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Title: Shabbat Shuvah

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9/19/2015—The Saturday between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is known as Shabbat Teshuva, the Sabbath of Repentance. [Well, actually, no. It is that, but the name of this Shabbat is Shabat Shuva, from the first word, shuva, in the haftarah from Hosea: Turn O Israel. The root of the word for repentance, is shuvah, to turn. I regret the error, which I caught from reading Rabbi Jessica Locketz in the Jewish Chronicle].

Various accounts are given of why and how this is, but the general idea is clear enough, the Shabbat of this holy time—the entire 10 day period between RH and YK is known as the High Holy Days—is a natural time to think about one's life. Shabbat has a different rhythm, after all. There is less doing. Shabbat Teshuva is also one of the two big sermons a rabbi traditionally gives. (the other is Shabbat Ha-gadol, the Saturday after the beginning of Passover). I went to hear the sermon of Rabbi Yisroel Miller, who was head rabbi at Paole Zedeck synagogue, give this sermon. He said to do one more mitzvah in the coming year.

So, let's think about repentance. There is ritual repentance and cultural repentance. This is a large part of what I heard that day. Keep kosher and identify more with the Jewish community (support Israel). This is the repentance of Israel bonds.

But it is also the repentance of liberal humanitarianism. Become a vegetarian and give to the Sierra Club (don't drive so much). I have heard these also on the High Holy Days.

Anything wrong with that? No. Secularists like me hardly ever consider their lives at all, let alone for ten days.

Ritual and cultural repentance is the same for everybody. There is also the repentance that is personal. There are in a year particular acts for which we might be ashamed. (I had a pretty good year in that regard, but on the other hand I haven't spent a whole day in self-examination). Classically, this is the moment to think about that affair you had, which your spouse does not know about. It is important to keep this repentance away from the petty and impossible—don't yell at your kids so much is always good advice, but I am speaking here of something shameful and particular. Of course, it could include a very large matter, such as the job that requires you to lie every day. And certainly it must include how you regard your enemies.

You can resolve to do something about these things, or not do them again. And you can try to see how these acts flowed from your whole life and the way you are.

All very good and necessary. But I am getting too old for either. I'm not changing my lifestyle if I can help it. And wealth and lack of energy shield me from having to lie to people.

There is another kind of repentance—one to which Martin Heidegger calls us. It has to do with language and thinking. This should come as no surprise. The Jewish tradition often refers us to our language and thoughts. It is here that purification must begin. That same portion from Hosea reads, Take with you words and turn to God... ."

But we lack the tools. Torah study in part begins the movement of purifying our language and thinking. Heidegger gives us another place to begin.

The book, *Contributions to Philosophy*, is Heidegger's great act of repentance. He had just resigned the Presidency (Rectorship) of the University of Freiberg (April 1934, less than a year after he was elected and joined the Nazi Party). He stopped going to Nazi Party meetings (he would later call this whole episode "the greatest stupidity of my life" but he never gave the public apology the authorities demanded.)

Contributions was written from 1936-1938, in private and never shown or even published during his lifetime. At the time, the book's veiled references to the Nazi movement (biologism) would have gotten him in serious trouble. Even as it was, the government banned him from teaching before the end of the war—they could tell something was going on.

So, where does Heidegger begin? The official title, the one a teacher might have on the door, is *Contributions to Philosophy*—"dull, ordinary and empty" Heidegger calls this title and he has an alternative—*Of the Event*.

But why so dull a title? "Philosophy can be officially announced no other way, since all essential titles have become impossible on account of the exhaustion of every basic [grounding] word and the destruction of the genuine relation to the word." (additional tran. by R. Taylor).

What follows is strange language, almost impenetrable for a long time.

But for Teshuva, the point is the exhaustion of language in the western, metaphysical tradition. Heidegger tried to stop using dead words. And that must be our starting point for teshuva. Wittgenstein called this not being pushed around by language. Teshuva requires that we examine our language—the way we speak every day. I can tell you, this attempt is difficult and tedious. Is it rewarding? We'll know when we try it.

I can say that transformation does not happen without it.