

POETRY OF REPENTANCE

William Kolbrenner

Only when I began to study *Paradise Lost*, John Milton's epic re-writing of Genesis, did it occur to me that being religious was not a sign of neurosis or flaky otherworldliness. In graduate school at Oxford and later at Columbia, for me and many of my fellow Jewish students, Milton was a safe way, without the risk of embarrassment, of experiencing the poetry of a religious sensibility. In earnest discussions of Christian redemptive history, the relationship between free will and divine providence, I lived, through Milton, the possibility of religious engagement.

I may have been able to suspend my disbelief about Christian theology, but when it came to the Jewish High Holidays, I preferred going to the West End Bar on Broadway to returning to my parents' Long Island Temple. If I were lucky, the assistant rabbi would give a sermon resonating with my graduate school politics. But the public spectacle of repentance, the responsive reading, the instructions--'please rise,' 'be seated,' 'turn to page 374'--was distant from the inner voice I had been cultivating through reading Shakespeare, Donne and Keats. Turning worship into political activism may have satisfied my social conscience, but it made repentance into something external, a way to avoid myself.

For us, today, the question of repentance, of *teshuvah* or literally 'return' to a more authentic self, unblemished by past habits and misdeeds, may be even more vexed. Our knowledge of the complexities of psychic history--of transgressions, dysfunction caused by trauma, and obstinate devotion to self-destructive behavior--may make repentance seem an unrealizable fantasy. Further, an enlightened conception of the self as creative, not merely passive, makes us skeptical about miraculous atonement activated through divine intervention.

Yet the Talmudic sage, Reish Lakish, says: Great is *teshuvah*, for deliberate transgressions are accounted meritorious deeds; as the Prophet Ezekiel says, "when the wicked man shall turn from his wickedness and do that which is lawful and right--through them he shall live."

Through them--transgressions--'he shall live'? To understand the paradoxical words of the sage--for me, it was a matter of granting him as much credit as I did Milton--requires a different suspension of disbelief, starting with a notion of time. Through the retrospective glance of repentance, past history--now not just neurotic obsessions weighing down the self--can be redeemed.

For Shakespeare's Macbeth, there is only the 'tomorrow, and tomorrow and tomorrow' of successive moments leading the 'way to dusty death.' Macbeth's time is now popularized on t-shirts, in paraphrase, 'stuff happens.' *Teshuvah*, however, is based upon a different sense of time, and the High Holidays, starting with the New Year, Rosh Hashana, challenge us to see our histories--as a people and as individuals--in the shape of coherent stories. In the cosmic history described in the Rosh Hashana service, the sounding of the shofar marks the beginning and ending of Jewish history, as well as the significant middle. Heard through the Rosh Hashana prayers, the shofar-blasts resonate with the first breath inspired by God into man at the Creation, the sounds of the shofar on Mount Sinai, and the shofar-blast that marks the end of time. Through this story, the present is no longer merely part of a chain of unrelated

moments--'tomorrow and tomorrow'--but infused with the knowledge of the future when the shofar announces the redemption of humanity.

This consciousness of time makes repentance on Yom Kippur possible. Not only does the nation have a sense of an ideal future, so too does every person--in which time-future connects back with time-present as well as time-past. Through the retrospective glance of repentance, past history--now not just neurotic obsessions weighing down the self--can be redeemed. But *teshuvah* is not a divine fiat, nor a human one. For repentance is creative, an active process of integration, bringing together the diverse parts of the self.

So important is repentance, the Talmudic sages say, that God created *teshuvah* before Creation, allowing for the unconventional storytelling that undoes normal cause and effect. Past actions do not bring about future events, but the ideal of an unrealized future re-creates the past so that a different outcome is possible. But though I may regret past deeds, indeed, in some cases must, I also acknowledge that I am who I am now because of who I once was. My imagined future was generated by my desires and, this is the sage's insight, even by my transgressions.

