

## Reconciliation in Judaism

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### Abstract:

The topic of reconciliation in Judaism is still highly controversial. On one extreme side, scholars claim that reconciliation is only a minor ethical commandment, whereas Yom Kippur (Atonement Day) is about atonement and has not much to do with reconciliation. On the other side, scholars see in the Yom Kippur tradition the essential source of all that Christianity, Islam, and secularized Western ethics have said about reconciliation. In a critical dialogue with arguments for the extreme positions, specifically in a debate with Martha Nussbaum's genealogy of forgiveness in her book *Anger and Forgiveness*, this presentation shows how reconciliation with G-d, with the other, and with oneself has been developed since the Torah. The interest here is to find the precise meaning of reconciliation in different eras: Torah, Talmud, European Middle Ages, and the 19th and 20th centuries. These considerations lead to various perspectives on Christianity, Islam, reconciliation studies and psychoanalysis. The paper also introduces ideas from a new PhD thesis written at the Jena Center for Reconciliation Studies (JCRS) by André Zempelburg.

### Keywords:

Reconciliation, Yom Kippur, Transactional Forgiveness, unconditional Generosity, Mishna

## ユダヤ教における和解

マルティン・ライナー

### 要旨

ユダヤ教における和解という主題をめぐるのは、現在もなおさまざまな論争がある。たしかにヨム・キプール（大贖罪日）は贖いにかかわるものではあるが、和解とはあまり関連をもたず、〔ユダヤ教において〕和解は倫理にかかわる副次的な戒律にすぎないと主張する学者がいる。その一方で、キリスト教、イスラーム、世俗的な西洋の倫理などが和解というものをめぐって語ってきたことのすべての本質的な淵源が、ユダヤ教におけるヨム・キプールの伝統のうちに含まれているとみる学者もいる。本稿では、こうした両極的立場にある論争を批判的に吟味すると同時に、さらにマーサ・ヌスバウム『怒りと赦し (*Anger and Forgiveness*)』で展開された「赦し」の系譜学に関する議論を参照することで、聖書以降、神、他者、自己との和解概念がいかに展開されてきたのかを明らかにするつもりである。また、古代イスラエル時代、ミシュナー・タルムード時代、ヨーロッパ中世、19世紀、20世紀などさまざまな時代におけるそれぞれの和解概念の意味を、精確に確定することを目的とした。そして、これらの考察をとおして、キリスト教、イスラーム、和解研究、精神分析などについていくらかの見解を示そうと思う。本稿ではまた、アンドレ・ツェンペルブルク (André Zempelburg) がイエナ和解研究センター (JCRS)において最近書きあげた博士論文についても紹介したい。

### キーワード

和解、ヨム・キプール、相互の赦し、無条件の高邁、ミシュナー

## Introduction

I would like to renew an old academic custom by starting with a joke:

The joke is from Sarah Kofman's book *Pourquoi rit-on? Freud et le mot d'esprit* (Paris 1989): "Finishing this book today, on Yom Kippur, I cannot avoid reporting a Jewish story Theodor Reik told us. Two Jews, enemies for a long time, meet each other in the synagogue on the Day of Great Pardon. One says to the other: 'I wish you what you wish me.' And the second said: 'You want to start again?'"

This paper will discuss Yom Kippur and the possibilities of starting something radically new through forgiveness instead of staying within the limits of reciprocating each other's behavior.

This topic seems to be a historical one, and more or less an endeavor for specialists in Jewish Studies. However, it is, at the same time, an existential topic that touches everybody's life. From early youth until old age, we all have to deal with what the French-Lithuanian Jewish philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch called the diseases of time: regret and remorse. Regret makes us wish to have done something in the past. Remorse is the opposite feeling, when we wish to undo what we have done. However, the past is irrevocable.<sup>1</sup> No human being can undo what is done. Missed opportunities, failed relationships, and guilt and shame more or less fill the hearts of everybody. This occurs despite whether it comes from time to time and very softly or it comes so strongly that it becomes difficult to continue living with the feeling of guilt and shame.

Individuals and times, cultures, and religions have their specific ways to regard those feelings, give them their colors, understand them, and find remedies. The Mediterranean and Japanese cultures may stress shame more than guilt, even if the stereotypical image of an honor and shame culture, such as Ruth Benedict presented in her classical book *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (first published in 1946), does not fully correspond to the relevant empirical data. In a kind of lucid moment, Benedict wrote against the rigid pattern she described in other parts of the book: "The Japanese are both, and strongly so: aggressive and peace-loving, warriors and poetical, rude and polite, stubborn and adaptable; they are submissive but do not like to be ordered around, they are loyal and sneaky, brave and scared, conservative and receptive to anything new. They are very concerned how other persons judge their behavior [which leads to shame, M.L.], while they are plagued by guilt if their misconduct remains undetected [which means guilt, M.L.]."<sup>2</sup>

Commonly, feelings of guilt and an intensive concern with finding a remedy for guilt have long been characteristics of Christian history. Late Antiquity, with its doctrine of God's

Eternity and God's identity with truth—*Deus est veritas*—made every past mistake not only a problem in time but an eternal obstacle against communion with God. Augustin's teachings on original sin and the creation of the sacrament of confession created what can be considered the most guilt and the most truth-centered culture in history so far.

