

The Power of One Hour of Repentance

What's it going to be like after the resurrection? Nothing in this world compares to the blissful thought of entering into the eternal reward of the World to Come.

In that place of "springs of living water," God will "wipe away all tears from their eyes. There shall be no more death. Neither shall there be any more sorrow nor crying nor pain, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4). The reward of the World to Come utterly transcends our ability to describe or even imagine: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Cor. 2:9). The sages say that "one hour of the bliss of the World to Come is better than the entire life of this world."

Despite that, there is one thing in this world that is even better than the whole World to Come. The Jewish sages explain that one single hour spent repenting and doing good in this world is greater than the whole life of the World to Come. In the Talmud, it says:

One hour of repentance and good deeds in this world is better than the entire life of the World to Come; and one hour of spiritual bliss in the World to Come than the entire life of this World (4:21).

How can a single hour in this world be better than the infinite delights of Eden, the revealed presence of God experienced eye to eye, and the total restoration of our spiritual potential? Because in the World to Come, repentance and good deeds don't really have any value.

Sin is really possible for us only in this existence. When we enter the World to Come, we will still retain our free will,

so perhaps the potential for sin still exists, but in practical terms, there is no sin, because we will be like the angels who behold the infinite light of God. We will be like the Messiah, who beholds the glory of the Father. Then we will be one in purpose, will and spirit with God, filled with infinite light, creatures of light who find no allure in darkness. We will have no desire for sin.

In this world, God's presence remains concealed. We don't see God, and it takes faith to walk with Him; it takes a real effort to set aside our own will for the sake of His. In the World to Come, however, God's presence will be revealed. It won't take faith or effort to submit ourselves to Him.

In view of that future state of glory, it's easy to see why the choice to submit ourselves to God and obey His commandments has meaning only in this world. In the World to Come, every tongue will confess Him, and all creatures will serve Him, but in this world, the path of repentance and good deeds requires a leap of faith and sacrifice of the will. That's why repentance and choosing to do right is something that only has real meaning now.

That also explains why the repentance message is central to Jesus' gospel message. Jesus really had only one main sermon and teaching, and it's the same teaching He told His disciples to present: "Repent! For the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17). He told His disciples that He had been sent only to declare that message (Luke 4:43).

In a Jewish context, "repentance" does not mean to change your mind or even to feel badly about something you have done, but rather, it literally means, "to turn around." It's the same word Moses and the prophets used to describe what the nation of Israel must do to amend her relationship with God when she strayed from the commandments of the Torah.

In a Jewish religious context, "repentance" means only to quit

breaking God's commandments, turn around and start obeying them. Sin is transgression of Torah. Quit sinning, start doing good. That message is obvious when the Gospels are read from a Jewish perspective. The vast majority of Jesus' teachings and parables circle around the theme of repentance. For example, consider the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, the prodigal son, the sower and the seed, the rich man and Lazarus, and so forth—they are all parables about repentance.

Likewise, the apostle Paul called the Gentiles to repentance. He described his mission saying that he “declared first to those at Damascus, then at Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, do works proving their repentance” (Acts 26:20).

We can't afford to procrastinate with repentance. Do it now, while it still counts for something. Do it while it still counts for something greater than the whole life of the World to Come. {eoa}

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