thereby “determine for himself the causal pattern according to which all of his natural reactions will take place.”¹⁰⁵ But once this happens,

all his desires and drives that had previously led him to sin now appear in a totally new causal framework, in a new person. Those desires that in the past had lured him into enslavement to external physical beauty have been redeemed and now appear in his new personality in a new form in which they lure him to devote himself to supernal spiritual beauty He is still “lovesick.” But the fires of passion that in his old personality had lured him to sin now lead him in an entirely different direction.¹⁰⁶

It is this type of repentance that R. Soloveitchik terms repentance of redemption and it is the true and ultimate form of repentance out of love. Here, we see the reverse side of transformation. It is not that the sublimation and transformation of powerful, sinful drives lead to the creation of a new religious personality. Rather, the powerful act of will involved in creating a new religious personality gives rise to a new, internal, personal causal nexus wherein these formerly negative drives will, of themselves, take on new positive meanings as they become integrated into their new and radically different spiritual surroundings.

Relationship between Repentance and Free Will,” pp.235-236 and 241-244.

105. Ibid., p. 243.

106. Ibid., p. 243.

In light of my analysis of R. Soloveitchik's understanding of the dynamics of repentance out of love, I would like to return once again to my original question. Why can't Cohen affirm that in repenting out of love an individual can transform deliberate sins into meritorious deeds?

First, Cohen, I would suggest, could not accept R. Soloveitchik's view regarding the transforming force of repentance out of love from the standpoint of its relationship to the category of time. Reinier Munk argues that "there is a similarity between Soloveitchik and Cohen in their interpretation of the category of anticipation as characteristic of the category of time."¹⁰⁷ But this similarity, I would contend, masks a deeper dissimilarity. True, for both R. Soloveitchik and Cohen, the individual in repenting out of love turns to the future. But for R. Soloveitchik, as we have seen, the individual who repents out of love *after* turning to the future turns to the past, and, in light of the future, transforms the meaning of the past, rectifying and elevating it. For Cohen, however, since self-transformation is an infinite task, directed to the future, an infinite task of moral ascent, there is no place for turning from the future to the past. One's eyes must be firmly directed to the future and to it alone. To be sure, remorse, for Cohen, is an important preliminary step in the process of repentance. But it is only a "preliminary step ... a negative precondition for the abandonment of the old way of life."¹⁰⁸ Note carefully: The old way is abandoned, consigned to a forgotten

107. Reinier Munk, *The Rationale of Halakhic Man*, p. 94.

108. R R, p. 203.

past, *not*, as in R. Soloveitchik's concept of repentance out of love, transformed.

There may also be another reason why Cohen could not accept any turn from the future to the past. For such a turn would lead to the merging together of past, present, and future, which, in turn (pun intended!), would give rise to that substantial self whose very existence Cohen denies. Precisely here, we see that Cohen's approach to repentance is still within the bounds of his critical idealism, as opposed to R. Soloveitchik, who, for all the influence of Cohen on his approach to repentance, breaks with Cohen's critical idealism and moves in the direction of existential phenomenology.

In this respect, the difference between R. Soloveitchik and Cohen concerning relationship of repentance and the dimensions of time is the reverse mirror image of the difference between him and the Musar school on this issue. If the Musar approach to repentance, in R. Soloveitchik's view, places too much emphasis on contrition over the past and consequently slights the critical element of resolve for the future, Cohen, in his view (though he never states this criticism explicitly) places too much emphasis on resolve for the future and consequently slights the critical element of contrition over the past.

Second, I would further suggest, Cohen could not accept R. Soloveitchik's view regarding the transforming force of repentance out of love from the standpoint of its relationship to the sin itself. Both Cohen and R. Soloveitchik would agree that an individual in repenting out of love creates himself anew. But for R. Soloveitchik, as we have just seen, such an act of self-creation means that

the individual through a powerful act of will creates for himself a new, internal, personal causal nexus wherein his formerly negative drives will, of themselves, take on new positive meanings as they become integrated into their new and radically different spiritual surroundings. Cohen, however, could not accept such an understanding of the meaning of self-creation. For the existence of a new, internal personal causal nexus, as espoused by R. Soloveitchik, would appear to presuppose the existence of a substantial self. But, as we have seen time and again, Cohen denies that the new I arising out of repentance out of love is a substantial self. In a similar vein, such a personal causal nexus would have a definite shape and form; but for Cohen, "As little as it is possible to imagine that a new heart is formed in actuality, so little is it possible for the meaning of the new I which is to be formed to have a definite shape."¹⁰⁹ Rather, for Cohen, as we have also seen, the new heart and the new spirit, the new I created in the act of repentance "are and remain tasks."¹¹⁰