Occidental Christianity has spread this view throughout the world. Since late Antiquity, Judaism has been impacted as well. Through the centuries, Judaism and Islam could dispute holding the second place among the world religions in paying attention to sin, guilt, regret and remorse. Depending on our worldview, we may see this as an advantage of both religions, or not. They may not be as greatly burdened with guilt and fear as Christianity was, at least not in past centuries. However, if we dig more in-depth, we find different ways of awareness, understanding, and giving importance, as well as different "colors" for similar social practices, dealing with and finding remedies for regret and remorse in the Hebrew Bible and Judaism and in the Qur'an and Islam, as well. Today, our focus is on Judaism. This presentation will describe the different stages of Jewish interpretation of reconciliation through historical periods.

The structure of the discussion is divided into six sections:

In the first section, "preliminary remarks," several positions are exposed. The extreme views that either reconciliation does not play a significant role in the Hebrew Bible and Judaism, or, conversely, that reconciliation is a Judeo-Christian concept that other religions have imported and adapted over the past few decades. As a third position, the paper will summarize Martha Nussbaum's genealogy of forgiveness in Judaism and Christianity based on her book *Anger and Forgiveness*.<sup>3</sup> Nussbaum distinguishes between transactional forgiveness, unconditional forgiveness and pure generosity. All three are prominent in all three religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The section will finish by defining and distinguishing different practices as part of reconciliation and describing the three primary relationships, human-G-d or transcendence, human-human, and man with oneself, which are always issues of reconciliation.

With those positions in the background, we can better understand the specificity of Jewish ways of approaching reconciliation. The second section tries to understand reconciliation in the Hebrew Bible. The focus is on the relationship between G-d and His people of Israel. The main question: What is the relationship between the sacrificial concept of reconciliation and forgiveness?

The third section looks at Jesus of Nazareth and Saint Paul, who both wanted to be and remained Jewish. The central thesis is that Jesus' practice of forgiving the sick people he healed

was an attack against the entire sacrificial concept of reconciliation. It was quite logical that this led to opposition against the temple. Combined with other provocations against the Law and the Roman Empire, this led to the process against Jesus and his crucifixion. After his death, Paul and other early Christians conceived a universal understanding of reconciliation.

The fourth section discusses classical rabbinic views on reconciliation, starting from Mishna Masechet Yoma. As in the New Testament, in rabbinic thought, reconciliation between human beings becomes increasingly essential.

The fifth section starts with Maimonides and his reception of Mishna tractate Yoma and draws out the storylines up to the time of Emanuel Lévinas.

The sixth section will summarize the results and ask the question of reconciliation with oneself. It seems that reconciliation with oneself has become the most crucial form of reconciliation for most people today. They experience the feeling that to forgive oneself takes longer and is more demanding than to forgive others. However, reconciliation with the other and reconciliation with G-d are still essential and need to be addressed.

## 1. Preliminary remarks

A. Concerning reconciliation in Judaism, we sometimes find two opposite extreme positions. One claims that reconciliation is not a central term in the Jewish religion. It is said to be a Christian concept, which cannot be understood except by the idea that man is profoundly separated from G-d and comes to G-d by reconciliation. For Jewish people, there is not such a profound separation. G-d elected them as part of the chosen people of Israel. What is needed is not for G-d to sacrifice his son or something of that kind but only to practice *teshuvah* “repentance” and to return to obedience to the Law. According to Martin Buber, Chassidic rabbi Bunan said, “The great human guilt is not committing sins but being able to turn back to G-d, every moment and staying apart from him.”<sup>3</sup> Commenting on that text, Dorothee Sölle (1929–2003), a German protestant theologian who vigorously fought against anti-Semitic traditions in Christianity and coined the term “Christofascism,” prefers the term *teshuvah* to forgiveness. Forgiveness and similarly reconciliation, she argues, are cheap gifts if they are not part of a transformation of hearts and actions. She was disgusted by Christians who were following the Nazi party and believed that G-d forgives them without any change in their hearts; she was further disgusted by Christian forgiveness as well and said that Judaism sees this more clearly when talking about *teshuva*.<sup>4</sup> As celebrated on Yom Kippur only once a year, forgiveness and reconciliation are only small parts and elements in a global process to

transform the hearts lived in the middle of a community turning itself toward G-d. *Teshuva* is a human decision, and it is at the same time G-d's transformational action. Sölle's final word in that chapter is a quote from the Hebrew Bible, where G-d has promised in Ezekiel 36:26: "I will give you a new heart and a new mind. I will take away your stubborn heart of stone and will give you an obedient heart" (quoted from Good News Bible).