Atonement may be a divine gift, but one requiring the courage to acknowledge that the past, no matter how seemingly recalcitrant--no matter how 'damaged' I may feel--is mine to transform. The repentance that is transformative is an 'act of love' for only by accepting the self, however daunting a prospect that may be, are transgressions turned into a source of life. When repentance comes out of fear of punishment, and the past is merely renounced, transgressions are made null, but the self remains unchanged. But repentance based upon love works because intentions and actions, never simple, are open to reframing. The story I tell now reveals that the past about which I feel regret, perhaps even shame, is not only consistent with, but propels me towards a future I had not yet imagined.

'No one,' the psychoanalyst Adam Phillips writes, 'can be better at living your life than you.' But we find excuses in the personae we adopt--sometimes our public, political and even religious commitments--to avoid who we are, and who we want to be. Repentance neither means neurotic fixation on past failure nor avoidance of aspects of ourselves we prefer to ignore. Nor does it mean believing in external rituals that guarantee purification.

Teshuvah does mean a commitment to living our lives, and a faith that the stories we tell can give both past and present a new voice. Not a vicarious engagement, *teshuvah* permits cultivating the poetry of a personal religious sensibility--starting with our own rewriting of beginnings (finding signs of life in transgression, trauma and loss), continuing in the reinvention of the present, and opening, finally, to the possibility of a different future.

A "graduate" of the LSS Beginners Service, William Kolbrenner is an English Literature professor at Israel's Bar Ilan University. An internationally renowned authority on Renaissance poetry and philosophy and the eighteenth-century proto-feminist Mary Astell, Kolbrenner also publishes and lectures widely on Jewish life and learning. He is the author of *Open Minded Torah*. This piece was originally published on *Aish.com*.



CONGRATULATIONS AND MAZAL TOV

MARRIAGES

Rivkah Wahrman and Simcha Daitchman
Mazal Tov to parents,

Myra Wahrman and Rabbi Chaim Wahrman
Channa Keller and Shmuel Yosef Farb

Mazal Tov to parents, Liba and Rabbi Dr. Chaim Keller
Chava Yehudis Silverstein and Akiva Moshe Goodman

Mazal Tov to parents, Sharone D'vora and Shmuel Goodman
Liza Zlatkis and Yoseph (Yos) Jacobs

Mazal Tov to parents, Batya and Eddie Jacobs

Mazal Tov to grandparents, Vicki and Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Carly Weisenberg and Andrew Lebwahl

Karin Fleisch and Daniel Silverstein

Mazal Tov to father, Andrew Fleisch

Chassia Schwartz and Yori Thau

Mazal Tov to parents, Devorah Altman and Rabbi Brian Thau



BIRTHS

Wendy and Dr. Jason Adelman, on the birth of a daughter,
Lily Roslyn

Mazal Tov to grandmother, Suzanne Goodman

Daniella and Jordan Brafman, on the birth of a daughter, Noa Elena
Chava and Naftali Burnham, on the birth of a son, Emanuel Pardes

Vera and Paul Greenberg, on the birth of a daughter, Hannah

Rachel and Binjamin Gutman, on the birth of a son,

Yitzchak Menachem (Ernie)

Dr. Victoria Chernyak and Stas Krasinski, on the birth of a baby boy,
Daniel Binyamin

Felicia and Yoram Zarai, on the birth of a daughter, Danielle

BAR/BAT MITZVAH

Nosson Tzvi Adler

Mazal Tov to grandparents,
Ilene (Sarah Leah) and Louis Vynerib

Uzziel Cohen

Mazal Tov to parents, Rivkah and Shia Cohen

Mazal Tov to grandparents, Drs. Yaffa and Stuart Blaustein

Yehuda Aaron Davis

Mazal Tov to parents, Heidi Bratt and Dr. Jeff Davis

Yehuda Dovid Kremansky

Mazal Tov to parents, Sarah and Rabbi Avraham Leib Kremansky

Matan Tuvia Kronfeld

Mazal Tov to parents,

Dr. Elizabeth Konecky and Yaakov Kronfeld

Akiva Moshe (Michael) Prell, at the Kotel on June 6, 2013

CONDOLENCES

Diane Aiken, on the loss of her mother, Dr. Ida Hutmacher

Dr. Stuart Blaustein, on the loss of his mother, Mary Blaustein

Leonard Cohen, on the loss of his father, Herbert Cohen

David Gorin, on the loss of his father, Naphtoli Gorin

Sara (Suzanne) Gurwitz, on the passing of her mother, Estelle Linz

The family of Helen Hanft (see box on reverse)