With this, I have completed my analysis of R. Soloveitchik's understanding of the dynamics of repentance out of love. Let us now step back for a moment and ask ourselves if there is a common thread running through all the different

109. Ibid., p. 204.

110. Ibid., p. 204.

facets of Soloveitchik's elaborate and complex picture of repentance out of love. I believe there is, and would suggest that it is R. Soloveitchik's claim that repentance out of love is not supernatural but rather wholly psychological in character, that it is a rational, comprehensible act that takes place in the depths of the psyche. And, for R. Soloveitchik—and in this respect he reflects his Kantian background—a rational, comprehensible act means an act that takes place within a lawful, causal framework. It is for this reason that repentance out of fear, which attempts to obliterate the past, to deny its effect on the present is, for R. Soloveitchik, an essentially non-rational act and is only effective thanks to God's transcendent, mysterious grace. For how can one affirm a cause, yet deny its effect? But in repentance out of love, as we have seen, man never denies the principle of causality, though on a personal level it operates in a different fashion than it operates in the realm of nature.

The act of *taharah* is not supernatural but psychological. It conveys one law in mental causality; although a cause is given the effect need not equal the cause. The effect need not be predetermined. Man himself may determine the vectorial character of the effect and give it direction and destination.¹¹¹

Here R. Soloveitchik clearly maintains that for an act to be considered rational and psychological in character it must conform to the principle of causality. Moreover, as we just saw, R. Soloveitchik, in speaking of redemptive repentance, emphasizes that man's ultimate act of self-transformation is not an act whereby

111. "Sacred and Profane," p. 25.

man abolishes a causal nexus, but rather one whereby man creates for himself a new internal causal structure that will determine from the outset, in a positive fashion, the patterns of his own behavior and responses. His acts in this sense follow a lawful pattern, but it is a pattern that has been set by man himself. If repentance out of love, then, is a rational, lawful, psychological act whose effectiveness may be understood solely in terms of its own inner personal dynamics, there is no need for mysterious, transcendent, supernatural acts of grace. Here, adopting a strictly philosophical approach, we see R. Soloveitchik's analysis arriving at exactly the same conclusion that we had seen it arrive at earlier when looking at the matter from an halakhic viewpoint. Once again, both aspects of R. Soloveitchik's thought, the halakhic and the philosophical, merge in a perfect unity.

C. Repentance out of Love and the Oral Torah

We have attempted to piece together a complete picture of Rabbi Soloveitchik's conception of repentance, both repentance out of fear and repentance out of love. And yet the final, and perhaps the most important, piece is still missing. For ultimately what is it that gives man the power to achieve this radical self-transformation, this arduous self-purification, this mighty self-creation? What is it that endows man with the ability to use the future to determine the meaning and the direction of the past? What is it that confers

upon man the strength to change sin into a source of good? In a word, from what wells does man draw those resources of spirit that enable him to perform repentance out of love? God's gift of free will? To be sure. But is not man's free will radically impaired by sin? God's gift of intellect, of analytic introspection penetrating to the very depths of one's being? Again, to be sure. But is not man's reason corrupted by sin?

And here we come to the most profound answer of all. It is the oral Torah, the living Torah, given to Moses but nurtured and developed by the sages and community of Israel, that is the ultimate wellspring of spirit deep in the soul of man, or at least the Jew, from whence he may draw the "waters of salvation," the might, the power, the force, the strength to perform repentance out of love.

In an as yet unpublished discourse on repentance that he delivered in 1969,¹¹² R. Soloveitchik, basing himself on certain midrashic texts, distinguishes between two types of repentance, one type of repentance where God's atonement flows from His attribute of mercy and one type of repentance where God's forgiveness flows from His attribute of justice, and links the former with the written Torah and the latter with the oral Torah. On Shavuot, then, when God revealed to Moses the written Torah, simultaneously with it He revealed to

112. I have prepared an edited transcript of this discourse, which I hope to publish in the near future. One section of this discourse was apparently recycled and is to be found in the discourse, "Zemanei Teshuvah ve-Yihhudam," in *Yemei Zikkaron*, pp. 245-251. As we shall see, however, in the latter discourse, delivered in the 1975, R. Soloveitchik draws a radically different conclusion from that drawn in the 1969 discourse.

him the repentance of mercy. But on the Day of Atonement, when, according to the Rabbis, God revealed to Moses the oral Torah,¹¹³ simultaneously with it He revealed to him a new type of repentance, the repentance of justice. R. Soloveitchik explains the nature of the links as follows.