**B.** On the other side of the spectrum, we find authors who consider the entire Christian teaching about reconciliation and forgiveness as grounded in Jewish presuppositions. Biblical scholars from Tübingen (Janowski, Hofius) underlined Yom HaKippurim's fundamental role in the Christian understanding of atonement and reconciliation. The famous passage in Romans 3:25 directly refers to the relevant place on the Ark of the Covenant (*kapporet*) in Lev. 16. Paul proclaims justification by faith, which according to Luther is the center of protestant understanding of the Christian message: "G-d has exposed him [Christ, M.L.] as the *kapporet* to show His justice and to forgive the sins." The contradiction between G-d's justice and his love seems to be the problem of both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament: It starts in the Hebrew Bible and finds a radical and surprising solution in the New Testament. Without the "Old Testament," the New Testament would be like ending a story without a beginning.

**C.** Even if both extreme positions A and B are impressive, they overlook essential facts: In Antiquity, pagan cultures also paid attention to reconciliation and forgiveness. This cannot be only and exclusively Jewish. Nevertheless, reconciliation and forgiveness are Jewish topics because Yom HaKippurim is the highest holiday in Judaism. No other day is so holy, and on no other day can the high priest enter the temple's holiest area, never does G-d come so close to his people as on that day. We have to look for middle positions, which reflect the similarities and differences between Christianity and Judaism better than the extreme positions. In the middle between both extreme interpretations, we find along with many others Martha Nussbaum, an American Jewish philosopher since her conversion to Judaism in the late 1980s. In her book *Anger and Forgiveness*, she develops a genealogy of our feelings and thinking about forgiveness.<sup>5</sup> Nussbaum leaves behind the extremism of both positions. She speaks about forgiveness as an impactful and independent topic in Jewish tradition. She starts her book with a Greek tragedy passage, reminding us that forgiveness and reconciliation are not exclusively Jewish or Christian topics but are very present in Ancient Greek literature. Nussbaum writes about Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, but we could refer to the much more well-known Aristophanes comedy *Lysistrata*, where everything is about reconciliation, and even reconciliation appears on the stage as a beautiful naked woman.

**D.** Both Jewish and Christian history can explain our feelings on guilt and forgiveness

in a very similar way because both religious traditions include the two fundamental forms of forgiveness: transactional forgiveness and unconditional forgiveness. Transactional forgiveness is conditional forgiveness. It means that man has to fulfil requirements, or at least follow a specific procedure to be able to receive forgiveness. The sacrament of confession with its component parts of repentance (*contritio cordis*), confession (*confessio oris*), absolution (*absolutio*) and satisfaction (*satisfactio operum*) is a typical example of transactional forgiveness. *Teshuva* in medieval Jewish tradition is similar in so far as there are many commandments to observe to receive forgiveness. Martha Nussbaum summarizes Jewish and Christian thought concerning forgiveness: “Transactional forgiveness is the central theoretical concept in medieval and modern Jewish philosophy (drawing on some biblical texts but ignoring others). It is one of three highly influential attitudes in the Christian tradition and the one that the organized church tends to prefer and codify. However, some less codified parts of the Jewish tradition and some well-known parts of the Christian tradition also introduce two different attitudes. One I shall call unconditional forgiveness; the other I shall call unconditional love and generosity.”<sup>6</sup> Examples of unconditional forgiveness are in the Hebrew Bible passages like Moses’ prayer for the people in Numbers 14.18-20: “Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now. And the Lord said, I have pardoned according to thy word.” In the New Testament, Jesus forgives unconditionally when healing people (Mark 2:9). Examples of generosity are The Prodigal Son’s parable, the lost sheep, and the lost coin (Luke 15). For Judaism, Nussbaum cites Jewish composer Gustav Mahler in his resurrection symphony. Nussbaum, in most cases, prefers unconditional forgiveness and even more unconditional love and generosity, but she sees the positive potential of transactional forgiveness.