Sarah Kremansky, on the loss of her father, Meir Feldman

The family of Elizabeth (Elisheva) Lambert (see box on reverse)

Ellen Natter, on the loss of her mother, Ida Abrams

SPEEDY RECOVERY/REFUAH SH'LAIMA

Regina Ullendorff, Rachel bat Feige

TZEITCHEM L'SHALOM (TO LIVE OR STUDY IN ISRAEL)

Rachel and Eugene Kontorovich

Akiva Moshe Prell

Samantha Ragsdale

Karin Fleisch and Daniel Silverstein

CONGRATULATIONS

Jill and Martin Davis, on their son, George (Getzel),

who was ordained at Hebrew College

Sharone D'vora and Shmuel Goodman, for dedicating a Torah Scroll

to Chabad of Chicago

Bella Hahn-Grossman, upon receiving her PhD in Clinical

Psychology from the New School

Mazal Tov to parents, Ohra and Dr. Manfred Hahn

Ellen and Mordecai Lipkis, guests of honor at the

Carlebach Shul's 11th Annual Dinner

Nathaniel Phillip, upon receiving the Mathematician Award for

his first grade class, and for being skipped to the third grade

Mazal Tov to mother, Dinah (Lucia) Bodden

Samuel Zakay, on his graduation from Columbia University,

PHI BETA KAPPA

Mazal Tov to mother, Ann Crane

TODAH RABBAH

Dr. Leonard Davidman, for brilliantly conducting the LSS Beginners

Service over the summer

Shlomo Dov Gewirtz, for his inspirational teaching of the Shabbat

afternoon Bible Class during the summer

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Wed September 4, 2013 - 29th of Elul
EREV ROSH HASHANA
 Selichot/Morning Services . . . 6:00 & 6:45 AM
Eruv Tavshilin
 Light Candles 7:07 PM
 Mincha 7:10 PM

Thurs September 5, 2013 - 1st of Tishrei
ROSH HASHANA
 Beit Midrash 7:30 AM
 Main Sanctuary 7:45 AM
 Ballroom 7:45 AM
 Beginners 9:00 AM
 Tashlich 6:10 PM
 Beginners Mincha 6:50 PM
 Mincha 7:10 PM
 Yom Tov Candles after 8:04 PM
 Daf Yomi after Ma'ariv

Fri September 6, 2013 - 2nd of Tishrei
ROSH HASHANA
 Beit Midrash 7:30 AM
 Main Sanctuary 7:45 AM
 Ballroom 7:45 AM
 Beginners 9:00 AM
 Daf Yomi 6:10 PM
 Candlelighting 7:03 PM
 Mincha/Kabbalat Shabbat 7:10 PM

Sat September 7, 2013 - 3rd of Tishrei
Ha'azinu SHABBAT SHUVA
 Daf Yomi 7:00 AM
 Bible Class 8:30 AM
 Morning Services 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
 Beginners Services 9:15 AM
 Mincha 6:30 PM
 Shabbat Shuva Drasha 6:55 PM
 Ma'ariv/Shabbat Ends 8:02 PM
 Daily Mincha & Maariv 6:55 PM

Sun September 8, 2013 - 4th of Tishrei
TZOM GEDALIAH
 Fast begins 5:17 AM
 Selichot/Morning Services 6:20 & 8:00 AM
 Daf Yomi 6:45 AM
 Mincha 6:50 PM
 Fast ends 7:49 PM

Mon September 9, 2013 - 5th of Tishrei
 Selichot/Morning Services 6:30 & 7:15 AM
 Mincha 6:55 PM