Every sin may be viewed as constituting an act of *me`ilah*, of trespass. In a strict halakhic sense, a person commits act of *me`ilah* whenever he uses a sacred object for profane purposes. But in a broader aggadic or theological sense, everything in the world is potentially holy, is capable of being sanctified.

113 R. Soloveitchik bases himself primarily on *Responsa of the Beth Ha-Levi, Derush 18*, written by his great-grandfather and namesake, R. Joseph Ber Soloveitchik of Brisk. For R. Soloveitchik's presentation of the various rabbinic texts pointing in this direction, see "Zemanei Teshuvah ve-Yihudam," pp. 247; "The Avodah Recitation and the Conclusion of Yom Kippur," *Before Hashem You Shall be Purified*, pp. 146-147, 162; "Keri'at ha-Torah be-Shabbat, be-Sheni, u-ve-Hamishi," *Shi`urim le-Zekher Abba Mari, Z"L*, Vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Makhon Yerushalayim, 1983), pp.176-177; and "A Discourse on the Sacrificial Order of the Day of Atonement," *Nora'ot ha-Rav*, Vol. 6, edited by B. David Schreiber (New York,1997), p. 217. I should note that the contention of the *Beth Ha-Levi*, based upon the *Yalkut Shimoni (Ki Tissa 393)*, that on the first tablets both the written Torah and what was later to be the oral Torah were written down, while on the second tablets only the written Torah was written down, the oral Torah being reserved solely for oral transmission, would appear to be directly contradicted by the view, expressed in *Shemot Rabbah 46:1*, that the first tablets contained only the ten commandments, while the second tablets contained "Halakhot, Midrash, and Aggadot." (See, however the comments of *Eytz Yosef*, ad. loc.) On the other hand, note *Shemot Rabbah 47:12*, which explicitly states that the "Halakhot, Midrash, and Aggadot" were not written down on the second tablets, but were revealed only orally.

Therefore, if a person, instead of using his possessions for noble, holy tasks uses them for his own ignoble, profane ends he commits thereby an act of *me`ilah*, of trespass, of profanation, of desecration. If a man instead of uplifting himself, of sanctifying himself, of using his own abilities and talents for elevated purposes, degrades and profanes himself, utilizes his abilities and talents for base ends, then, again, he commits an act of *me`ilah*.

But, from the standpoint of halakhah, what is the effect of an act of *me`ilah*? If a person takes a sacred object and uses it for profane purposes what happens to the status of that sacred object? Here the halakhah declares that the effect of *me`ilah* depends upon the nature of the sanctity of the object which is being profaned. The halakhah distinguishes between two types of *kedushah*, holiness: *kedushat damim*, monetary holiness, or *kedushat bedek ha-bayyit*, the holiness of objects that are the property of the sanctuary, and *kedushat ha-guf*, intrinsic holiness. If one sets aside an animal for an offering, that animal acquires *kedushat ha-guf*, the animal itself becomes sacred, it acquires intrinsic holiness. However, if one sets aside some object for the temple treasury, the object does not acquire *kedushat ha-guf*, intrinsic holiness, but only *kedushat damim*, monetary holiness. The object is not holy per se. Only its value is holy. Or to put it another way, the object belongs to the realm of holiness. To phrase the matter loosely, it is *meshubad*, it is bound, linked, to a domain of holiness that is external to it. The difference, then, between *kedushat ha-guf* and *kedushat damim* should be understood as follows: In the case of the former, holiness is internalized within

the object; in the case of the latter, holiness is external to the object.

How, then, does this distinction between the two types of *kedushah*, *kedushat damim* and *kedushat ha-guf*, impact upon the halakhic effect of *me'ilah*? The halakhah states that if one commits an act of trespass, of desecration, with respect to an object that possesses *kedushat damim*, the object loses its sanctity, it becomes wholly profane. For since the source of holiness in the instance of *kedushat damim* is external to the object, through the act of *me'ilah*, through the wrongful misuse of the object, the individual cuts the link connecting the object with that external source. The object therefore has no source of holiness upon which to draw and becomes profane. However, if one commits an act of trespass, of desecration, with respect to an object possessed of *kedushat ha-guf*, that object can be tarnished, blackened, but it can never lose its sanctity, can never become wholly profane. For since the holiness in *kedushat ha-guf* is internal to the object, is embedded in its very grain, no act in the world can deprive the object of that holiness. The holiness may be tarnished, may be coarsened, but it can never be completely eradicated, nor can it be driven out. If an object possesses *kedushat ha-guf*, then no matter what happens it remains holy forever.

