

## Yom Kippur Atonement

A friend, not Jewish, asked me about Yom Kippur. She said, “Isn’t it a day of repentance and forgiveness? “Hmmm...that’s right yet not complete.” In contemplating my initial response, I wondered exactly what I meant. Now, I must be clear on this, I am on hopefully my last third of life, having turned recently 70 years old. My father and Grandmother passed away in their 90’s and I have a living Aunt who is 96. So, maybe just because of the genes I’ll make it that far. Not that I necessarily would want to hit my 90’s for even though they made it that far, their bodies were pretty much ready to get out of here a lot sooner. I believe that it was their ego’s that kept them around and maybe a bit of competitiveness to see how far one can physically age or maybe just a real deep fear of death and what may occur afterwards. As a Jew I must admit if you asked me, “What kind of Jew are you?” I’d have to say an ultra reformed Jew; so reformed that Jewish is but a faint shadow, but definitely still a Jew. I say that I’m a Jew because my lineage goes back to Adam. Now another friend informed me, again not Jewish, that Adam wasn’t Jewish, rather he was just the First Man. Well, I wonder whose Creation Story Adam originates within? Ok, that discussion is for another time.

I’m Jewish to the core, so I explained, and not too surprising I’m very sensitive and while I don’t deny my Jewish self to anyone, nor do I live it externally in my dress or speech. Maybe its because in my previous life I was given a free train ride to Auschwitz. Or maybe it’s the shame of not doing what was right when I had the chance before it all fell apart. This all being said, I feel that I’m highly Spiritual and being Spiritual in any religion is a tough situation. Why? Because the ritual stuff while it brings the community together also inhibits a broader viewpoint of the basic tenants of the religion to which the religious leaders adhere, teach, and enforce.

In me are the ancestral heritage memories, the genetic memories of an American Jew, a Jew among many doing nothing before the full power of the Holocaust was unleashed. Doing nothing in regards to what, you may ask? Of receiving mail and telegrams from our relatives still in Europe telling us in guarded words of the catastrophe developing like a Golem in the late thirties of being Jewish. It was in these memories of the Jewish American, a boat quietly slipping from a port in Germany, traveling the world for a place to disembark, finally coming to the United States and the anti-Semite State Department refusing refuge so the boat full of Our People returned to Germany...to the gas chambers they went with not a word of protest. Talk about our Jewish Guilt. Who can experience Guilt like a Jew?

I replied to her, “Yes, Yom Kippur is The Day of Atonement.” She replied that when she looked Yom Kippur up on the Internet she read that forgiveness and repentance was the meaning of Atonement. Yes, Forgiveness of another’s transgression against me and OK, yes Repentance was good; to attempt to correct my transgression against another.

I shared with her, “Somewhere deep inside my Jewish self, in this genetic memory, or my imagination or some combination of both, I was with the Almighty, you know as a part of The Almighty when Adam and Eve were thrown out into the “Real” World”, shutting the door to The Garden of Eden forever more. Now I had to ask her, “For one mistake, and of course the First Man and Woman made the First Mistake, a Mistake it was, not like it was being repeated, wasn’t it just a wee might extreme of the

Omniscient One to take his “Children” who had been created without even going through childhood, just kind of Popped into Being with a wave of The Hand, there standing innocent and uncovered, and telling them, “One mistake that’s all you get, and now leave home to never come back?”

She paused for a while and shared, “I’ve never looked at Adam and Eve’s Expulsion from Eden in that way.”

I smiled sadly and said, “How would you feel about a Father throwing his children out of their home for making their first mistake, no matter how unfortunate their mistake was?”

She replied, “Eating from the Tree of Knowledge was a Sin, The Original Sin, and because of them, we are all born into Sin.”

“Huh?” I was kind of asking how you feel about Adam and Eve being thrown out of their home after making their first mistake.”

I have to respect how she stuck to her opinion by her repeating that it wasn’t just a mistake it was The Original Sin and for that they and all humankind thereafter had to be punished.

