

**Talmud Berakhot 34b**

Another statement of Rabbi Chiyya bar Abba transmitting Rabbi Yochanan:

All the prophets prophesied their prophecies (of good and consolation) only for *baalei teshuvah*, but *tzaddikim gemurim* – “No eye has seen, G-d, besides You, what G-d will do for those who wait for Him.”

This disagrees with Rabbi Abahu, for Rabbi Abahu said:

In the place where *baalei teshuvah* stand – *tzaddikim gemurim* do not stand, as Scripture says: “Peace, peace, to the distant and to the near” =

first (to the) distant and then (to the) near.

What does “distant” mean? Those who were initially distant;

And what does “near” mean? Those who were initially near and remain near.

But Rabbi Yochanan said:

“to the distant” = the distant from sin; “near” = who were close to sin and have distanced themselves.

**Talmud Berakhot 34b**

. . . What is the meaning of “No eye has seen etc.”?

Said Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi :

This refers to wine which has been guarded in its grapes since the Six Days of Creation.

But Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmeni said:

This refers to Eden, over which the eye of no creature ever reigned . . .

**Zohar Mishpatim #337**

When he grasps the Tree of Life, then he is called a *baal teshuvah*

**Responsa Ridbaz 2:832**

You asked me whether these two statements of the Sages disagree or agree, namely: “Said R. Yochanan: All the prophecies of the prophets referred only to possessors-of-repentance, but as for the absolutely righteous – ‘no eye has seen, G-d, but Yours alone what will be done for those who wait for Him’”, and “Said R. Avahu, for R. Avahu said: In the place that possessors-of-repentance stand, the absolutely righteous cannot stand”.

Answer: Many things have been said about this statement of R. Avahu, but I will tell you what seems agreeable to me as a means of reconciling the two statements, namely that R. Yochanan is dealing with ordinary possessors of repentance, who were wicked and returned in complete repentance . . . and there is no distinction here between the individual and the community. But R. Avahu is dealing with the absolutely righteous, whose hearts are steadfast with G-d, for they were straight from the beginning, but they accidentally transgresses one of the commandments, or else they were presented with an opportunity to sin and were overcome by their inclinations, but immediately returned in complete repentance and returned to their righteousness and straightness, so that their righteousness and service was doubled because they tasted sin and abandoned it . . . Both statements deal with one who returns out of love, but one who returns out of fear has not completely repented.

**Maharsha to Berakhot 34b**

I will also say my piece in accordance with a precise reading of R Yochanan’s statement “What is ‘near’? That he was close to sin but has now distanced himself”, which means that the text isn’t dealing with someone who sinned and actively performed a transgression, who couldn’t be called “close to sin”, but rather it means that he believed himself close to sinning but overcame his evil inclination and did not sin, meaning that he is a *baal teshuvah* with regard to his thought of sinning. It is certainly this one, who overcame his evil inclination and did not perform the sinful act, that R. Abahu holds has a spiritual advantage over the absolutely righteous, who were not seduced at all by the evil inclination and were never close to sinning, while R. Yochanan holds that nonetheless the completely righteous have the spiritual advantage in that they did not sin at all, even in thought, as opposed to this one who came close to sinning and therefore transgressed in thought.

**Mikhtav Mei'Eliyahu 3:353**

You asked regarding Berakhot 34b . . . (and you suggested) that there seems room to reconcile by saying that G-d's grace is more revealed with regard to *baalei teshuvah*, whereas the service itself is more revealed in the always-righteous. Your words are very correct! Actually, disagreement is only possible in legal matters, and even there only with regard to practice – but regarding essences disagreement is impossible . . .

**Rambam, Laws of Repentance 7:3-4**

Don't say that repentance is only necessary from sins that involve an act, for example sexual transgressions, theft, and robbery. Rather, just as a person must repent of those, so too he must search out his bad characteristics and repent of anger, hate, jealousy, mockery, pursuit of money and/or honor, pursuit of food, et al. From all he needs to repent, and these latter sins are harder than those involving actions, as when a person is entrenched in these it is very hard to separate from them, as it says: "Let the evildoer abandon his path [and the man of evil his thoughts] . . .". Let a person who is a *baal teshuvah* not imagine that he is distant from the level of the righteous because of the sins and transgressions he performed in the past, for it is not so – rather he is beloved and dear before the Creator as if he has never sinned. Furthermore, his reward is great, for he tasted sin and separated from it and conquered his inclination. Said the Sages: "In the place that *baalei teshuvah* stand, the absolutely righteous cannot stand", meaning that their spiritual level is higher than those who have never sinned because they conquer their inclination more.

**Rupture and Reconstruction p.38 (Dr. Haym Soloveitchik)**

I grew up in a Jewishly non-observant community and prayed in a synagogue where most of the older congregants neither observed the Sabbath nor even ate kosher . . . Indeed, the only time the synagogue was ever full was during the High Holidays. Even then the service was hardly edifying. Most didn't know what they were saying, and, bored, wandered in and out. Yet at the closing service of Yom Kippur, the Neilah, the synagogue filled and a hush set in upon the crowd. The tension was palpable and tears were shed. What had been instilled in these people in their earliest childhood, and which they never quite shook off, was that every person was judged on Yom Kippur, and, as the sun was setting, the final decision was being rendered, in the words of the famous prayer, 'who for life, who for death, who for tranquility, who for unrest'. These people did not cry from religiosity but from self-interest, from an instinctive fear for their lives. Their tears were courtroom tears, with whatever degree of sincerity such tears have. What was absent among the students in Ponevezh and in other contemporary services – and, lest I be thought to be exempting myself from this assessment, from my own religious life too – was that primal fear of Divine judgment, simple and direct.

***Ish HaHalakhah* p. 94 (Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik; translation by Aryeh Klapper from *Halakhic Man* by Lawrence Kaplan)**

Here appears the primary difference between the concept of repentance in Halakhah and the concept of repentance held by universal religious man (*ish hadat hakelali*).

The latter grasps the idea of repentance from the perspective of atonement, in the role of a shield against punishment, in the role of fruitless regret that creates and renews nothing. His soul bewails its wounds and mourns for yesterday, because it is past; for time, that has already sunk into the realm of oblivion; for deeds that have evanesced like shadows; over facts that cannot be changed or exchanged for others. Therefore, he needs much grace, miracles and wonders, great mercy, etc.

Not so Halakhic Man! Halakhic Man does not surrender himself to weeping and grief, does not lacerate his flesh nor flagellate himself. He does not engage in compensatory repentance nor surrender himself to bodily mortification or spiritual affliction. Halakhic Man is engaged in self-formation, in creating a new "I". He does not regret an irretrievably lost past but a past still in existence that winds its way into the present and future . . . There are phenomena that begin in sin and iniquity and end in mitzvot and good deeds, and vice versa. The future alters the trends and tendencies of the past . . .