One of the fundamental principles of Judaism is the concept of *kedushat Yisrael*, the affirmation that each and every Jew is holy. But, R. Soloveitchik asks, what type of holiness does he possess: *kedushat damim* or *kedushat ha-guf*? And the import of the answer to this question should now be obvious. For if the holiness of the Jew is akin to *kedushat damim*, then every sin, insofar as it is an

act of trespass, renders the Jew wholly profane, deprives him entirely of his holiness. However, if the holiness of the Jew is akin to *kedushat ha-guf*, then sin, despite the fact that it is an act of *me`ilah*, can only tarnish or coarsen that holiness; the Jew, however, cannot be deprived of holiness. The Jew can never become wholly profane; his holiness has been blackened but *he, himself*, remains holy.

R. Soloveitchik is now in a position to answer his original question: How is the written Torah linked with repentance of mercy and the oral Torah with repentance of justice? He replies: If the Israelites had received the written Torah alone, then the holiness accruing to them as a result of their possession of that Torah would have been akin to *kedushat damim*. The individual Jew would have been linked, would have been bound to a source of holiness external to him. Consequently, if a Jew would have sinned in such circumstances and committed thereby an act of *me`ilah*, he would have broken the link, snapped the bond connecting him to the external source. He would have thereby become wholly profane. He would have been left bereft, devoid of any sanctity. Therefore, even if he would have repented, even if he would have returned to God, he would have been only able to *reacquire* his lost holiness through an act of mercy on God's part. The repentant sinner would have had no claim on God. Rather God would have restored to him the holiness that he lost as a result of sin as an undeserved gift, as a sheer act of grace.

However, once the people of Israel received the oral Torah on the Day of

Atonement, holiness was no longer contained just in a text, in an external source to which they were linked, but it became internalized within them. Torah was no longer simply a book, but a living tradition embodied within a living people. The oral Torah is an integral part of the people. It is not so much a deposit of tradition, but rather a living institution: originally the Great Court, the representative of all Israel, and after the dissolution of that court the people of Israel as a whole. Torah is to be found not only in a book, but also in each and every Jew who is a link in the ongoing tradition. In a word, for R. Soloveitchik, it was through the revelation of the oral Torah that holiness became internalized in each and every Jew and the holiness of Israel became transformed thereby from *kedushat damim* to *kedushat ha-guf*.

It follows that once Israel possesses the oral Torah, once *kedushat Yisrael* is akin to *kedushat ha-guf*, if a Jew sins he can no longer be wholly profaned, for his holiness is an integral part of him; it lives within him. To be sure, his sin effaces his holiness, but it never eradicates it. He is both defiled and holy at the same time, or to put it another way, his holiness is encrusted with a layer of defilement. Therefore, if through an act of repentance the Jew cleanses himself, if he purifies himself from his defilement, then his holiness re-emerges, as of itself, in all its beauty and splendor. The repentant sinner then need not ask God to restore his holiness to him as an act of grace; he never lost it. Rather the repentant sinner having, through his own efforts, raised his inalienable holiness to its previous exalted state, may now rightfully demand from God, as an act of

justice, forgiveness.

The linkage drawn in the above discourse on repentance between repentance of mercy and the written Torah, and repentance of justice and the oral Torah is brilliant homiletics, indeed one of the most brilliant pieces of homiletics I have ever had the privilege of hearing from Rabbi Soloveitchik. Nevertheless, as I said above, I believe that it is necessary to place this linkage within the framework I have established. We have seen earlier that, for Rabbi Soloveitchik, repentance of justice is essentially repentance out of love, while repentance of mercy is essentially repentance out of fear. The primary link then is between repentance out of fear and the written Torah and repentance out of love and the oral Torah.¹¹⁴

This link between repentance out of love and the oral Torah enables us understand Rabbi Soloveitchik's insistence throughout his writings that the Day of

114. See, as well, "Keri'at ha-Torah be-Shabbat, be-Sheni, u-ve-Hamishi," p. 177, where the oral Torah is linked with repentance. While this discourse does not explicitly refer to repentance out of love, R. Soloveitchik's description of repentance there as a "renewal of the personality" clearly indicates he has repentance out of love in mind. Similarly, in "Zemanei Teshuvah ve-Yihhudam," p. 250, the oral Torah is again linked with repentance. And while, again, this discourse too does not explicitly refer to repentance out of love, R. Soloveitchik's reference there to cleaving to God and the necessity for *Taharah*, for self-purification, once again clearly indicates that he has repentance out of love in mind.

