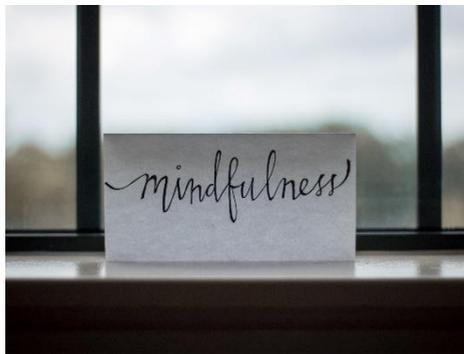


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*Confession and  
mental health*

*Rabbi Alon Meltzer*

*A New Page of Talmud –  
Nasso 5782*



Speak to the Israelites: When men or women individually commit any wrong toward a fellow human being, thus breaking faith with יהוה, and they realize their guilt, they shall confess the wrong that they have done. They shall make restitution in the principal amount and add one-fifth to it, giving it to the one who was wronged.

**Bamidbar 5:6-7<sup>1</sup>** All of the commandments in the Torah: whether they be the positive commandments, or the negative commandments; if a person transgressed any of them, whether he did so intentionally, whether he did so unintentionally, when he repents and returns from his sin - he is obligated to confess before God.- **Rambam Mishneh Torah, Repentance, 1:1<sup>2</sup>**

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 transgressions. And there is very strong evidence that writing about upsetting experiences or dark secrets can benefit your mental and physical well-being. Similar to religious confession, expressive writing encourages individuals to explore their deepest thoughts and feelings about upsetting experiences. For such emotional purges to work, people must be completely honest with themselves. Across hundreds of studies, we are now beginning to appreciate just how expressive writing works. – **James W Pennebaker<sup>3</sup>** In light of this, it may be said that the concept of confession has more than one dimension. It is not an act that has an independent existence, nor is it something that stands on its own. It is, rather, the finale, the conclusion of another act – that of ‘repentance’. As we have already explained on several occasions, repentance is not a sudden occurrence. It does not begin at nightfall of the eve of the Day of Atonement, just moments before the recitation of confession. Repentance sprouts forth and grows in

the course of a long and drawn-out process typified by doubt and speculation, soul searching and spiritual reckoning. First comes the inner stirring which generates actual repentance. A great gap often intercedes between the idea and the act, for crystallised thinking is the end-product of intuitive thoughts. They take hold of one in the darkness of night, they emerge from the innermost recesses of the secret self, and man tries to fend off some of them and hides them from himself, not to mention others. The road that leads from these first stirrings to the actual contemplation of repentance is long indeed, and even then, after the rational idea is clearly formed in thought, it must be reborn and

they shall confess the wrong that they have done...  
וְהִתְוַדּוּ אֶת-חַטָּאתָם אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ  
**Bamidbar 5:7**

translated into action. To do this necessarily entails expressing the thought of repentance in words and working it out in logical terms. Pure thought on its own, no matter how exact and

penetrating is simply not grasped until it is formed into words. We know many truths about ourselves that we do not dare express in public, and even avoid saying them to ourselves. – **Rabbi J B Soloveitchik on Repentance<sup>4</sup>** When the varying energies at work in the world — justice and mercy, male and female, tradition and change — go out of whack, teshuvah helps to rebalance them. In other mystical texts, return is seen as a kind of rebirth, and the achievement of the soul's deepest freedom.– **Yehudah Mirsky<sup>5</sup>**

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