

Can't We Just Move On?

Kol Nidre 5783

To claim to be what I am not is a pretension.
To insist that I must be only what I am now
is a restriction which human nature must abhor.
The being of a person is never completed, final.
The status of a person is a status nascendi.
The choice is made moment by moment. There is no standing still.
Abraham Joshua Heschel, Who is Man, 20/c

There is an experiencing self, who lives in the present and knows the present, is capable of re-living the past, but basically it has only the present...And then there is a remembering self, and the remembering self is the one that keeps score, and maintains the story of our life...Now, the remembering self is a storyteller...What defines a story are changes, significant moments and endings. Endings are very, very important. Now, the experiencing self lives its life continuously. It has moments of experience, one after the other. And you can ask: What happens to these moments? And the answer is really straightforward: They are lost forever.

~Daniel Kahneman: The Riddle of Experience vs. Memory (TED Talk)

The problem of repentance is intertwined with an apprehension of the concept of time and how it relates to the human experience. Rabbi Yedaiah Ha-P'nini was the one who coined the phrase: "The past is nothing, the future is not yet, and the present [passes] like the blink of an eye." According to this conception, a human's life is meaningless, they have no hold in time whatsoever. But the truth is that the human does exist within two distinct dimensions of time: (1) in memory, and (2) in expectation for the future. . . Memory replies to the question: "Who am I?" I am the one who remembers these feelings and those experiences, these moments of happiness and those moments of sorrow...

It is the memory of sin that releases that power within the inner depths of the soul of the penitent to do greater things than ever before... a person who has sinned and has repented may be able – if they prove worthy – to utilize the dynamism of the forces of evil which had enveloped them before and elevate those forces, making them operate on behalf of the forces of good . . . By sinning, they discovered new spiritual forces within their soul, a reservoir of energy, of stubbornness and possessiveness whose existence they had not been aware of before he sinned.

~Rav Joseph Soloveitchik, On Repentance, 20/c

As Rabbi Abbahu said: In the place where the repentant stand, even the fully righteous cannot stand.

~Talmud, Brachot 34b, 5-7/c

"At that point, God said to me—carve two stone tablets...and I will write upon those tablets, the words that were on the first tablets which you shattered, and put them in the Ark." (Deuteronomy 10:1-2)
Rav Yosef taught: this implies that the tablets, and the fragments of the tablets are put in the Ark.

~Talmud, Bava Batra 14b, 5-7/c