Atonement is the day set aside for repentance out of love.¹¹⁵ For it was on the Day of Atonement that the oral Torah was revealed. Consequently, on the Day of Atonement we are all called upon not simply to obtain *Kapparah*, atonement, through external sacrificial rites, but to engage in an act of *Taharah*, of self-purification, before God — “Before God you shall purify yourselves” (Lev. 16:30).¹¹⁶

We may therefore return to our earlier question. What is it that gives man the power to radically transform himself, to create a new personality, to use the future to determine the past, to change sin into a source of good—in a word, to repent out of love? A powerful will? A penetrating intellect? The voice of God that

115. See “Kapparah ve-Taharah,” pp. 19-20; “Bi`ur ha-Ra o Ha`alato,” pp. 185-187;

116. Note that R. Soloveitchik follows the view of Rabbenu Yonah, and interprets the phrase, “Lifnei A-donai titharu” (Lev. 16:30) as a command, understanding it to mean, “Before God you shall purify yourselves,” as opposed to a promise, in which case it would mean, “Before God you shall be purified.” Thus, R. Soloveitchik maintains that when the high priest recites this phrase during the sacrificial service of the day, he is urging the people not to be satisfied with the *Kapparah* provided by the sacrificial service, but to engage in the act of *Taharah*, an act that can be performed only by each individual on his own. See “Kapparah ve-Taharah, p.19; and “Bi`ur ha-Ra o Ha`alato,” pp.186-187. For Rabbenu Yonah’s view, see *Sha`arei Teshuvah*, Second Gate, Fifth Path. Note that Rabbi Hutner, in *Pahad Yitzhak: Yom ha-Kippurim*, Essay 1, also links the character of the Day of Atonement as a day of revelation with the requirement that the repentance that one performs on that day be a repentance of *Taharah*, though he understands this connection differently than does R. Soloveitchik. I hope to return to this matter on another occasion.

calls from within even after the sin? To be sure, all these, but yet more. It is ultimately the oral Torah, the living Torah which each and every Jew integrates into his very being, that enables him to interiorize that holiness that undergirds his will, that illumines his intellect, that sustains the divine voice from within. Were it not for the oral Torah, sin would paralyze man's will, corrupt his intellect, smother the inner divine voice. If the Jew possessed the written Torah alone, he would have only had an external relationship to holiness. He would not have had an inner source of strength from which to draw, so as to engage in that arduous process of self-purification called repentance out of love. He would only have been able to repent out of fear and hope for God's infinite mercies. Only the oral Torah which is indissolubly linked with the people of Israel, which can never truly be written down but lives on in the soul of every Jew, ensures, guarantees, that, no matter what, man will never lose that power of self-transformation which, as we have stated time and time again, is repentance out of love.¹¹⁷

117 In *Halakhic Man*, p. 114, R. Soloveitchik writes that "Spinoza and Nietzsche did well—from this perspective [i.e. -- repentance from the perspective of *Kapparah*] to deride the idea of repentance." To elaborate briefly on this point in light of our analysis, we may say that had the Jewish people received only the written Torah they would have been able to engage only in repentance out of fear and thereby would have only obtained *Kapparah*. But such a form of repentance would indeed be vulnerable to the critiques leveled against repentance by Spinoza and Nietzsche. More broadly, we may say that R. Soloveitchik is tacitly suggesting that the entire modern critique of Judaism from Spinoza via Kant and Hegel to Nietzsche regarding Judaism as a slavish religion based on obedience would be in place were Judaism only a religion of the written

We return for the final time to our original question as to why Cohen is unable to affirm, as do the rabbis and as does R. Soloveitchik in their wake, that in repentance out of love deliberate sins are accounted to the repentant sinner as meritorious deeds. We had suggested earlier that to say that the individual via repentance out of love can transform deliberate sins into meritorious deeds is to say that via repentance out of love that individual, if only for a brief moment, is able to bridge the gap between himself and the moral ideal. But it is precisely the possibility of bridging this gap that, we observed, Cohen must deny.