I replied. “You know being Jewish, even as “Reformed” as I am, I don’t feel that Original Sin and the inheritance of it to one’s offspring is a Jewish thing. No, most definitely not. I’m not sure where you got the idea that Adam’s snack fostered The Original Sin and all that it means to you.”

She didn’t have to pause even for a second, “Everyone knows that we are born into Sin. It’s in The Bible.”

“Hmm, I’m don’t and I’m someone. Probably it’s all about what we are taught. I never was taught about Original Sin and all of us being born into it, but I have heard about it from my Christian friends. Maybe it’s a Christian thing.”

“Well, it’s in the Bible and I’ve been taught to live by the Bible.”

“Ok, that makes sense that you’ve been taught this, but I’m not sure that it’s in the Bible, at least not the Jewish Bible. Maybe it’s in the Christian Bible.

“The Bible is the Bible.”

“I don’t know about that. I mean the original Bible is Jewish. Maybe our different opinions come about from the way it has been translated. You know, translations are always dependent upon the translator and it isn’t unusual for cultural meaning to be lost in translation.”

“Ok. I know that. But The Bible is the Bible.”

I thought about this for a moment or two then offered, “Well, can’t argue about that and I hope we are just exploring rather than taking a stand and defending it. To me it seems that when even Jews explore the meaning of what was written there are differences of opinions and various viewpoints that can at times seem contradictory.”

“Isn’t the Rabbi the arbitrator of these various opinions and viewpoints?”

“Yeah, however there are numerous rabbis and unlike there being a Pope in Catholicism where there can be an official interpretation, for Jews it still is only an interpretation and because we aren’t perfect, then how can any one interpretation be perfect?”

“What we don’t understand we nonetheless accept what we’ve been taught because of our Faith. We are born into Sin.”

“Hmmm. I’m not an expert on any viewpoint of either Judaism or Catholicism, but for me one can’t read the Bible in a literal sense because yes, there is The Written word, however Moses spent a good amount of time in the Presence of The Almighty receiving the Oral Teaching, which put meaning into The Written Word. In other words the Torah, the First Five Books of what is known as the Bible, provides The Format yet without the Oral Teaching it would be impossible to know The Almighty’s meaning in what was Written.

You see, The Oral Teaching is a Jewish Thing and it’s understandable how anyone not a Rabbi or a Learned Jewish Elder would probably teach the Bible from a literal viewpoint. Still that would be like making a literal interpretation of an analogy. It wouldn’t even be close to the intended meaning. So that’s probably how Christian theologians got a bit confused about that part, which to them implied Hereditary Sin, the failure to observe an edict from The Almighty when Adam and Eve partook of the Fruit of Knowledge.”

“I guess, before meeting you, I never actually spoke with a Jew about any of this.”

“Well, to get back to what we were looking at, that being Yom Kippur and the concept of Atonement and Forgiveness, I’m sure that I’ve been socially inept at times and haven’t always recognized that, so taking at least a day to really look at it is a good idea. In my way of understanding Yom Kippur, by the way, it is the last day of a ten-day period of reflection that begins with the Jewish New Year, which is called Rosh Hashanah. It’s also kind of far out that the Jewish New Year starts out with a hard look at one’s self rather than at the end of the year. I guess this period of reflection sets up the coming year in a good way, kind of a form of The New Year’s Resolution thing. Anyway, to me Adam and Eve’s Thing was a mistake and not a Sin even if they didn’t listen to the Almighty. I mean who created the Snake but the Big Guy. Why create the snake and set it loose in Eden with two newly created and extremely naïve kids running around unsupervised?”

She feeling rather adamant about this Original Sin Thing restated her strong point of view, “You know that a Sin occurs when you go against The Almighty’s Will. Adam and Eve ate from the Fruit of Knowledge. That’s that! It’s a Sin.”