Nussbaum’s distinction between transactional forgiveness, unconditional forgiveness and unconditional love/generosity helps us to see that we have to introduce distinctions in the semantic field of reconciliation and forgiveness. There should not be one more or less synonymous term for “whatever attitudes one thinks good in the management of anger,”<sup>7</sup> but here we have a complex reality to discover. As a definition, I propose using the word reconciliation for the entire process to rebuild “normal” and, if possible, “good” relationships after grave incidents. “Normal” and “good” stand in quotation marks because the main criterion of whether a relationship is normal or good consists of how the concerned partners in the relationship talk and think about that relationship. If there were never normal or good relationships, I would propose the word conciliation for the entire process of building “normal”

and, if possible, “good” relationships after serious incidents. Forgiveness would have a narrower sense: Forgiveness is an entirely process and acts to overcome the tendency to revenge and resentment against others. This definition of forgiveness opposes an “instant,” “one for all times,” or “forgive and forget” approach. Instant forgiveness is like a creation from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*). Instant forgiveness is possible, but it is much more divine forgiveness than human. In most human cases, forgiveness is a long process with different elements. Only the moment of decision to start something new and creative can be considered one and unique. This is always the “divine” moment. As Hannah Arendt described in her classic passage on the Human Condition: The moment of forgiveness is the experience of freedom. “Forgiving, in other words, is the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven.”<sup>8</sup> This recalls the joke we related at the beginning of this lecture. Both enemies do not find freedom for a new beginning. To understand forgiveness, we have to overcome reciprocative behavior and start anew, creating a new level of freedom. In those moments, we are experiencing something quasi-divine: creative freedom to start something completely new. In several theological and philosophical traditions (Plato, Luther, Spinoza, Hegel), God shares many of his properties with man; we can say that we are experiencing a divine moment in us and through us in the moments of forgiveness. Along with Zempelburg (p. 254), Spinoza said in his Ethics (IV prop 35), somehow against *homo homini lupus*, *Homo homini Deus*: Man becomes “God” as a man when forgiving the other. In most human cases, however, the process of forgiveness includes setbacks and repetitions of anger and disappointment. There can even be punitive, humiliating, and controlling aspects in several ways of forgiveness, and during several periods of forgiveness, there are moments of excuse and explanation. There can be medium degrees within forgiveness when forgiveness means to let go of the wish to revenge, but there is not yet any trust in the other person as a moral agent. There can be reconciliation without forgiveness because relationships can become better even if people are not ready to forgive. There can be tragic wisdom, when people regret past actions even if there was no better alternative. Above all those forms and stages of reconciliation and forgiveness, stands the general insight that in most cases forgiving is hugely beneficial for both victims and perpetrators. It leads to freedom and peace of mind. As forgiveness does not imply forgetting, it includes transforming the narrative into a story about learning.

**E.** To summarize two preliminary results: 1. There are more cases of reconciliation than cases of forgiveness. Forgiveness is more specific and includes a conscious dealing with

past evil actions. 2. Reconciliation and forgiveness consist of different stages and are experienced in many various forms. There is not one model or blueprint for all of them. Both insights make the topic of reconciliation quite rich and diverse. But things are still a bit more complicated.

In all those processes of reconciliation and forgiveness, we have to consider those different relationships that are always present: The relation with the other person, the relation with G-d, and the relation with oneself. In a more detailed way, we can describe the other as a diverse reality: individuals, groups, organizations, generations can be distinguished. There are main perpetrators, collaborators, bystanders, people who were more victims than perpetrators. Alternatively, there can be direct victims and indirect victims with different distance to the grave incident. Children, friends of the direct victims, later generations, somehow even every human being, if we follow Martin Luther King, who in his letter from the Birmingham jail wrote that “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.” The notion of crime against humanity encodes that universal aspect.

One of the great events in philosophy these past few years was the publication of the seminar “Le parjure et le pardon,” two volumes with teachings Jacques Derrida presented during the years 1997–1999. In those volumes, he created the term “pardonance,” meaning that there are situations where the original perpetrators and the original victims are no longer present but where the need for forgiveness is still present in the situation and can be felt like a crying need, and the answer is like a redemption.<sup>9</sup>

Working in more detail, we also have to include the inner group, which might support reconciliation or fight reconcilers as traitors. Often the inner group is divided on that point, either through direct fear by sanctions for people who chose reconciliation or through loyalty, since better relationships with enemies are blocked for long periods of time. To complete the list, we should not neglect the further need to consider our relationship with the non-human environment, nature, and animals as a reconciliation dimension.

