

person, living a normal life, does not fall into the ways of sin. Sin constitutes a sort of spiritual pathology, just as many diseases of the flesh constitute physical pathology, as when the tissues cease to behave in a normal fashion and cells begin to grow wildly — so sin is a sign of spiritual pathology. The conclusion to be drawn from this supposition is of great significance in understanding repentance. If sin is a sickness — then it also has the characteristics of a sickness. What is characteristic of sickness? Suffering. As far back as Aristotle it was established that it is pain and suffering which inform man that he is ill. If sin is an illness, then it too must be felt, i.e., be expressed in suffering. Every organic illness or abnormality reaches the awareness of a human being through his nervous system. The language of sickness, its a-b-c, is suffering. Every pathological phenomenon is generally connected with pain and suffering. The organism informs the human being by means of suffering that he is ill. Suffering according to Aristotle, is a great blessing conferred by the Creator on His creatures; it serves as a warning of what to expect. Indeed, we all know how many tragedies are liable to occur because pains are discerned when it is too late.

Sin is also a disease — and it, too, reaches human consciousness through the language of suffering, through deep and piercing pain, through spiritual agony which can be sharper and more unbearable than any bodily suffering.

We have discerned the stage of “acknowledgment of sin” in the process of repentance. Before this stage of *acknowledgment of sin*, however, there is another phase which I call the *sensing of sin*. Sensing of sin is analogous in every respect to feeling sickness. Both of these feelings speak in an identical way through the language of suffering.

We all know, to our great sorrow, what bodily pain is. In what way are spiritual suffering and the suffering of sin expressed? How is man made aware of the sickness of sin?

SIN AS ANTI-AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

As in sickness of the body, so, also, in sickness of the soul which is sin, man tries to deny, to minimize and to distance himself from the pain. Often, out of fear, whether covert or overt, when we are attacked by pains, we put off the visit to the doctor and console ourselves by saying that they are a figment of the imagination, that very soon they will pass of their own accord. So do we behave, as well, regarding spiritual suffering which comes to make us aware of sin.

What form does suffering take to effect the “communication” of sin to man? Let us refer to the Book of Books for an answer. The Torah tells us about the sin of the golden calf: “And when the people heard these evil tidings, they mourned: and no man put on his ornaments” (Exodus 33:4). In the wake of sin comes a strong feeling of sorrow. The previous day they had engaged in wild, joyous celebration around the calf, but now they felt the bitter sorrow of mourning. The consciousness of the sin reached them and was expressed in the sorrow of mourning. Nor is this the only time that sin is referred to in terms of mourning. The same phenomenon recurs with the sin of the spies: “And Moses spoke these words to all the children of Israel; and the people mourned greatly” (Numbers 14:39). Here, also, mourning follows sin.

What is the sorrow of mourning? According to the Halakhah, the laws of mourning apply when a person loses something important and precious. The loss of money and property is not a real loss; a real loss is the loss of a dear and beloved person. Mourning is reaction to a loss and it expresses itself in a strong sensation of nostalgia, of yearning, or of retrospective memories. The power of mourning, its cruelty and its loneliness, has its focal point in the memory of the human being. Were man able to forget, to eradicate

events from his memory — then there would be no need for mourning. The feelings of bereavement are dependent on memory, which is the greatest blessing of man *qua* man; memory constitutes the entire awareness of the human “I”. In times of mourning, however, this blessing becomes a curse.

Memories float up from the past, and when the past comes to the surface and man is forced to compare yesterday with today — he is engulfed by a feeling of bereavement and mourning. Over the course of many years a man becomes accustomed to returning home from his outside affairs; he climbs the few steps before the front door of his house in the same way he has done for years. He rings the bell out of habit and expects to hear, as always, soft steps from the other side of the door. He waits; but the steps never come. He puts his hand into his pocket, pulls out the key and opens the door. It seems to be the same door and the same furniture. Everything is clean and polished as usual. Nevertheless, something has changed. Everything appears to be in exactly the same state and in the same place in which they were before he left his house. Nothing has been moved; only no one is there waiting for him. All around there is peace and quiet which can sometimes be worse than heart-rending cries. Mourning engulfs his whole being.

