

Teshuvah and Mentoring— The CCAR Process

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Teshuvah (repentance) and its concomitant *tikkun hamidot* (rehabilitation) are challenging, difficult, at times frightening. Who are we? What have we done? What we have become haunts our mental life. We must resolve to change and act on our resolve. We must face the fundamental elements of human growth and becoming.

I am writing this essay in the midst of my own process of *teshuvah* and rehabilitation. Time may bring further depth, knowledge, and insight. It is my hope that such further understanding awaits. In this ongoing process and in the experience of being mentored by a small group of my colleagues, I have learned, I have struggled to comprehend, and I have changed. Some of what I have learned about *teshuvah*, mentoring, fears of change, change itself, and our lives as rabbis may help others. I share it with you in that spirit.

Process of *Teshuvah*

Teshuvah requires behavioral change and *tikkun* (*tikkun hamidot*). One form of *teshuvah* requires as its proof and validation that when given the opportunity to repeat the offensive action, we do not repeat our earlier behavior (Rambam). We consciously and with forethought choose not to act in that particular way. *Tikkun* also requires a change in attitude toward oneself. I no longer find acceptable the person that I have become and/or some of the values that I have adopted. I work to change my being in a way more consonant with the person I desire to be. Values that may have been affirmed in words become integrated in essential and existential change of character and ethos.

As I seek *teshuvah*, many texts I once studied speak more powerfully and pointedly. I am addressed by them in both personal and

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interpersonal ways. New understandings and possibilities emerge; insights deepen. In *Pirkei Avot* 3:16, Rabbi Akiva teaches,

Everything is given on pledge and a net is spread out over all the living. The shop is open, the merchant extends credit, the ledger is open, and the hand records therein. Whoever wishes to borrow, let him come and borrow. But the collectors make their regular daily rounds and payment is taken from man whether or not he recognizes it. They have good authority on which to rely and the legal procedure is proper. All is prepared for the festive banquet.

This passage so clearly indicates, and so I have studied, that we are responsible and accountable for all that we do and cannot escape the consequences of our actions. In further study, the last sentence calls out for interpretation and clarification. *V'hakol m'tukan l'seudah* is most often understood as "everything is prepared for the banquet awaiting the righteous in the world-to-come." The table is set, food prepared and all are awaiting the honored guests. Yet Rashi, Bartinora, Ramban, and Rabbeinu Yonah suggest that we read "*V'hakol*" either that all men and women have a share in the world-to-come after a process of *tikkun* in this world, or that all parts of our being undergo *tikkun* in preparation for that festive meal in the world-to-come. After a process of *tikkun*, we can all earn the blessings of the world-to-come.

A passage in *B. T. Berachot* 8b is of essence. When asked about the correct way to treat a scholar who had forgotten so much of his learning, Rabbi Joshua replied that such a scholar is to be treated with respect. *Luchot veshivrei luchot munachot baaron*—the complete second unbroken set of tablets, as well as the broken fragments of the first set, were placed in the Ark of the Covenant.¹ The first set of tablets shattered by Moses resided with the second unbroken set. Even brokenness and fragments retain holiness and warrant respect and reverence.

We can extract from this teaching and learn about *tikkun* and *teshuvah*. These processes require facing the past, living with it, and transforming it. Brokenness does not disappear. We carry both sets with us forever. I carry the fragments of the tablets of my life, shattered by my own actions, as Moses did with the original tablets. Then, as the personification of the *aron* (Ark of the Covenant), I carry the new set as well. Only in this way can healing come from brokenness itself. The affirmation of forgiveness and new possibilities

emerges from the presence of the reality of brokenness, its transformation, and the new path in the journey.

Many of us know and have used the story of the monarch's emerald. Somehow this most precious gem was scratched and then thought to be worthless. Yet an artisan used the deep scratch as the beginnings of an engraving of a beautiful flower. Starting with the scratch and flaw that so many thought had destroyed the gem and its worth, this work of creation now added greater value to the gem itself. The brokenness remains but is transformed by creation into that which possesses greater worth.