In the following, we focus on three relationships: Human-G-d, Human-human, and Human-oneself. In this examination, we follow a PhD thesis written at the Jena Center for Reconciliation Studies by André Zempelburg, “*Versöhnung im Judentum.*” Marburg: Tectum, 2019.<sup>10</sup>

## 2. Reconciliation in the Hebrew Bible

The main text for reconciliation in the Hebrew Bible is Leviticus 16. The English version calls it the day of atonement. In Hebrew it is Yom HaKippurim. The plural HaKippurim shows that there are different acts of doing KPR (atonement). In the biblical text, we have three sacrifices: first, the high priest sacrifices a bull for his and his family's sins in order to be able to enter the holiest part of the Tent. Second is the sacrifice of one goat, which stands for the people of Israel. Aaron, the high priest, spreads the goat's blood onto the *kapporet*, the place of G-d's presence in the Ark of the Covenant. The third sacrifice is the second goat, the so-called scapegoat. Aaron puts the sins of the people of Israel on the goat's head, and the goat will carry all the sins into the desert.

There are many discussions on the meaning of KPR, but there is a growing consensus to understand it from the Septuagint translation as forgiveness (Z 18-49). The three sacrifices together lead to G-d's forgiveness for the people of Israel's sins. The three Yom HaKippurim sacrifices express a deep understanding of how G-d's forgiveness comes to the people of Israel. It is not so different from Human-human processes of forgiveness. We can highlight five similarities:

(1) G-d is offended by the sins; therefore, He makes the rules on how reconciliation can be possible. Without acknowledgement of the offended rules, no reconciliation is possible.

(2) Aaron and the people have to follow G-d's rules.

(3) The first sacrifice shows the difficulty of approaching the offended. Beyond human analogy, the offended is Holy G-d. The People of Israel are too immersed in their sins to approach Him. Only after a sacrifice for his own sins can Aaron approach Him without having to die.

(4) The primary sacrifice is the goat's sacrifice, which is brought to the place where G-d is present. The blood symbolizes life, in this case, the life of Israel. Coming close together again is a crucial moment in forgiveness. This is the divine moment of reconciliation. It happens once in a moment and makes it possible for all Israelites to distance themselves from all sins of the entire year.

(5) The scapegoat rite symbolizes the transformation of the sinners. They remove their sins and keep a distance from them.

Two elements deserve special attention: In Marta Nussbaum's distinction, the Yom HaKippurim seems to be a case of transactional forgiveness. However, it is not. G-d does not forgive because he receives the animals. G-d wants to forgive, but he gives rules that engage the entire people of Israel. Through those rules, he forgives those who follow the rules. There

is no give in order to receive (*do ut des*-logic) or economy of the gift, but this is just a rule given by G-d to follow. A second element is that the sacrifice of the first goat already achieves forgiveness. The confession of sins and the scapegoat ritual is not the precondition for forgiveness but its consequence. Grace comes before human separation from sin.

### **3. Jesus and Paul on Reconciliation and Forgiveness**

When Jesus of Nazareth started to preach about the Kingdom of G-d, the temple was very active and attracted many thousands of pilgrims every year. The highest holiday was Yom HaKippurim. It might not have been a conscious provocation, but when Jesus said to the paralyzed man in Mark 2 that his sins are forgiven, he said something that led straight to a deadly conflict with the established system. Mark 2:6 and 7 says, “Some teachers of the Law who were sitting there thought to themselves, How does he dare talk like this? This is blasphemy! God is the only one who can forgive sins.” With his provocation about forgiving sins, along with his various criticisms of the temple and his provocation of the Roman Empire when he announced the Kingdom of G-d, it seems clear that the establishment had to react.

The death of Jesus led to a new and profound experience of forgiveness. It seems that the disciples left Jesus alone. There might have been acts of denial (St. Peter) and treason (Judas). Nevertheless, seeing Jesus Christ resurrected and forgiving, the disciples experienced new feelings and new reasons to believe in G-d’s forgiveness, even beyond betrayal and through death. For the disciples, all came together into a new picture: Passages in the Hebrew Bible, Jesus forgiving sins, his critique of the temple, the appearances (or “Visions”) of the resurrected restoring community with them and thus forgiving them. The Letter to the Hebrews interpreted this a few decades later when the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, by replacing the high priest with Jesus, who went into the indestructible heavenly temple.

Between Jesus’ death and the destruction of the temple, Saint Paul gave another metaphorical interpretation of Jesus’ death. Jesus on the cross here replaces the goat’s blood on the *kapporet* (Romans 3,25). To interpret Christ’s death by the Yom HaKippurim is a metaphor. Christ was brutally killed on the cross; he was not sacrificed in the temple. For Paul, this is only one metaphor to understand the meaning of the cross, where Jesus had died. Paul also knows many others. However, it is a profound one that leads to a new concept of reconciliation. Not only on the cross but also by his entire coming into the world, his death and resurrection, G-d was in Christ and reconciled the world with himself (2 Corinthians 5,18). This implies universalism: the entire world is reconciled. The main element of reconciliation

is already accomplished. According to Paul, the situation we all live in is equivalent to Yom HaKippurim after the rite with the first goat. Only to separate oneself from sin remains a daily exercise for Christians.

