

TESHUVAH (Repentance) Handout

The Hebrew word translated "repentance" is TESHUVAH, which literally means to "turn" or "turn around."

TESHUVAH is prerequisite for divine forgiveness: God will not pardon man unconditionally but waits for him to repent.

Man must experience genuine remorse for the wrong he has committed and then convert his penitential energy into concrete acts.

TESHUVAH has three stages: (1) acknowledgement of the sin; (2) ceasing to do the sin; and (3) doing good.

The motion of turning implies that sin is not an ineradicable stain but a straying from the right path and that by the effort of turning, a power God has given to all men, the sinner can redirect his destiny.

TESHUVAH carries with it the idea that a person has the power to redirect his or her destiny at any point in time – see Ezekiel 18:20-32.

In the New Testament the Greek word translated "repentance" is METANOIA. In Classical Greek METANOIA meant "to change one's mind or heart about someone or something." It was an internal act of the mind.

The meaning of repentance underwent a transition after the New Testament books had been written.

The earlier Church Fathers, such as Justin Martyr (c. 150 CE), *sought some sort of contrition for sin from a convert, which would then be announced during the convert's water baptism ritual.*

By the fifth century the Roman Church added "ritual acts of penance" to repentance and for Augustine (410 CE) "repentance was not the work of man, but a gift -- like grace -- from God."

A thousand years later the Protestant theologians of the Reformation taught that the meaning of "repentance" could be understood by breaking down METANOIA into its basic parts: (1) *meta* (after) + *noeo* (to think). However, they taught that it meant -- "to change one's mind about Christ," meaning "to change from not believing in Christ to believing in Christ" -- which actually meant to believe their specific theology about Christ.

The Jewish understanding of TESHUVAH and the Greek meaning of METANOIA are very different. TESHUVAH requires the offender to restore or repair the damage that he or she has done to another.

TESHUVAH consist of acts that repair the community by making the harmed party whole.

The Christian understanding of METANOIA requires the sinner to do "a mental activity," and maybe a ritual of confession along with penitential acts. A sinner can commit a sin that harms another and then simply ask God to forgive him or her. The harmed or injured party or parties are not involved.

When you read the English translations of Greek manuscripts of the words of the Jewish Jesus, it is absolutely necessary to remember that his meanings are from the Jewish culture.

The Jewish Jesus did not think or teach in Greek.

Repentance for the original Jewish Jesus Movement was TESHUVAH – not METANOIA.

SOURCE: The Encyclopedia Judaica (Vol. 14, col. 73) & Jewish Encyclopedia (see "Bible Study Tools" link at <http://biblicalheritage.org>)