In his lectures on *teshuvah*, the Rav z"l (the late Dr. Pinchas Peli's works on the teachings of Rabbi J.B. Soloveichik are so helpful for our understanding here) emphasized that the challenge of *teshuvah* is integrally interwoven with the concept of time, "for it involves a future correction of something in the past."² In qualitative time "the past is continuous and stable, does not pass or slip away through one's fingers, but remains static. This past obtrudes and enters the domain of the present which intermingles with the future."³ Both past and future "are alive, act and create in the hub of the present. The fundamental principle of the essence of repentance is that the future will rule and govern the past unrestrictedly."⁴ Repentance shapes and creates time in the order of future, past, and present.⁵

You and I are obliged to create ourselves. The commemoration of the creation of the world on Rosh Hashanah is the affirmation that repentance and *tikkun* are acts of creation. Herein lies the Jewish view of grace, that we can correct something in the past, and the Holy One is accepting and forgiving. Yet, like the broken tablets the past remains, transformed, corrected, part of holiness itself. The scratch in the emerald of our soul and character is transformed.

The truly repentant and transformed person is characterized by "creative power, which enables him to forego uprooting the past. He can, on the contrary, take up the past and exalt it and shape it, so that it can be molded with the future to create the present himself."⁶ This teaching runs contrary to Rambam's *teshuvah gemurah* (complete repentance), where somehow the past is erased completely from the person's being. In the Rav's view, the demand of *teshuvah* is not to uproot the past but to shape and mold it. Through this creative capacity and power, you and I learn to live as subjects and not as objects.⁷ "The dialectical dynamic of sin (is) that the very thing that severs man from God, which makes him abominable and unclean, is the very thing which leads him after repentance to that high

peak.”⁸ The new spiritual forces and energy can be sanctified and directed heavenward.⁹

The goal is the transformation of the past with destiny and not fate in mind. The past is never erased. We learn to use our creative powers in the face of what seems forever fated and transform it and ourselves by focusing on destiny-directed existence.¹⁰ This is no easy task, but essential; it is a task that is painful and at times unrelenting. No excuses or justifications will do here—only hard work.

The Mentors and the Mentoring Process

As part of the process of *teshuvah* and rehabilitation, the CCAR requires mentoring by colleagues, but this requirement transcends the CCAR. Mentoring is essential to the process of *teshuvah*. In addition, an analysis of the elements of the mentoring work is essential to understanding the process. As mentors, colleagues fulfill their rabbinic roles as counselors and help define the purpose and scope of rabbinic counseling. They come to represent the potential for humanness and Jewish presence even as they carry forward their evaluative and judgmental role.

I have come to the belief that processes of both *teshuvah* and *tikkun* can take place most meaningfully in an ongoing mentoring relationship. These mentors are rabbinical colleagues who must understand the stress, loneliness, and lack of privacy of the rabbinic life and soul, and that of the rabbinic spouse and family. The mentors’ understanding cannot be limited to books or courses taken. Their understanding must be a “lived” understanding that leads to conceptual and personal dialogue. The mentoring process is like peer-review but still different—for it is our lives that lie open, an openness transcending professional-personal dichotomies. An empathic capacity for human dialogue and concern is required of any who serve as mentors.

The mentors challenged me to think more broadly, to examine anew texts that I had studied for years, to probe more deeply into the consequences of my behavior and develop a greater awareness of those harmed or hurt by my actions. In addition, they challenged me personally—at the very center of my soul and its journey—as to the nature and path of my “return,” those from whom forgiveness had to be asked and how restitution could be made.

Thus the mentoring process encompasses both the change in behavior and soul of the person mentored, and, through interper-

sonal dialogue, impacts those who mentor. Mentors must be open to the one who sits with them and into whose life they now can enter. They, too, must enter the realm of hope and engage in the possibility of change. You may never enter into the privacy of another soul as you do when you mentor. There is no greater vulnerability than opening one's soul to another in a time of judgment. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur can never again be the same for the mentors or the one mentored.

My awareness of this dual function of the mentoring process arose through our study together—study that has questioned and challenged assumptions and early answers. Yehoshua ben Perachyah teaches in *Pirkei Avot* 1:6: *aseh l'cha rav ukeneih l'cha chaver* "Provide for yourself a teacher, acquire a friend for yourself." If we translate *chaver* as study colleague and *rav* as mentor, the essence of the mentoring process is clear. In this process, as trust builds and the encounter is deepened, we come to *l'cha* "for yourself." The process takes on personal significance. Textual study anchors the mentoring and assists in walking the spiritual journey.

So often as rabbis we tend not to share our feelings and innermost selves. For some this is the result of our professional training, which may lead us to separate our personal selves from our professional selves. For others this distance from our personal beings might have been our initial attraction to the rabbinic vocation. In either case (or both) sharing becomes increasingly difficult for many.