Mark 2 and 2 Corinthians 5 show that in the Christian faith, unconditional forgiveness is emphasized. However, with his words explaining that the forgiveness of sins comes to the disciples through bread and wine, the Lord's Supper is equivalent to Yom HaKippurim: Neither are transactional. Only later confession of sins and the sacrament of confession became a precondition for participation in the Lord's Supper. From that development, a transactional, Church-controlled misunderstanding of forgiveness became predominant.

However, even in the tradition of Jesus' teachings, we find affirmations that can be understood as Transactional forgiveness. Highly impressive unconditional forgiveness occurs when Jesus heals persons, and it is astonishing that, in some passages of the synoptical gospels, Jesus sees reconciliation with one's Fellow as a priority before receiving G-d's forgiveness. The "Our Father," which according to many New Testament scholars is not from Jesus himself but more likely a transformation of Jewish prayers such as the Kaddish by the early Christians, is asked: "Forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors." Moreover, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus asks the congregants to reconcile with one's Fellow before going to the temple to make a sacrifice. In those teachings of Jesus, we find a parallel to the evolution of rabbinic thought about the relationship between forgiveness in human relationships and G-d's forgiveness.

It is still challenging to decide whether Jesus was the first teacher in Palestinian Judaism or only one of the first to underline the importance of human-to-human forgiveness. Hannah Arendt saw Jesus' role as extremely important: "The discoverer of the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs was Jesus of Nazareth."<sup>11</sup> According to her, Jesus discovered the power to forgive and called on people to forgive before expecting forgiveness from God. Matthew 18:35 (cf. Mark 11:25): "And when ye stand praying, forgive ... that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses." God forgives "us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (quoted by Arendt p. 239 note 77). We will now discuss how rabbinic Judaism underlines the same idea and makes it a principle: first human reconciliation, then reconciliation with G-d.

#### **4. Reconciliation in the Mishna**

In the Mishna treaty on the Yom Kippur, Yoma, one central phrase says it bluntly: "The

Yom HaKippurim forgives transgressions (*‘aberot*) against the place [*hamaqom*, which means G-d]. It only forgives transgressions between man and his Fellow [*haber*; M.L.] if he pacifies [SHRZH, M.L.] him before” (M. Yoma 8,9). As Jesus said, for the Mishna, the priority is to make peace with your Fellow.

At least four decisive sets of questions have to be asked:

First: Who is the *Haber*, the Fellow? Does it only mean a beloved friend, people who are alike? Is it limited to Jews or neighbors? Where are the boundaries of the duty to pacify the other? In Mishna times, most interpretations believed that *Haber* in B. Yoma 8 only meant a Jewish person living within a certain proximity.

Second: How shall the other be pacified? This involves apology and confession, or how it shall happen. In Talmudic times, two observations were significant. The first was the search for creative ways to achieve reconciliation before the Yom HaKippurim, The Gemara of B Talmud to Yoma 8,9 quotes Rabbi Yishaq, who proposes different means to pacify the Fellow: through words, through money [mammon; M.L.], through providing more friends for him (cf. Zempelburg p. 260). The second motive is that forgiveness based on truth and remorse is much more valued than paying money or resolving the questions cheaply and quickly. B.T. Yoma 87a depicts Josef’s brothers in Gen 50,17 as an example of asking for forgiveness: “You shall speak to Yosef: O please carry” (N.S.; in the sense of forgive) (cf. Zempelburg p. 262).

Third: How important is it to receive forgiveness, and are there acceptable limits to the effort of seeking forgiveness? B.T. Yoma 87a quotes Rabbi Yose bar Hanina, who said that anyone seeking to obtain forgiveness should not ask more than three times. This implies that it was not an absolute necessity for G-D’s forgiveness to first receive human forgiveness at any cost in Talmudic times.

Fourth: Has the victim the duty to forgive? This is clearly not the case. David Konstan (*Before Forgiveness: The Origins of a Moral Idea*. Cambridge 2013, p.110) argues with the article by Louis Newman<sup>12</sup>: “Newman argues further that the Mishnah never proposes that one has the duty to forgive, so to speak, unilaterally, irrespective of the offender’s stance, but only as a response to an appropriate gesture of repentance on the part of the offender. This would seem to approach the modern conception, according to which forgiveness requires signs of a change of heart in the offender and the party who forgives, and hence forgiveness can never be obligatory in the sense of a simple reflex: It is an active process and must be earned.” It seems that limitless forgiveness (“seven times seventy times,” see Matthew 18:22) is a concept of the Jesus-tradition but not mainstream in rabbinic teachings. Having seen similarities and differences regarding forgiveness between Jesus in the Gospel and in rabbinic thinking, we

briefly follow the developments from medieval times until today.