The sinner, also, mourns: “And the people mourned.” What does the sinner mourn? He mourns that which he has irretrievably lost. What has he lost? Everything. The sinner has lost his purity, his holiness, his integrity, his spiritual wealth, the joy of life, the spirit of sanctity in man; all that gives meaning to life and content to human existence. The mourner mourns the soul of the beloved one he has lost; the sinner — his own soul, which he has lost.

Mourning inevitably contains a masochistic element. The mourner tortures and torments himself; he hates himself. In the bereavement of sin there is also a clear masochistic element. The sinner begins to sense a feeling of contempt and disgust toward

himself, he experiences masochistic self-hatred. The sin is seen as an abomination, an object of revulsion, something utterly nauseating. The feeling generated by sin is not a moral sensation; the moral sense in man is not such a powerful force. The feeling of sin which drags a person to repentance is an aesthetic sensation, or more correctly, a negative aesthetic reaction. The sinner feels disgust at the defilement of sin. The suffering of sin lies in the feeling of nausea toward the defiling, disgusting uncleanness of the sin.

It is interesting to note how an elderly Jew in the old-fashioned city of Vilna — the author of the book *Haye Adam* — many years ago understood so well the aesthetic opposition a person builds up towards sin. The natural inclination or desire of man is for the beautiful, for the aesthetic; man despises the ugly — it is this which draws him away from the sin into which he has sunk, in as much as sin contains ugliness, disgust and abomination which repel man’s aesthetic consciousness. Thus, when God seeks to draw man to repentance, He arouses not only his moral awareness, which is usually not sufficiently strong to awaken him from his sin, but, more so his aesthetic consciousness which has better chances of effecting the repulsion of the despised and loathsome sin.

The sinner begins to ask himself, in the words of the author of the *Haye Adam*, Rabbi Avraham Danzig (in his “*Tefila Zakah* — Pure Prayer,” said before *Kol Nidre*): “We are astonished at ourselves — how was this abomination perpetrated?” He does not say, “this evil,” or “this sin,” or “this iniquity,” or “this transgression” — but “this abomination!” How? How? . . . The sinner is unable to grasp, when repentance begins to knock at the doors of his heart, how he was able to betray the purity of his soul for the abominable sin which now arouses such aesthetic revulsion in his soul.

The Torah spoke in the same vein of idolatry: “Neither shall you bring an abomination into your house . . . you shall utterly detest it,

and utterly abhor it, for it is a cursed thing" (Deuteronomy 7:26). The Torah does not say here, 'do not worship idols'. Had it done so, one could have searched for a dispensation to be exempted from the general prohibition. However, it is not the prohibition of idolatry that the Torah emphasizes, but the abomination, the revulsion and ugliness of it. If you have any aesthetic sensitivity whatsoever, if you have spiritual repulsion for an abomination — how could you possibly be drawn to idolatry?

"We are astonished at ourselves" says the author of *Haye Adam*. We are human beings with a sense of beauty, an aesthetic soul, and we are attracted to fine things — how then could we have let ourselves be so attracted to commit an abomination and do contemptible things? "We are astonished at ourselves!"

In the Bible we find a story describing how sin turns into abomination, and how the sinner is pursued and chastised not by his weak and helpless desire for the good, but by his aesthetic drive which proves itself to be powerful, aggressive and full of cunning. I refer to the account in II Samuel, Chapter 13: "And it came to pass after this, that Avshalom the son of David had a fair sister, whose name was Tamar; and Amnon the son of David loved her." If the Scripture testifies that she was fair, we do not doubt that she was, indeed, beautiful, and we can imagine how enchanting Tamar seemed to Amnon the son of David. A moment before he sinned, Amnon surely still thought that Tamar represented beauty of which there was none higher, none more splendrous or glorious. This filled him with such powerful love that because of it he sinned and did "this base deed . . . as one of the base men." This was the case before the sin, but immediately afterward: "And Amnon hated her with a great hatred, for the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her" (verse 15). He hated her now with such a great vengeance not because he suffered pangs of conscience but because he suddenly realized that not only

was she not beautiful, but how ugly and repulsive she was. His sin was an abomination to him. Because of it he came to hate himself — and subsequently hated her. Sin has a masochistic effect. Amnon hated himself and transferred his hatred to Tamar, humiliated through no fault of her own. The same wondrously beautiful Tamar was transformed in his mind into a symbol of abomination and hate. Amnon certainly did not understand what had happened to him, and he asked himself the same question which the author of the *Haye Adam* asked: "We are astonished" — I am astonished at myself; how could this abomination have been committed?"