“Got it. Can’t argue that. As I’ve said, I’m not interested in making this an argument, rather an exploration of the concept of Atonement. We can agree that making a wrong as right as one can is a great thing to do. So, I want to apologize right now if this conversation is causing us to have some kind of conflict. Oh, by the way, looking at Atonement and Repentance I don’t remember Adam and Eve being given the opportunity for either Atonement or Repentance. Do you?”

“No. I’m not sure. It’s not that, it’s just that I believe one way and you another.”

“Still, it doesn’t hurt to look at other ways of looking at life and also to take the time to look at it from where those beliefs emanate. Let me just explore this a bit longer and I’d appreciate your feedback after I try to explore how Atonement is meaningful to me. Is that agreeable?”

“Yes, Sure. You sure come out with some challenging and I must say interesting ideas and concepts.”

“Thanks for sharing that. Here’s what I would like to share about Yom Kippur. This is something I’m just formulating as we look at Atonement, which I’ve never really done with someone else. Here. For that one tiny spark of light that allows me to be one

small part of The Whole, one part of The Almighty, for what The Almighty did by throwing Adam and Eve out of their Home, for that act, I have to say that I am in a state of Atonement. For that one small part of The Whole that I am, I feel that it is right for me to take some responsibility for The Decision and Choice that has cast humanity (In the Western Theologies of One Creator) into the wilderness. Because I am a portion of The Almighty, in that way I actually see that it might very well have been The Almighty who Sinned, and not Adam and Eve, for only The Almighty who is Omniscient knew the consequences and knowing them, The Almighty nonetheless created the Snake. To me, then there can't be any human Original Sin, rather just a youthful mistake."

I looked at her, eyes wide open, crossing herself as she waited for a bolt of lightning to strike me caput and her too because she was sitting in the same room as me. When it didn't happen, she whispered, "You have more to tell me?"

"Well, yes I do. I mean no, I'm just sharing some kind of Insight that I'm having as we speak. You know the definition of a mistake for me at least is doing something that didn't work out. A mistake isn't an intentional act. An act that is hurtful or against the rules that is done intentional can't be called a mistake. Yet, for Adam and Eve who didn't know the consequences for their breaking The Tree of Knowledge rule, their existence within that state of ignorance renders that poor decision an error of judgment. In any case, to me it is really the responsibility of their Parent to educate children as to the consequences of their behavior before it occurs. Not knowing the consequence could lead someone to break a rule impulsively. I would like to believe that if Adam and Eve knew that one such mistake would have the consequence of being thrown into the wilderness with no life skills, I wonder if that would have been enough to temper Adam and Eve's compulsion to take a bite from a Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge?"

"Gosh, this is so unusual I don't know what to say."

"Of course, if The Almighty had explained to them about what was so Threatening about The Tree of Knowledge, that one bite would have a catastrophic outcome, well then I guess the whole thing of keeping The Essence of The Tree of Knowledge a Mystery would have been blown. So in a way I could understand how The Hands of The Almighty were tied in this case. Still being The Almighty, who else but The Almighty would have the Right and Power to untie The Hands and then be free to say a thing or two to prevent the dreadful outcome of their being persuaded by the snake who assured them of no consequence, an assurance that led them to eating from the Tree of Knowledge. Also I might add, I don't remember reading in The Bible where The Almighty warned Adam and Eve about the snake. With no warning and being Innocent, how could they have even suspected the duplicity of the snake?"

"Where do you get these ideas? They're profound."

I shared with her, "I often wonder the same thing. Never can say exactly, but after wondering for a long time I just feel that these perceptions have a certain amount of value and that by just contemplating their meaning it is helpful to me in grasping the challenges of humanity which of course helps me understand myself."

"Wow."

"One more thing. In defense of the snake who didn't create itself, I wonder why The Almighty did create the snake given that the Almighty knows All, including the Future. It seems to me like a Set Up where the Outcome was predetermined. I can't fathom the purpose of this given the Consequences for All of Life."