## 5. From Maimonides to Lévinas and contemporary Jewish thought

In this section, we consider four significant trends in the development of Judaism's views on forgiveness and reconciliation.

1. The first trend is Yom HaKippurim becoming Yom Kippur. The three acts in the Tora, sacrifice for the high priest, sacrifice for the people of Israel, and the scapegoat rite, could no longer be repeated after the destruction of the temple. In the liturgy, everything became condensed into a single central act when G-d forgave Israel. Quotes from the book of Numbers mainly reify this. Here, one recites Numbers 15:26 (“May all the people of Israel be forgiven, including all the strangers who live in their midst, for all the people are at fault”). A further invocation would be “O pardon the iniquities of this people, according to Thy abundant mercy, just as Thou forgave this people ever since they left Egypt.” After these prayers, the moment of forgiveness comes: The leader and congregation repeat three times, “The Lord said, ‘I pardon them according to your words.’” (Numbers 14:20). Given this complete focus on the Lord's performative answer, “I pardon them,” it is only logical that the singular Yom Kippur increasingly replaced the plural voice of Yom HaKippurim. Other liturgical topics, such as famously declaring vows and promises void (Kol Nidrei) at the beginning of the liturgy, only help to project freedom and peace.
2. The second trend is how reconciliation between human Fellows becomes increasingly essential. It seems that Maimonides still considered reconciliation with G-d as much more central than reconciliation between human beings. According to him, the ten days of teshuva before Yom Kippur had a greater sense of preparing to receive G-d's forgiveness and only in a few aspects the purpose to reconcile with human Fellows. This approach increasingly changed in Judaism. Seeking human forgiveness became more and more necessary as preparation for Yom Kippur. Questions such as what to do if the person I have offended is far away or has died tended to receive more attention. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the shift was complete. In Shlomo Ganzfried's Kizzur Schulchan Aruch, the ten days before Yom Kippur are completely focused on seeking human forgiveness.
3. Already in the New Testament, the discussion of who is my Fellow is prominent. The Good Samaritan parable (Luke 10: 30-37) changes the question from who is my

Fellow to whom can I make my Fellow. The Good Samaritan treated the man who fell from the robbers' attack as his Fellow. Thus he becomes his Fellow. In Judaism, the discussion is much more about the limits of who is a fellow. The main concern seems to have been not to overload people with obligations they have to fulfil to celebrate Yom Kippur. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the notion of *Haber* is, however, enlarged. Emmanuel Lévinas is one author who made this crucial step toward universal ethics (cf. Zempelburg p. 330ss).. He clearly understands Haber as the other human being, Jewish or not.

4. The latest trend seems to be that in the 21st century, Jewish authors have discovered reconciliation with themselves. André Zempelburg takes up American Psychiatrist and rabbi Abraham Twerski in his book *Happiness and the Human Spirit: Become the Best You Can Be* (2nd ed. Woodstock 2008; 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 2007). He states that we have to tell the truth about ourselves. If we acknowledge the truth, we are not truly just and right. We have to forgive ourselves. Zempelburg also quotes American Jewish novelist Karyn D. Kedar, who in 2007 published a series of short stories in the book *The Bridge to Forgiveness: Stories and Prayers for Finding God and Restoring Wholeness* (Woodstock 2007). In this book, she states: "Forgiveness is learning to come to terms with the story of your life and releasing the pain of the past" (p. 100).

## 6. Summary

The quest for reconciliation with oneself seems to become a new door to understanding Jewish thought and practice about finding forgiveness from others and G-d. After finishing this overview, we might understand how central the question of forgiveness and reconciliation is in human, social, and religious life. To summarize this presentation, the closeness and differences between the Christian and the Jewish ways of seeing forgiveness and reconciliation should not be viewed as a fixed opposition but rather like a dance, where sometimes Christians follow Jewish ideas like the metaphor of *kapporet* while Jews follow the discoveries Jesus had made, such as the priority of human-to-human forgiveness before G-d's forgiveness.

The presentation argues for the following central theses:

1. The Hebrew Bible relates most of its statements on reconciliation and forgiveness to the Yom HaKippurim (Lev. 16) and other sacrificial or temple practices to again find forgiveness and connection with G-d.