As she had become so hateful and despicable to him, he was not satisfied with calling out to her "arise, begone," but "He called to his servant boy and said to him: put this woman out of here and bolt the door behind her." Even the name of Tamar, his heart's desire, had become an abomination to him. "This woman!" — he is unable to form her name on his lips; the feelings of abhorrence and defilement envelop him and choke him, "and bolt the door behind her!" — he felt threatened by her presence. Only a short while ago he had so admired her and loved her — and now, he was filled with loathing for her.

The sense of bereavement that comes from sin is expressed in feelings of defilement, loathing and self-hatred. Remorse is accompanied by bitter self-recrimination — "we are astonished at ourselves, how could this abomination have been perpetrated?"

In addition to the sense of bereavement, remorse is related to another emotion: the sense of shame — the sense of shame a person can feel for himself. "We are astonished at ourselves" — meaning, also, that we are ashamed of ourselves. "I was ashamed and confounded," the feeling of disgust mingles with the feeling of shame. The awful monstrosity of the act of sin plagues the sinner and leads him to feel remorse. This remorse comes as a result of emotions,

not from reasoning — a person's intellect plays a negligible part in it. What was responsible for the transformation which occurred in Amnon's soul turning love into hate, desire into revulsion? Neither the mind nor the intellect. He had no time for reasoning things out. These emotions which came as an instinctive emotional reaction to the sin brought about this transformation. They are the natural reactions of revulsion and shame and not processes of reason, understanding and knowledge. Amnon could not understand why he suddenly hated her to the point that he was unable to tolerate her presence, just as he did not know why her charms had so enchanted him originally. Of course, the unfortunate Tamar could not understand what had happened and she saw his present behavior as bringing even greater humiliation upon her than the sin he had just committed by assaulting and raping her. "And she said to him, do not add this greater wrong of sending me away to the other that you have done to me." She failed to grasp that this was the instinctive and natural reaction of the sinner to the sin itself and to the object of his sin as well. Amnon now identified Tamar with the sin itself.

REPENTANCE WHICH REQUIRES NO RESOLVE FOR THE FUTURE

Repentance which comes in the wake of an emotional shock of the sort which came over Amnon is repentance motivated by emotion. It is, of course, understood that wherever there is an emotional reaction to sin, when the sin is rejected not for intellectual reasons, but in an emotional and instinctive manner, through the natural feelings of shame and disgust which overwhelm the sinner causing unbearable torment to his soul, then the sinner is no

longer required to make a resolution regarding the future. It becomes superfluous in such a case. The essence of repentance lies in remorse, in the feeling of shame towards himself, in "we are astonished at ourselves, how could such an abomination have been committed," in that feeling of "and Amnon hated her with a great hatred" — and consequently, how can he repeat the sin? Can we suspect someone of repeating his sin when the love which drove him to sin has turned to unfathomable hatred and disgust? The torment of his soul and the feeling of shame in themselves block the way of the sinner. In this type of repentance there is no need for him to resolve not to repeat the sin in the future. We can rest assured that since he knows what sin is with his entire being which is pervaded with the aftertaste of sin, and, it is this torment which now fills him with hatred — instead of love; disgust — instead of desire; scorn — instead of admiration. There is no greater preventive measure which can assure us that he will not repeat the sin.

In repentance of this sort, where confession expresses itself in the words "I am contrite and ashamed," as Maimonides phrases it in Chapter I of his Laws of Repentance — it is pointless to say "and I will never do this again." He is not going to repeat it, having been burned by the sufferings his soul has endured which have deeply penetrated his being and left indelible impressions on him. Wherever the sinner says, "I am ashamed" it implies a reference to emotional repentance which comes out of the spontaneous and natural reaction to sin and not from intellectual reasoning. The instinctive feeling that causes *remorse* is thus the central motif of repentance. The sinner reacts to his sin, just as the sick man reacts to his pains. He will restrain himself from repeating those things which bring him so much suffering. Resolve for the future — for this, there is no apparent need. Remorse and shame — these are what restrain him from sinning again. So when Maimonides says: "and I will never do this again" — his intention does not seem to