

Texts quoted at the Workshop: Medieval Jewish Cultural Creativity Under Christian Influence

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1. The Doctrine of Repentance of German Pietism (1150–1250)

Maimonides: *Code of Jewish Law*, “Laws of Repentance,” 2, 3: What is *repentance*? It occurs when the sinner forsakes his sin, and removes it from his thoughts, and concludes in his heart not to do it again. . . . Let him also regret what has happened. . . . And let the sinner call the One who knows all hidden things to witness that he will never return to sin that sin again.)

Ashkenazi Pietistic texts:

1. “There are four categories of *teshuvah*: repentance of opportunity, repentance of restraint, repentance of balancing, and repentance of Scripture. The latter three are carried out in practice, the first is not.

Repentance of opportunity. If a man has sinned by *having* sexual relations with a married woman, and that woman comes to him, desirous of repeating their sin, and he burns with desire and love for her, and he has the opportunity to make love, but he beats down his lust and suppresses his desire and restrains himself from making love with her, or with another woman who is secluded with him and willing, and he feels remorse and does not sin—this is the repentance of opportunity.

Repentance of restraint. He must restrain himself from looking at women, or at their jewelry (whether the women are wearing it or not). He must not look at a place where women laugh together, or at young girls. He must not listen intentionally to the sound of women singing, nor sniff the aroma of perfume; . . . he must not listen to lewd stories . . . nor eat hot foods that arouse the passions, nor watch animals engaged in intercourse. . . . He must not wink at a woman or make any suggestive motion with his fingers or his lips . . . In short, he must have nothing to do with women whatsoever.

Repentance of Balancing. According to the apparent pleasure he felt while kissing and fondling and engaging in intercourse, so he must cause himself pain and afflict himself, balancing the pain against the pleasure. . . . At the very least for 40 days, and preferably for a full year, he must not eat meat or

drink wine except for the Sabbath, holidays, and Purim; he must not eat hot bread or bathe, except a little on holidays; he must not be present at any occasion for levity (but he may go to a wedding for the actual service); he should not take pleasure in anything. He should scourge himself each day and lie upon a plank without a pillow, except on the Sabbath and holidays, when he may lie on straw and place a pillow under his head. . . . He must live a life of sorrow, wearing sackcloth, never speaking about anything related to sexual pleasure.

Repentance of Scripture. One who has sexual intercourse with a married woman, an offense punishable by death according to Biblical law, must suffer pain as grievous as death. He should sit in ice or in snow once or twice for an hour, and in the summer he should sit among flies or ants or bees, so as to suffer afflictions as painful as death. . . . He must weep and confess each day, and suffer all manner of affliction, because he made her forbidden to her husband.”

Rabbi Eleazer of Worms, *Sefer ha-Rokeah, Hilkhot Teshuvah*, ca. 1200

2. “She [the adulteress] must confess three times each day in the women’s synagogue of two or three congregations of her city. . . . She must wear black and sit like a mourner in the synagogue. . . . She must fast for 365 straight days [until evening], and at night she must not eat meat or drink wine except on Sabbaths and holidays. . . . During the winters she must sit naked for a quarter of an hour in cold water or in the snow twice each week, and in the summer she must similarly sit naked in a place of flies or bees.”

Rabbi Jacob Weil, *Responsa*, no. 12, ca. 1430

3. “On every Monday and Thursday thereafter he [who killed someone accidentally but negligently with a gun] must come on foot from the village in which he is living to the synagogue of Konstantinov and sit behind the door. Then he is to be whipped and he must make confession and he must fast each day [until sunset] for half a year, and he must frequently fast three days and three nights straight.

But when I saw that this was more than his strength could bear, for he was a sick man, I lightened his penance to the effect that he should fast only three days in every seven, but that he should not eat meat or drink strong drink the entire week, except on the Sabbaths and holidays, nor sleep on mattresses and pillows on week days.”

Rabbi Meir of Lublin, *Responsa*, no. 43, ca. 1600

2. The Jewish Messiah: Vicarious Atonement

The souls in Lower Paradise, on every New Moon and Sabbath day, go about and ascend to the spot called “Walls of Jerusalem,” where there are a great many Chieftains and legions mounting guard, as written, *I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem* (Isa. 62:9). They mount up as far as that spot, but do not enter it until their purging is complete. There they prostrate themselves, drink in ecstatically of the celestial radiance, and then return into Paradise.