2. From the Septuagint, we understand that *kipper* in Hebrew is very similar to forgive, not as expiation or payment of guilt like in Saint Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* or in the German translation "Sühne."
3. The rite of Yom HaKippurim distinguishes three sacrifices: (a) one for the high priest to enter the Holiest of the Holy without having to die, (b) one as a symbolic killing for the people of Israel and the incorporation of their lives into the place of G-d's presence, and (c) one to remove sins through the scapegoat rite.
4. Rite (b) is the precondition for rite (c), which means that G-d's acceptance of Israel comes first, before the separation from sin.
5. All three rites symbolically express profound truth: (a) expresses the Holiness and the unconditional importance of G-d and his commandments for life and human failure and sin before that reality. (b) Expresses the acceptance of Israel in God's presence, and (c) expresses the liberation from sin.
6. The rites of Yom HaKippurim provide the metaphorical background for later reflections, such as a central part of early Christian soteriology or the social-psychological theory of scapegoating (René Girard and others).
7. Jesus of Nazareth added two central new elements in the way Israel dealt with sin and forgiveness. (1) He forgave himself unconditionally and started a process leading to the replacement of the temple by himself. (2) He underlined the principle that human-human reconciliation is the precondition for reconciliation with G-d.
8. Saint Paul and other authors of the New Testament developed the line of thinking behind (1) and created different metaphorical understandings of Jesus' death and resurrection. In Romans 3:25, Christ on the cross is identified with the *kapporet*, the place on the Ark of the Covenant where G-d's presence meets the goats' blood sacrificed for Israel.  
In the Letter to the Hebrews, Christ replaces the high priest, and with his arrival in heaven enters an eternal sanctuary.
9. All of these metaphors are images. Often, they cannot be combined. In 2 Cor 5 and Col 1, the world's reconciliation is grounded in G-d's being in Christ. Here, as well as in Romans 11, where he argues a universal election, Paul creates a universalistic version of Judaism.<sup>13</sup>
10. Rabbinic Judaism (M. Yoma 8.8s) is evolving in the same sense Jesus did with the second line of his teaching (2, above) when he underlined human-human reconciliation. It would be wrong to say that Mishna followed Jesus; Jesus took exact

positions in the rabbinic discussions of his time but advocated limitless forgiveness (cf. Matthew 18:22), which rabbinic literature mostly does not support.

11. All of the typical developments in Christianity are somehow present and somehow absent in Occidental Judaism: the elements of the sacrament of confession, the Neoplatonic understanding of G-d and truth. One other difference we could not develop during the conference is that in Judaism, sin is not a universal destiny but the result of the evil drive in each human being.
12. Through Medieval Judaism and Lévinas, there has been a growing universal understanding of Fellow (Haber) as the other in a very general sense. For Lévinas, every human being is the other with whom reconciliation is necessary.
13. After the discovery of reconciliation with other human beings, reconciliation with oneself became a new issue. Nevertheless, this cannot be resolved without reconciliation with G-d (or what stands for G-d: experiences that arise as unconditional, holy, transcendent, ultimate truth), and this in turn requires reconciliation with the other.
14. By starting their reflection on the topic of reconciliation with oneself, people discover new and more individual insights into the essence of reconciliation.
15. Gaining an understanding of both topics, reconciliation and forgiveness, implies multidimensional and multi-relational approaches.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For Jankélévitch's distinction and its importance for reconciliation studies cf. Francesco Ferrari, "Vladimir Jankélévitch's "Diseases of Temporality" and Their Impact on Reconciliatory Processes, in: *Contemporary Perspectives on Vladimir Jankélévitch*, eds. M. La Caze, M. Zolkos, Rowman & Littlefield, London 2019, pp. 95-116.

<sup>2</sup> Benedict 1946, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> M. Buber, *Die Erzählungen der Chassidim*. Zürich 1949. 755.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Das Recht ein anderer zu werden. Theologische Texte. Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag 1981, p. 162.

<sup>5</sup> Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*.

<sup>6</sup> Nussbaum, *ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>7</sup> Nussbaum, *ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>8</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*. 2nd. Ed. Chicago & London: Chicago University Press. 1998 (1st ed. 1958) p. 241.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Ginette Michaud, *La vérité à l'épreuve du pardon. Une lecture du séminaire 'Le parjure et le pardon' de Jacques Derrida* (Montreal: Presses Universitaires 2018), p. 41.

- <sup>10</sup> André Zempelburg, *Versöhnung im Judentum. Eine religionswissenschaftliche Perspektive auf den jüdischen Versöhnungsbegriff in Bezug auf Gott, den Nächsten, den Anderen und sich selbst*. Marburg: Tectum 2019.
- <sup>11</sup> Arendt, *ibid*, p. 238.
- <sup>12</sup> Louis Newman, "The quality of Mercy. On the Duty to Forgive in the Judaic Tradition," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 15 (1987), p. 155-172.
- <sup>13</sup> For a more detailed presentation of this interpretation cf. Gerd Theißen/Petra von Gemünden: *Der Römerbrief. Rechenschaft eines Reformators*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht 2016.