In light of our discussion in this section, we may supplement our previous answer as follows. Cohen, we may say, conceives of the relationship between the individual and the moral ideal on the model of the relationship that exists between the Jew and the written Torah. In both instances, the individual is linked to a source of holiness that is external to him. For R. Soloveitchik, by contrast, thanks to the oral Torah holiness need not be, as it is for Cohen, an infinite asymptotic ideal that may only be approached but never attained. Rather, the oral Torah, which stands at the very heart of Judaism, enables the Jew to bridge the gap between himself and the moral ideal and to interiorize holiness within him.

Torah. It is thanks to the fact that Judaism is primarily based on the oral Torah that these critiques in R. Soloveitchik's view, are so misguided. For it is the oral Torah that both leads the individual to the love of God and makes it possible for him or her to repent out of love. I elaborate upon this important issue in my article on R. Soloveitchik in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Jewish Philosophy* (forthcoming).

Thistles in with another point we had made earlier. We had contrasted R. Soloveitchik's view that repentance out of love leads to *devekut*, to cleaving to God, to being a dwelling place for the Shekhinah, with that of Cohen who asserts the gap between God and man can never be entirely overcome, that since God is the infinite moral ideal, one may only approach Him, never cleave to Him. Here again our earlier discussion takes on a new dimension in the light of our present discussion in this section. I would suggest that we take very seriously R. Soloveitchik's reference to the Shekhinah, to the indwelling presence of God. For the Kabbalah identifies the Shekhinah, the last and most immanent of the ten Sefirot, both with Knesset Israel, the mystical collectivity of the Jewish people, and with the oral Torah. From R. Soloveitchik's standpoint, I would suggest that we should view the Kabbalah's identification of the oral Torah with the Shekhinah as stemming from the prior identification of the oral Torah with Knesset Israel. As we saw, in a very real sense the oral Torah, for R. Soloveitchik, is the creation of the Jewish people. Thus, R. Soloveitchik states in *Halakhic Man* that

Halakhic man received the Torah from Sinai not as a simple recipient but as a creator of worlds, as a partner with the Almighty in the act of creation. The power of creative interpretation (*hiddush*) is the very foundation of the received tradition.¹¹⁸

And, similarly, he states in *But from Thence Ye Shall Seek* that "God gave the Torah to Israel and commanded us to engage in creative interpretation."¹¹⁹

118 *Halakhic Man*, p. 81.

119 *But from Thence Ye Shall Seek*, p. 207.

What does he mean by such statements if not that the Sage by an act of creative interpretation manifested in the study and development of the oral Torah becomes “a creator of worlds, ... a partner with the Almighty in the act of creation.” If, as Gershom Scholem and others have contended, one of the key innovations in the Kabbalah was to identify the Shekhinah with Knesset Israel,¹²⁰ it follows that the oral Torah, which is the creation of Knesset Israel, should similarly be identified with the Shekhinah. The oral Torah, thus, represents the indwelling presence of God in the world. Therefore, the person who performs repentance out of love as a result of having interiorized the oral Torah within him has indeed become a dwelling place for the Shekhinah.

To reverse this last point, we may say that the person who has interiorized the oral Torah within him, precisely because he thereby becomes “a partner with the Almighty in the act of creation,” overcomes, via this joint partnership in the creation of Torah, the distance separating him from God and becomes a dwelling place for the Shekhinah. He may thereby truly experience God as “Father, Companion and Intimate Counselor,” may truly come to love God, and consequently be able to reach the heights of engaging in repentance out of love.¹²¹

120 Gershom Scholem, “Shekhinah: The Feminine Element in the Divinity,” *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead* (New York: Schocken, 1991), pp. 160-161.