They also at times go forth, roaming about the world and viewing the bodies of the sinners undergoing their punishments. So Scripture says, *And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have rebelled against Me; for their worms shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched, and they shall be abhorrent unto all flesh* (Isa. 66:24)

They continue to roam about, casting their glance on those who are victims of pain and disease, who suffer for their belief in the unity of their Master. They then return and make all this known to the Messiah. When the Messiah hears of the great suffering of Israel in their dispersion, and of the wicked amongst them who seek not to know their Master, he weeps aloud on account of those wicked ones amongst them, as it is written, *But he was wounded because of our transgression, crushed because of our iniquities* (Isa. 53:5). The souls then return to their place.

The Messiah, on his part, enters a certain Hall in the Garden of Eden, called the Hall of the Afflicted. There he calls for all the diseases and pains and sufferings of Israel, bidding them settle on himself, which they do. And were it not that he thus eases the burden from Israel, taking it on himself, no one could endure the sufferings meted out to Israel in expiation on account of their neglect of the Torah. So Scripture says, *surely our diseases he did bear* (Isa. 53:4). . . . For indeed, beyond number are the chastisements awaiting every man daily for the neglect of the Torah, all of which descended into the world at the time when the Torah was given.

As long as Israel were in the Holy Land, by means of the Temple service and sacrifices they averted all evil diseases and afflictions from the world. Now it is the Messiah who is the means of averting them from mankind until the time when a man quits this world and receives his punishment.

Zohar, *Va-Yaqhel*, 212a; translated in *The Zohar* (London, 1984), 5 vols., 4:200–201; cf. Raphael Patai, *The Messiah Texts* (New York, 1979), 115–16.

3. Christians as a Positive Model for Emulations

1. Look what happens when a congregation [of Jews] gathers to hear words of Torah from a sage. Slumber weighs upon the eyes of the officers; others converse about trivial affairs. The preacher is dumbfounded by the talking of men and the chattering of women standing behind the synagogue. If he should reproach them because of their behavior, they continue to sin, behaving corruptly, abominably. This is the opposite of the Christians. When their men and women gather to hear a preacher, they stand together in absolute silence, marveling at his rebuke. Not one of them dozes as he pours out his words upon them. They await him as they do the rain, eager for the waters of his counsel. We have not learned properly from those around us.

Solomon Alami, *Iggeret Musar* (Jerusalem, 1965), 27 (ca. 1415 Spain)

2. In every city, their scholars master all branches of knowledge; their priests and princes stand at the fore in philosophy, integrating it with their theological doctrine. They have written many books, on the basis of which biblical texts are expounded before large congregations. Each day their preachers give important insights into their religion and faith, thereby sustaining it.

For some time now, calls have gone out far and wide, summoning the people to hear their learned discourses. They have fulfilled their promise. Among those who came were Jews. They heard the preachers and found them impressive; their appetites were whetted for similar fare. This is what they say: ‘The Christian scholars and sages raise questions and seek answers in their academies and churches, thereby adding to the glory of the Torah and the prophets, as do the sages of every people. . . . The Gentiles search enthusiastically for religious and ethical content, using all appropriate hermeneutical techniques. But our Torah commentators do not employ this method that everyone admires. Their purpose is only to explain the grammatical forms of words and the simple meaning of the stories and commandments. They have not attempted to fill our need or to exalt the image of our Torah to our own people by regaling them with gems from its narratives and laws.’

Isaac Arama, *Aqedat Yitshaq* (Warsaw 1883), 8a, translation in *Saperstein*, *Jewish Preaching*, 1200–1800 (New Haven 1989), 392–93 (late 15th-century Spain)

3. “You have followed them in their corruption, you have failed to emulate their good” (Sanh 39b). Look at the Gentiles among whom we live. We learn from them styles of clothing and arrogance, but we do not learn from them silence during prayer. We are like them in consuming their cheeses and their wine, but we are not like them with regard to justice, righteousness, and honesty. We are like

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them in shaving our beard or modeling it in their style, but we are not like them in their refraining from cursing or swearing in God's name. We are like them in frequenting underground game rooms, but we are not like them in turning from vengeance and refraining from bearing hatred in our hearts. We are like them in fornicating with their daughters, but we are not like them in conducting business affairs with integrity and fairness.

Saul Levi Morteira, *Giv'at Sha'ul* (Warsaw, 1912), sermon on *Devarim*, 129a, early 1630s, Amsterdam