Tue September 10, 2013 - 6th of Tishrei
 Selichot/Morning Services 6:30 & 7:15 AM
 Mincha 6:55 PM

Wed September 11, 2013 - 7th of Tishrei
 Selichot/Morning Services 6:30 & 7:15 AM
 Mincha 6:55 PM

Thu September 12, 2013 - 8th of Tishrei
 Selichot/Morning Services 6:30 & 7:15 AM
 Mincha 6:55 PM

Fri September 13, 2013 - 9th of Tishrei
EREV YOM KIPPUR
 Daf Yomi 6:15 AM
 Selichot/Morning Services 7:00 & 7:40 AM
 Mincha 1:45 & 3:00 PM
 Candlelighting 6:52 PM
 Kol Nidre 6:55 PM
 Daf Yomi after Ma'ariv

Sat September 14, 2013 - 10th of Tishrei
YOM KIPPUR
 Beit Midrash 7:30 AM
 Main Sanctuary 8:30 AM
 Ballroom 8:30 AM
 Beginners 9:00 AM
 Mincha Main Sanctuary 4:55 PM
 Neilah 6:25 PM
 Ma'ariv/Shabbat & Yom Tov ends 7:52 PM
 Daily Mincha & Maariv 6:45 PM

Wed September 18, 2013 - 14th of Tishrei
EREV SUKKOT
 Daf Yomi 6:20 AM
 Morning Services 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Eruv Tavshilin
 Candlelighting 6:43 PM
 Mincha 6:50 PM
 Begin meal in Sukkah after 7:32 PM

Thu September 19, 2013 - 15th of Tishrei
SUKKOT
 Morning Services 8:00 & 9:00 AM
 Talmud Class 6:00 PM
 Mincha 6:45 PM
 Ma'ariv 7:41 PM
 Yom Tov Candles and begin meal
 Light in Sukkah after 7:41 PM

Fri September 20, 2013 - 16th of Tishrei
SUKKOT
 Morning Services 8:00 & 9:00 AM
 Talmud Class 5:00 PM
 Candlelighting 6:40 PM
 Mincha/Kabbalat Shabbat 6:45 PM

Sat September 21, 2013 - 17th of Tishrei
CHOL HAMOED SUKKOT
 Daf Yomi 7:00 AM
 Bible Class 8:30 AM
 Morning Services 8:00 & 8:45 AM
 Talmud Class 5:45 PM
 Mincha 6:30 PM
 Ma'ariv/Shabbat ends 7:38 PM
 Daily Mincha & Maariv 6:35 PM

Sun September 22, 2013 - 18th of Tishrei
CHOL HAMOED SUKKOT
 Morning Services 6:45 & 8:30 AM
 Daf Yomi 7:55 AM
 Mincha & Maariv 6:35 PM

Mon September 23, 2013 - 19th of Tishrei
CHOL HAMOED SUKKOT
 Morning Services 6:45 & 7:30 AM
 Mincha & Maariv 6:35 PM

Tue September 24, 2013 - 20th of Tishrei
CHOL HAMOED SUKKOT
 Morning Services 6:45 & 7:30 AM
 Mincha & Maariv 6:35 PM

Wed September 25, 2013 - 21st of Tishrei
HOSHANA RABA
 Morning Services 6:15, 7:00 & 8:00 AM
Eruv Tavshilin
 Candlelighting 6:31 PM
 Mincha 6:35 PM

Thu September 26, 2013 - 22nd of Tishrei
SHEMINI ATZERET
 Morning Services 8:00 & 8:45 AM
 Talmud Class 5:50 PM
 Mincha 6:35 PM
 Yom Tov Candles after 7:29 PM
 Ma'ariv/Hakafot 7:30 PM

Fri September 27, 2013 - 23rd of Tishrei
SIMCHAT TORAH
 Morning Services 7:00 & 8:30 AM
 Women's Service 9:00 AM
 Talmud Class 5:50 PM
 Candlelighting 6:28 PM
 Mincha/Kabbalat Shabbat 6:35 PM

