

Confession and Mental Health

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Confession is a central element to our process of repentance and the Yom Kippur prayers, but it is found within this week's Parasha. The Jewish people are commanded, men and women, that if they wrong a fellow human being, they must confess and make amends to those whom they wronged¹. It is a powerful reminder about the importance of maintaining the equilibrium of interpersonal relationships, especially amidst a tight nit community.

But what is striking is that the confession process also has a deeply profound effect on the person and their own mental health.

Maimonides explains in his laws of repentance that confession is a positive command, and an obligation on all who commit a transgression². The confession is private, it is an articulation between the wrongdoer and God, going through the process is a mental exercise that brings resolve and resolution.

Dr James Pennebaker explains that "Any type of open and truthful disclosure reduces stress and helps individuals come to terms with their behaviour. It is not coincidental that some of the most powerful people or institutions in many cultures encourage people to confess their sins"³. It is cathartic, and allows people to work through their experiences, trauma, and gain closure over given situations.

Rav Josph Dov Soloveitchik, in his essay 'Blotting out sin or elevating sin', notes that the process of repentance is a long process, it doesn't start and end one day, and certainly not on Yom Kippur. It is something whereby we acknowledge our failings and go through a thinking process where we evaluate our actions, and work out what we might have done wrong, and how we got there. By reaching the point of articulation, one has been able to move through a process that settles the mind and creates a healthier personal state.

Finally, Yehudah Mirsky notes that the kabbalistic framing of the idea of repentance is that it rebalances the world, as if it were a rebirth of sorts⁵. This notion, applied to the individual, once again supports the idea that repentance, and specifically confession is good for mental health, it is uplifting and an opportunity to find personal balance.

It is always incredible to see our ancient wisdom meld perfectly with modern ideas, and that the Torah truly fulfills that which is found in Proverbs, "Her ways are pleasant ways, And all her paths, peaceful."

All citations can be found in **A New Page of Talmud**