

On Repentance and Repair: Confession and Starting to Change

Let's begin with the first step. How would you describe confession?

Confession is about owning the harm that you have caused and owning it fully, right. It's about no hedging, no qualifications, no "but I really intended really well and I was just trying to be a good person." It requires even before you do the confession step a little bit of that *cheshbon ha-nefesh*, the accounting of the soul, to really cross that bridge between the story of yourself as the hero and the good guy who's always doing right and having to face you didn't do the right thing.

No matter what it is you have to just name it, own it fully and definitely has to be at least to the person or people that witnessed and experienced the harm, right. If you say something racist in a staff meeting, then all of the people present in that staff meeting have to hear your confession, whether you put it on the team slack, whether you name it in the staff meeting next week, whether you catch yourself in the moment and say, "Oop, I just heard what came out of my mouth and that wasn't right." And then correct yourself and own it.

Whatever it is, you have to confess fully, and it's praiseworthy even to do it in a more public way, to tell more people that this is what happened as a way of asking for help, as a way of accountability, as a way of saying I'm going on a repentance journey. And I want to change, and I'm inviting all of you to help me because I can't do it alone.

What is the potential impact for the victim to hear this confession?

So this is really part of why I think that all of the steps of repentance are deeply victim-centric even if we don't see the victim named in each of the steps. So for example, in the confession step, suddenly there's an end to the gaslighting, right. There is suddenly an end to any question about where culpability lies. The victim can stop questioning themselves, "Did this really happen? Was it really that bad, am I making this up?" Right.

A victim who's clear on what happened but maybe isn't believed by everybody in the community has that validation and vindication. Like, "See? Look, they're owning it." Everybody around now is clear on what happened, and that victim can get the full support that they have deserved all this time from everyone in the community.