Through mentoring we come to sharing and its importance. Through study, conversation, tears and laughter the mentors' role as judge and evaluator is expanded to that of *moreh derech* (the one who points the way) and *moreh tsedek* (values guide). As time together increases, stress is lessened (although it never disappears), as does worry about confidentiality and judgments (although this too never disappears). During this easing of the external microscope, another meaning emerges for *l'cha*. Now *l'cha* takes on the meaning of "into yourself" or "to yourself."

The mentors enter personal space as the one mentored deepens his/her penetrating inner vision. Step by step the *l'cha* ("for/to/into yourself") connects to "myself"—a higher vision of the self—the person I wish to become. No longer is the higher vision an external value but it becomes an internal goal and possibility. That which was so remote before, so unattainable because of the past, enters the present and future, and, as we have learned from the Rav, it enters the past as well.

This sharing with colleagues of that which I have not shared before with others nurtures a newly emerging capacity for sharing with others. There is a sense of relief. New vistas for growth emerge. Although I am still uncomfortable (but less so), the capacity for sharing and communication begins to grow stronger.

In the process of *teshuvah* and *tikkun* we need both the psychological therapeutic hermeneutic and the Jewish hermeneutic. The ongoing challenge is that occasionally the psychological hermeneutic enters the mentoring sessions and boundaries can become blurred. A boundary line has to be drawn at the beginning of the process and maintained throughout the process. The mentors need to be sensitive to this as they lead the process forward.

Jewish mentoring embraces the weight of tradition and the values of that tradition. The judgment of tradition is ever-present. The mentors evaluate whether sufficient change or transformation—*tikkun*—has taken place. A psycho-social evaluation can reveal whether certain aspects of *teshuvah* have taken place. Have enough psychological and social growth, understanding, and change occurred so that the person can be expected not to repeat his/her behavior (Rambam)? Is there attitudinal change? These are therapeutic judgments, ones that can emerge in diagnostic evaluation. The mentors need to know the results of the therapeutic evaluation (has the possibility of repetition been diminished and to what extent). But theirs is the task of evaluating spiritual change and growth as well. Are the values of the tradition now internalized in the soul and life of the one mentored?

In therapy, the psychological understanding, healing, and growth of person and self are at the center. In Jewish mentoring, the transformation of the person in faithfulness to the values and demands of tradition are at the center. The Jewish self extends beyond the person to his/her relationships to the Jewish people, Torah, and God. This is the heart of the matter. Have those relationships changed and how have they changed? What else needs to be done in those relationships?

In our world today, the psychological is so much a part of our regular conversations. It is easy to slip into it, rather than focus primarily on the soul's journey. The psychological belongs properly and ethically in the therapeutic domain rather than in the mentoring domain. At the same time, I understand that psychological insights can add to the soul's self-understanding. One is not isolated from the other—but a boundary, albeit flexible, can and must be maintained.

The CCAR's process of *teshuvah* and rehabilitation requires ongoing reporting; the therapist has to report to the mentors, the mentors have to report to the Ethics Committee, and the Committee to the Board. An initial evaluation and then a final evaluation have to be conducted by an independent therapeutic evaluator. Yet one of the essential requirements in the therapeutic and mentoring work is confidentiality, confidentiality that enables both the therapeutic work and mentoring to proceed in openness and safety. Throughout my work questions about confidentiality have remained and have created personal pain, anxiety, and insecurity. Just what is kept confidential; how much of what is shared in a session leaves the session; who tells what to whom; who is entitled to know what and how much? How safe am I and my family in the process? How much of both therapy and mentoring is mortgaged by reportage and unclear boundaries! These questions demand clear answers if this process is to work, producing environments conducive to both therapeutic work and mentoring. Dr. Glen Gabbard, noted authority on boundary violations, makes this point ever so clearly. Putting the psychotherapist in a "police officer" role renders therapeutic treatment impossible. "Psychotherapy requires confidentiality, so that the psychotherapist should not be the person reporting to the monitoring agency... If the therapist is perceived as an agent of the licensing board or an enforcer of the law treatment will be unsuccessful. The therapist's main investment must be in providing understanding for the patient."¹¹ Gabbard recommends the assignment of a rehabilitation counselor (perhaps a role to be assigned to the chair of the mentoring team). In any plan, roles must be clearly differentiated. In this area in particular, the CCAR's process requires further clarification, understanding, and analysis. Otherwise this mentoring process with its potential for good will is handicapped from the start.

In addition to the value of the mentoring process I have come to understand that *tikkun* (*tikkun hamidot*) is the essence of rabbinic pastoring. Some of our colleagues are trained in the fields of psychology and social work and are well-qualified therapists and analysts. However, when rabbis serve primarily as rabbinic counselors their work is in the Jewish hermeneutic of *tikkun*.