Following up, in a sympathetic tone, “Listen, in my effort to grasp the significance of these novel perception I always feel a certain degree of confusion. Anyway, given what we’re looking at, to put meaning into Yom Kippur, me being who I am, I have to share in Atoning for The Original Parent’s impulsive behavior of throwing Adam and Eve, who were Innocent and so Childlike, out of their home into a hostile and frightening wilderness. I can also say that I feel the same about The Flood and the murder of the innocent animals and plants that were drowned to say nothing of the human race being almost completely exterminated. Being made in the Image of The Almighty and Being So, I am willing to feel and thus share the guilt of these cataclysmic and traumatic outcomes. In doing so I choose to view Yom Kippur as an opportunity to reaffirm my connection with The Almighty. By doing so I am able to share and hopefully I am able and allowed to assist in the act of Repentance to correct in some way the pain and sorrow that has flown down through time and which affects our lives today. In this way I Seek Forgiveness and offer Repentance and thus experience Yom Kippur.”

“You take on a lot don’t you?”

“I guess so, but then I’m Jewish and because MY People were Chosen by The Almighty, I feel willing to share in the responsibility for the behavior of MY Family as a result of My Family’s religious beliefs. So Atonement and This is What it is for Me.”

Very thoughtfully she asked, “In making it correct, I can’t help but to wonder how this possibly can be achieved.”

“Great question. Let me share this. Now in the current life that I’m living I have dedicated myself to “Making Right that which is Wrong” and so I spend my day kind of picking up the trash of humanity physically as I walk in a nature area every day, you know, picking up beer bottles broken and whole, beer cans, dropped doggie bags, discarded wrappers, and even the detritus of abandoned homeless camps. I do the same in my apartment complex, never waiting for someone else to do the work if I see it, I pick it up. Professionally I worked in the field of Rehabilitation until retiring recently. In this effort I worked as a crisis intervention worker in the field and in the home. I spent time with abused children and their parents. These parents often expressed that they wanted to be rid of their children because they were overwhelmed and so blamed their children for their woes. To me I have to wonder where did they get the idea that their woes were sourced in their children. Then I remember the Role Model that The Almighty Provided humanity. “Adam and Eve for your One Mistake, you’re out of here.” For peoples repeated transgressions, “Die.”

I take a breath and then continue, “Yom Kippur and Atonement, I haven’t forgot. It’s coming. Somehow in my convoluted Jewish subconscious I actually resent the throwing of Adam and Eve out of the Garden. Now how can I resent the behavior of The One? As a parent of four adult children and now six grandchildren I must admit that I might have had during a few moments of exhaustion and ignorance of what I was doing as a parent, thought of following The Example. Even if my home wasn’t the Garden, well the idea of having some peace and quiet was very alluring. Still I really wasn’t anywhere close to throwing the extension of myself, my life through my offspring, out of our home.

No, I can’t accept, acknowledge, or rationalize the decision, the choice, the reaction to The Bite. Since when does a bite come with such consequences? I have bitten

into some sour apples, once or twice into a rotten part of an apple, even one with a small worm, but who shoots the horse because it has thrown a shoe?"

This is going to be difficult to accept, but there I was with this upwelling of intuitive Jewish meshugas (Yiddish: Crazy Stuff ) and from my mouth I spoke these words, "No, The Sin wasn't so much due to the actions of Adam and Eve but a result of the Reactive Behavior evidenced by The Almighty when children/humanity were thrown out of their Home and abandoned under created hardships. As a Jew I choose to live a life of Atonement for the Sins of the Creator. By my making this decision, and being a part of The Almighty, I hope that my effort will somehow initiate in The Almighty the willingness to accept responsibility for this calamity and to start Repenting. Should this happen I'm sure all of Humanity will be grateful and be willing to Forgive. Maybe it would be helpful for The Almighty to be Adult enough to come live with us and share in our efforts to make a better life for all people, animals, and plants...OK, then definitely for the fish also.

This work of Service to humanity in its suffering and to the Non-Human Life of this Beautiful World, is The Life of Atonement that is recognized by my way of experiencing Yom Kippur."