Sat September 28, 2013 - 24th of Tishrei
Bereshit
 Daf Yomi 7:00 AM
 Morning Services 7:40, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
 Beginners Services 9:15 AM
 Beginners Mishnayot 4:45 PM
 Talmud & Bible Classes 5:15 PM
 Mincha 6:15 PM
 Ma'ariv/Shabbat ends 7:26 PM
 Daily Mincha & Maariv 6:20 PM

Fri October 4, 2013 - 30th of Tishrei
ROSH CHODESH
 Morning Services 7:00 & 7:40 AM
 Candlelighting 6:16 PM
 Mincha 6:20 PM

Sat October 5, 2013 - 1st of Cheshvan
ROSH CHODESH Noach
 Daf Yomi 7:00 AM
 Bible Class 8:30 AM
 Morning Services 7:40, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
 Beginners Services 9:15 AM
 Beginners Mishnayot 4:35 PM
 Talmud & Bible Classes 5:05 PM
 Mincha 6:05 PM
 Ma'ariv/Shabbat ends 7:15 PM
 Daily Mincha & Maariv 5:10 PM

Fri October 11, 2013 - 7th of Cheshvan
 Candlelighting 6:05 PM
 Mincha 6:10 PM

Sat October 12, 2013 - 8th of Cheshvan
Lech Lecha
 Daf Yomi 7:00 AM
 Bible Class 8:30 AM
 Morning Services 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
 Beginners Services 9:15 AM
 Beginners Mishnayot 4:25 PM
 Talmud & Bible Classes 4:55 PM
 Mincha 5:55 PM
 Ma'ariv/Shabbat ends 7:03 PM
 Daily Mincha & Maariv 6:00 PM

Fri October 18, 2013 - 14th of Cheshvan
 Candlelighting 5:54 PM
 Mincha 6:00 PM

Sat October 19, 2013 - 15th of Cheshvan

Vayeira
 Daf Yomi 7:00 AM
 Bible Class 8:30 AM
 Morning Services 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
 Beginners Services 9:15 AM
 Beginners Mishnayot 4:15 PM
 Talmud & Bible Classes 4:45 PM
 Mincha 5:45 PM
 Ma'ariv/Shabbat ends 6:53 PM
 Daily Mincha & Maariv 5:50 PM

Fri October 25, 2013 - 21st of Cheshvan
 Candlelighting 5:44 PM
 Mincha 5:50 PM

Sat October 26, 2013 - 22nd of Cheshvan
Chayei Sara
 Daf Yomi 7:00 AM
 Bible Class 8:30 AM
 Morning Services 7:40, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
 Beginners Services 9:15 AM
 Beginners Mishnayot 4:05 PM
 Talmud & Bible Classes 4:35 PM
 Mincha 5:35 PM
 Ma'ariv/Shabbat ends 6:43 PM
 Daily Mincha & Maariv 5:40 PM

Fri November 1, 2013 - 28th of Cheshvan
 Candlelighting 5:35 PM
 Mincha 5:40 PM

Sat November 2, 2013 - 29th of Cheshvan
Toldot
 Daf Yomi 7:00 AM
 Bible Class 8:30 AM
 Morning Services 7:40, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
 Beginners Services 9:15 AM
 Beginners Mishnayot 4:10 PM
 Talmud & Bible Classes 4:40 PM
 Mincha 5:25 PM
 Ma'ariv/Shabbat ends 6:34 PM
 Daily Mincha & Maariv 4:35 PM

Sun November 3, 2013 - 30th of Cheshvan
ROSH CHODESH
 Move clocks back one hour
 Morning Services 7:00 & 8:30 AM
 Daf Yomi 7:55 AM
 Mincha 4:35 PM

Mon November 4, 2013 - 1st of Kislev
ROSH CHODESH
 Daf Yomi 6:15 AM
 Morning Services 7:00 & 7:40 AM
 Mincha 4:35 PM
 Beginners Shmooze 8:15 PM