The role of the *kohen* in Leviticus with regard to the *m'tsorah* (variously understood as one afflicted with leprosy or other skin ailments, for example psoriasis) is most relevant here. Through the

years I have come to see these passages as essential to the rabbinic, pastoral, and healing tasks. The *kohen* is responsible for the sanctity of the community, but also for the most human task of caring for the *m'tsorah* during his illness. The *kohen* is with the *m'tsorah* during his rehabilitation and assists him in his return to the community. The *kohen* makes the judgment about the "illness"—is this person *tamei* "ritually unclean" or *tahor* "ritually clean"? If the person is *tamei* and removed from the camp, the *kohen* tends to the *m'tsorah*, checks in at regular weekly intervals, and tends to the *m'tsorah's* needs. Then when the *tsaraat* (skin disease) has disappeared physically and the *m'tsorah* is physically healed (but not as yet *tahor*) the *kohen* guides a process of completion of spiritual healing. The *kohen* assists in the *m'tsorah's* return to the community through ritual and walks with him in that process.

This model is a paradigm, not only for what are the rabbinic pastoral obligations, but for the mentoring process as well. In the former, the paradigm serves as a guide in cases of death, the return of the widow/er to the community, cancer recovery, divorce, etc. It is always difficult to return to the community, and the return demands as much rabbinic pastoral work as the caring and tending during illness, sadness, and grief. In the latter case, the mentors, like the *kohen*, make judgments, evaluations, and reports, and at the same time are those who tend to and walk with the person mentored. They are the community representatives in the absence of that community both physically and spiritually. Their role as defined by the CCAR is limited to the person mentored. Sadly, there was no one in the absence of that community who was present for my wife and family. Someone from the rabbinic community or representing it must be there for the spouse and family as well—the role of *kohen* is never limited to the *m'tsorah* alone.

The mentoring process possesses a dialectical quality: judge and pastor, evaluator and caregiver, *rav* and *chaver*. Human contact cannot be minimized here. The mentors are the primary and, at times, only contact during this period from those who were colleagues. Only through such contact can we find the hope and affirmation that Rabbi Alexandri taught in *Vayikra Rabba* 7:2: "If a person uses broken vessels, it is considered an embarrassment. But God seeks out broken vessels for his use, as it says, 'God is the healer of shattered hearts.'" In addition to the essential loving embrace of family and a few close friends, the mentors' role here is required for the goals of *tikkun*, *teshuvah*, and healing, and for the possibilities of

future service. We get into the mud and pull ourselves up together, mentors and I. With eyes on destiny, we pull together. They cannot pull from above.

There are personal lessons from the mentoring process to be learned by all rabbis, not just those in the CCAR process. Questions arise that call forth personal answers.

Where do we as rabbis do *teshuvaah*? How do I as a rabbi develop the process in a significant way? Can I find a *chaver* and *rav* who can serve as a *teshuvaah* partner? Can I develop a peer group in whose safety and trust I can overcome the loneliness of the rabbinic vocation?

I believe that all these questions can be answered. They are essential questions that are part of the spiritual health of the *rav*. We rabbis need to do *teshuvaah* as do our institutions and communities. The *kohen gadol*, the High Priest, conducted the atonement rites not only for himself and his family, and for all the priests (his community and its institutions), but also for the entire community of the people of Israel in all its manifestations. The rabbi, too, must do it for himself and be a leader in calling the community to a *cheshbon nefesh* (inner reflection and inventory).

For all this each of us needs a *chaver* and *rav* who can challenge us and help us probe deeper, a peer group where in safety and trust we can probe yet more deeply and begin to share that which is in our hearts and souls. It is the essence of the health of the *rav*'s soul, and a source of renewal and becoming.

On The Road Alone

But what happens between sessions? In those moments, work with family, study, and inner reflection continues—all these and more are on the agenda of *teshuvah*. Yet there is also a solitude that the Rav z"l calls "the jungle of the soul."¹² The path to *teshuvah* is a lonely road where, like Moses, we ascend alone to the mountaintop of renewed opportunity, forgiveness, and a new set of tablets.¹³ It is there I learn of God as forgiving, yet *v'nakeih lo y'nakeh*—the past is not obliterated. But still I can receive the second set—whole and healing. Like Moses, we can also return to the community of Israel to serve.¹⁴ The mentors help me understand the challenge to climb alone and are to walk with me on the road back to the community they represent and serve. On the road back, the mentors assist in the uneven and unsteady steps toward those who were once colleagues.

