Although this week’s Torah portion is the longest in the book, it contains only 18 commandments and one of them is the commandment of confessing sins to G-d.

According to Judaism almost any sin can be fixed by genuine repentance and confession. But interestingly there is no commandment to repent - only to confess!!!

This, of course is very misleading. Confession without regret is not only worthless it is exactly what brought a person to sin in the first place!!

When Jews feel that Torah is only 'lip service' and void of content, they turn to sinning. So how can empty 'lip service' confession be the cure for sins when it was the cause?

Indeed the question should be the opposite. What possible importance can there be in confessing? The essence of repentance is the FEELING of remorse for rebelling against the Creator? Repentance is in the heart - not in the mouth.

Also, next week will be the holiday of 'Shavuot' when the Torah was given over 3320 years ago on Mt. Sinai. Is there a connection between this and the commandment of confession?

To understand this here is a story. (Ko Asu Chachmeinu vol. 3 pg. 121 from Koheles Raba 3:8)

This story occurred many hundreds of years ago. A successful Jewish businessman traveled from his home in Caesarea, Israel to a distant country to make money. Usually he traveled alone but this time took his 16 year old son with him to introduce him to the world of business.

The trip was successful and in one of their large wooden suitcases they put a small chest filled with precious solid gold coins that they had earned.

They loaded their baggage in the hold of the ship they chartered to take them home, and were assured by the ship's captain that no one would touch it. But our hero, who we will call Reb Yitzchak (although in the story he was not given a name), was a bit uneasy, so he figured that when no one was looking he would sneak down into the hold to check in his suitcase whenever possible.

In the middle of the first night of their journey he tiptoed silently out of his room onto the rising and falling deck under the starry sky when suddenly he heard people talking. He stopped and quietly turned to go back, but what they said caught his attention.

"Listen mates! You know our two passengers? Well I happen to know that the older one’s got a lot of money in one of his suitcases."

"Money?” one of them almost whispered. "Is it a lot? How do you know?"

Reb Yitzchak recognized the voices; it was two of the sailors that he had heard shouting orders earlier. Obviously unaware that they was being overheard they continued.

"Heh heh!” the first sailor replied, "This afternoon I was in the hold and he didn’t see me. He went down there; opened one of his suitcases and inside there was a small chest. Well, he opened it and you couldn’t believe it! It was filled with Red Crowns! Filled!! I mean... there must be a fortune there! Maybe....five fortunes!!"
“Ha ha aaaha!!” All five of them laughed and chuckled.

“But what can we do? I mean, they’ll go to the police when we get to port and we’ll get caught for sure!”

“Not if they happen to,” here the sailor lowered his voice, “sort of…. fall overboard! Get it? Then everyone’ll be happy; we get rich, they get a good sleep and the fish get a good meal! Ha haaaaa!! We might have to give the captain something too…. You know, maybe there are SIX fortunes. Ha Haaaaaa! What do you say mates? Eh? We can do it tomorrow afternoon when the captain is asleep and we are far out to sea. What do you say? Are you all with me??”

Reb Yitzchak began to tremble as the sailors were laughing and making toasts to their plan. A cold sweat covered his body. He had never faced death before. He had to think fast but what could he do? He was no match for them, they were armed and murderous and there were five of them.

He tiptoed back to his room, woke his son, told him what he heard and suddenly had an idea.

Early the next morning shouts and screams came from Reb Yitzchak’s room.

“Lazy bum! Wake up! Wake up I said!!! I’ve had enough of your sleeping! Enough!!”

The sailors gathered around as suddenly the door burst open and Reb Yitzhcak, dragging his son by the neck of his pajamas pulled him out of the room.

“Here! I want you to see something!” He shouted at the boy, ignoring the spectators. See! Look in the sky!! See! Know what that is? It’s the sun rising! The sun! You lazy good for nothing! How do you think it gets in the sky? Never saw it rise did you! Cause you always sleep! Never earned a penny in your life and you never will! You think you’ll live off me do you? Well, just watch this!”

Reb Yitzchak threw his son to the deck, ran like a madman through the door that led down into the belly of the ship with his son yelling after him. “Who cares about you or your money! I want to sleep! LEAVE ME ALONE… GO MAKE MONEY!”