121. See, in this connection, my remarks in note 117.

D. An Unexpected Development

There is a surprise ending to this paper. I have analyzed R. Soloveitchik's conception of repentance as it emerges from his essays and discourses written and presented from the 1940s to the late 1960s. However, in a discourse on repentance that he delivered in 1975 R. Soloveitchik introduced a major modification into his conception of repentance—some might go so far as to term it major reversal.¹²² In this discourse R. Soloveitchik once again returns to R. Akiva's famous watchword: "Happy are you O Israel. Before Whom do you purify yourselves? and Who purifies you? Your Father in Heaven." But this time R. Soloveitchik does not maintain that "the act of purification is something each man must perform by himself, each man in his own heart." Rather, emphasizing the conclusion of R. Akiva, "Who purifies you? Your Father in Heaven," R. Soloveitchik asserts that on the Day of Atonement God does *not* leave purification to man, but rather "God Himself effects purification, *Taharah*, as He effects expiation, *Kapparah*."¹²³ How should we, from a normative point of view,

122. See "Zemanei Teshuvah ve-Yihhudam," pp. 242-243; and "Rabbi Akiva's Homily on Teshuvah," *Before Hashem You Shall be Purified*, pp. 98-100. For the date of this discourse, see *Ibid.*, Table of Contents, p. iv, s.v. "Yom Kippur – God in Search of Man."

123. It should be noted that R. Soloveitchik limits his point to the purification attained on the Day of Atonement. Regarding the rest of the year, he continues to maintain his contention that "the act of purification is something each man must perform by himself, each man in his own heart." It is precisely because "God so desires His people's closeness on the Day of Atonement that

evaluate this startling change?¹²⁴

Should we see it, as Cohen no doubt would, as a failure of nerve, as a descent from the bracing heights of the religion of reason down to the miasmal swamps of metaphysics and myth? Should we see it, as Maimonides no doubt would, as a fall from the rigorous naturalism of the true philosophical and scientific understanding of Judaism into the supernaturalism of popular religion

ultimately God Himself [on that day] effects purification, *Taharah*, as well [as expiation, *Kapparah*]." But this qualification does not, in my view, alter the radical nature of his change of view.

124. I presented an earlier version of this paper as a lecture at the University of Toronto in 2001. An auditor queried whether I should have been so startled by this change of heart on the part of R. Soloveitchik. After all, she observed, R. Soloveitchik was well known for often changing his mind and offering differing and at times diametrically opposed opinions and rulings regarding a wide variety of issues. The query is well taken, but I would make two points in reply. First, the issues concerning which R. Soloveitchik would often change or appear to change his mind were generally issues of public policy or complex halakhic questions where slight, almost indiscernible, changes in the circumstances surrounding the particular question posed to him could affect the way in which he ruled, not matters of fundamental theological import. Second, what is striking concerning R. Soloveitchik's views on repentance is that, as I have sought to show, these views, as they are set forth in his essays and discourses written and presented from the 1940s to the late 1960s, a period of some 30 years, form, despite minor variations and inconsistencies, a coherent and relatively unchanging whole. For him, then, to suddenly introduce a major modification into these views, to, as it were, shift gears after this long period, constitutes, I would maintain, an unexpected and startling development.

[¹²⁴]IGNORE

for which Maimonides has only condescension and disdain? Or, to the contrary, should we see it, as Rabbenu Yonah no doubt would, as a salutary and long overdue departure from the shoals of philosophic rationalism and naturalism to the safe shores of sound rabbinic doctrine?

Obviously, this is a question of the highest importance, and this essay is not the place to resolve it. But in light of my analysis, I do believe I can say two things. First, as we have seen, R. Soloveitchik's conception of repentance as it emerges from his essays and discourses written and presented from the 1940s to the late 1960s is, despite minor variations and inconsistencies, very closely knit and forms a coherent whole. One cannot therefore simply modify one element in this conception without bringing the entire edifice crashing down. Since R. Soloveitchik never developed his new, more traditionalist conception of repentance, I would suggest that we should ignore it, and focus, as I have done in this essay, on the conception of repentance he so carefully and powerfully worked out and presented over the course of most of his career.

And last. The very fact that late in his life R. Soloveitchik repudiated the view that he had so steadfastly maintained before, namely, that it is man who performs purification, that all purification is self-purification, serves, in a negative way, as striking testimony to the major role that this key Cohenian concept played in R. Soloveitchik's thinking about repentance. It was only toward the end of his career that R. Soloveitchik freed himself, for better or for worse, from the influence of Cohen concerning this critical issue. Perhaps we may say that at

long last R. Soloveitchik's natural, almost childlike piety triumphed over his commitment to the Maimonidean and Cohenian position that the highest form of repentance, namely, repentance out of love, is not supernatural but rather wholly psychological in character, that it is a rational, comprehensible act that takes place in the depths of the psyche.

If so, it was a triumph that one can view only with the most ambiguous of feelings.