On the road alone, the struggle continues with and toward the Eternal One and myself. Like Jacob, our forefather, the encounter leaves one limping, but restored; sleepless, but transformed. God's voice is heard as we are called to climb the mountain a second time. This time we fashion the tablets ourselves, unlike the first set, which the Eternal formed. We are creators, subjects not objects. Like Moses, we bring the new set—our lives open to change, transformation, and another chance—to the Eternal Rachaman.

We climb to the mountaintop to hear the Voice again and be redeemed in grace and healed by forgiveness. Sometimes, like Moses, we are changed and rays of light shine forth. Sometimes, like Jacob, we sleep on the mountaintop and are aroused from our slumbers to a vision of the Eternal and the divine promise. Or, like Jacob in another encounter, we struggle all through the darkness of night with a divine being—with the demands of our tradition and its values. We wrest a blessing and a new name. We are now Israel—but not completely. For the rest of our lives we are limping—moving between two names—two visions—Jacob or Israel. Even at death's moment, the biblical text moves back and forth from one name to the other. Forgiven—but limping. Broken—but graced and embraced. Thus, like the emerald, we maintain the "flaw" within—but we and it are transformed, forgiven and cherished.

Hopefully, from both the human and soulful relationship, as well as the whisper of the eternal, we learn, gain wisdom, and change. Our colleague, Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, shared with me his father's *z"l* drash on *v'ahaota l'reiacha kamocho*, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." Why *kamocho*? Why not simply say *v'ahaota l'reiacha*, you shall love your neighbor?

When we see our neighbors' faults, it is hard to love them or care for them. Somehow we are perched above—judgmental, often lacking compassion. It is only when we see that we and they are similar, that we both are limping and flawed, that like us they have faults and weaknesses and that they, like us, are imperfect, that we can love them. Only then can we forgive them their faults and see them as we ourselves are. So many have stood above, accusing and judgmental. So often during these years, eyes and ears have been closed to my pain and the pain of my family cast out with me. It is only when those who stand aside and above recognize *ki kamocho hu*, "for (s)he is as we are," that true healing will occur for me and my family. Only when we perceive that we all need *teshuvah* and *tikkun*, in different ways to be sure, can healing and humanness come for us all. This

empathic humanness and kindness, and gratitude for the random acts of kindness of others, emerge as well out of the transforming human relationships that the mentoring process attempts to build.

The person mentored, the broken vessel, the one outside the camp—*kamocho*—(s)he is like us. *V'ahavta l'reiacha kamocho—ki kamocho hu*, for (s)he is as we are. In forgiving them, we learn how to forgive ourselves, and in loving them, we learn how to truly love ourselves as well.

I have learned that I needed a *rav* and *chaver*. I need them more than ever now. I believe that we all do. Self-destructive privacy and inability to share cut us off from our most essential humanness. My family needed and failed to receive communal and collegial care and support. They needed it then and they still need it now. *Ki kamocho hu*—we are all alike at different levels of weakness and strength, failure and achievements. Although we must climb the mountain alone, as Moses was required to do, we can return to each other and the community of which we were once a part.

Notes

1. Also see *B. T. Bava Batra* 14b and commentaries to this discussion (Maharsha, Ramban, Rashi).
2. Pinchas H. Peli, *On Repentance: The Thought and Oral Discourses of Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1996), 33.
3. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Ish Halachah," *Besod haYachid ve-haYachad: A Selection of Hebrew Writings*, ed. Pinchas Peli [henceforth IAIT] (Jerusalem: Orot, 1976), 162.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Peli, loc. cit., 35.
6. *Ibid.*, 36.
7. Soloveitchik, "Kol Dodi Dofek," IAIT, 337; Peli, loc. cit., 30.
8. Peli, loc. cit., 36.
9. Soloveitchik, "On Repentance: Blotting Out or Elevating Sin," in Peli, loc. cit., 263.
10. Peli, loc. cit., 9f.
11. Glen O. Gabbard and Eva Lester, *Boundaries and Boundary Violations in Psychoanalysis* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Press, Inc., 2002), 450.
12. Soloveitchik, "On Repentance: Blotting Out or Elevating Sin," in Peli, loc. cit., 264.
13. Soloveitchik, "Ma Dodech Mi-dod," IAIT, 189–254; Peli, loc. cit., 41.

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14. Soloveitchik, "The Lonely Man of Faith," *Tradition* 7/2 (1965): 22ff.; Soloveitchik, "On Repentance: The Individual and the Community," in Peli, loc. cit., 108, 120-21, 125; Peli, loc. cit., 42-45.