Fri November 8, 2013 - 5th of Kislev
 Candlelighting 4:27 PM

Mincha 4:35 PM

Sat November 9, 2013 - 6th of Kislev
Vayeitzei
 Daf Yomi 7:00 AM
 Bible Class 8:30 AM
 Morning Services 7:40, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
 Beginners Services 9:15 AM
 Beginners Mishnayot 3:00 PM
 Talmud & Bible Classes 3:30 PM
 Mincha 4:15 PM
 Ma'ariv/Shabbat ends 5:26 PM
 Daily Mincha & Maariv 4:25 PM

Fri November 15, 2013 - 12th of Kislev
 Candlelighting 4:21 PM
 Mincha 4:25 PM

Sat November 16, 2013 - 13th of Kislev
Vayishlach
 Daf Yomi 7:00 AM
 Bible Class 8:30 AM
 Morning Services 7:40, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
 Beginners Services 9:15 AM
 Beginners Mishnayot 2:55 PM
 Talmud & Bible Classes 3:25 PM
 Mincha 4:10 PM
 Ma'ariv/Shabbat ends 5:20 PM
 Daily Mincha & Maariv 4:20 PM

Fri November 22, 2013 - 19th of Kislev
 Candlelighting 4:16 PM
 Mincha 4:20 PM

Sat November 23, 2013 - 20th of Kislev
Vayeishev
 Daf Yomi 7:00 AM
 Bible Class 8:30 AM
 Morning Services 7:40, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
 Beginners Services 9:15 AM
 Beginners Mishnayot 2:50 PM
 Talmud & Bible Classes 3:20 PM
 Mincha 4:05 PM
 Ma'ariv/Shabbat ends 5:15 PM
 Daily Mincha & Maariv 4:15 PM

Wed November 27, 2013 - 24th of Kislev
EREV CHANUKAH
 Daf Yomi 6:20 PM
 Morning Services 7:10 & 7:50 AM
 Mincha 4:20 PM
 Light Chanukah Candles after 5:02 PM

Thur November 28, 2013 - 25th of Kislev
THANKSGIVING DAY
 Morning Services 7:00 & 8:30 AM
 Light Chanukah Candles after 5:02 PM

HIGH HOLIDAY SERVICES
 at the Manhattan Day School
 310 West 75th Street
 (bet. West End Ave. & Riverside Dr.)

ROSH HASHANA
 Wed., Sept. 4, 7:10 pm
 Thur. & Fri., Sept. 5 & 6, 9:00 am
 Thur., Sept. 5, 7:10 pm
 Fri., Sept. 6, 7:10 pm @ LSS

YOM KIPPUR
 Fri., Sept. 13, 6:55 pm
 Sat., Sept. 14, 9:00 am

Tickets
 LSS Members \$75, Non-Members \$125

SAVE THE DATES
Special Events

Sukkot Shopping: Tue., Sept. 17
Sukkot, Simchat Beit Hashoeva:
 Tue., Sept. 24, 7:00 PM
 @ Ramaz Middle School

Simchat Torah Celebration
 Thu., Sept. 26, 7:30 PM

Intro To Bible Class Begins
 Tue., Oct. 1, 6:30 - 8:00 PM

Beginners Shmooze - Free
 Mon., Nov. 4, 8:15 PM

Beginners Shabbat Luncheon - \$20
 Oct. 5 & Nov. 2, 12:30 PM

Beginners Chanukah Shabbaton
 Fri.-Sat., Nov. 22 - 23

Chanukah Bash: Mon., Dec. 2

HELEN HANFT
 Helen Hanft was a star of stage, film and TV. While she appeared in major productions, such as last year's Super Bowl commercial, her greatest artistic triumphs were undoubtedly in the annual Beginners Purim Schpiel, and her occasional monologues at the Shabbat Beginners luncheons.

ELISHEVA (ELIZABETH) LAMBERT
 Elisheva (Elizabeth) Lambert succumbed after a long valiant battle with cancer. She was a brilliant student, accountant and artist. Like the flowers she painted, she was always radiant and upbeat. Her special optimism and spirituality were always an inspiration to all.