Reb Yitzchak came up with a crazed look on his face carrying the small chest on one shoulder. Then, before anyone could do anything, he ran to the rail of the ship, opened the chest with a key and screamed. “All you want is my money! You bum! Well….. now ...... WORK FOR IT!”

Saying this he tipped the chest over and the sailors watched in horror as all coins went spilling over the side, splashing unceremoniously into the ocean - forever.

The wide-eyed sailors held their heads in disbelief, “What a maniac!” One said. “What a temper! Whew! Lucky he didn’t kill his son!” said another. “There goes our plan!” said a third, as one of the others nudged him to keep quiet.

Yitzchak then pulled his son by the ear back into their room yelling “Now look what you made me do you lazy fool! Because of you etc. etc.!”

Several days later the ship arrived in Caesarea and after the two passengers emerged safely from the ship Yitzchak’s son turned to his father and said sadly. “Good, father, we saved our lives but now we lost everything we worked for. What will we do now?”

“Hashem will help!” answered Reb Yitzchak. I think that King Solomon will not let us down.

“King Solomon?” repeated his son. “What has he got to do with this? How can he help?”

“Well, it was from him I got the idea how to save ourselves. I just hope the judge agrees. Come! Let’s see.”

The boy didn’t understand a word but he saw that his father was not worried or sad in the least which encouraged him.
Reb Yitzchak wrote a note to his wife that they had arrived safely, had his suitcases and the note taken to his house and headed straight for the home of the mayor who was also the judge of the city and told him what had happened.

The mayor immediately told his police to apprehend the sailors, have them brought to jail and placed in separate rooms.

The mayor was a clever man and he sensed that Reb Yitzchak was telling the truth. He questioned the sailors one by one telling each one that the others confessed until finally all of them admitted that they had spoken about throwing Reb Yitzchak and son into the sea.

He then brought them all together to hear their defense.

"True," One of them said "We did talk about stealing his money. But, well, we were drinking! Right? And, well..... that's no reason for him to throw it in the sea. Right?” He looked at his friends who all were nodding their heads and rolling their eyes at the judge, shrugging their shoulders with palms up in innocence.

"After all,” said another, "HE threw his money away! We didn’t do anything but talk a little. And we didn’t even talk to HIM!! We were just ..... well.... Talking! He's the crazy one!” He too looked at his friends who were nodding and smiling pathetically as before.

"True, true” said the judge quietly as though agreeing with them. "All you did was talk. And, after all, this man is from the nation of King Solomon. You must have known that he was familiar with the book of Koheles (Ecclesiastes).

"Ehhh?” they all said almost in unison "Koheles?”

"Yes,” Repeated the Judge, "Koheles. In that book written, by the wisest man ever, it says clearly that there is a “Time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones” (3:5). Are you familiar with this?”

Not understanding what the Judge was getting at and certain that he was agreeing with them they just mumbled various things, shook their heads knowingly and kept smiling.

"My dear friends,” the Judge continued, "This Jew realized that despite the hard work that he put into amassing that gold, the only way he could save himself from your evil plans was to take the advice of King Solomon and “cast away stones”.

"But King Solomon also foresaw how to rectify the situation” the judge continued: "He wasn’t called the wisest man for nothing. Now it’s time for you to complete the saying, “A time to gather stones” “

“You must gather ’the stones’ he cast away and repay his loss.

"But if not“ He continued ...... then I find you all guilty of attempted robbery with intent to kill and sentence you to life imprisonment at hard labor gathering stones. Take your choice. In any case for you it will be ’a time to gather stones!'”

Needless to say they did exactly what they took the Mayor's advice and did what they made Reb Yitzchak do: forfeited their money to save their lives.

And Reb Yitzchak rejoiced in his regained wealth.

This answers our questions.

Repentance; regret for the past and resolution to improve the future, is essential for forgiveness. But repentance can only fix the past and the future. But the damage done in the present (As king David said, ”My sin is always before me” Ps. 51:4) has to be rectified in more immediate and physical way. And that is the purpose of confession.
The DEED; sound and movement of the lips involved in audible confession, is like a body to ‘spiritual’ repentance.

Something like in our story; the only way Reb Yitzchak could save himself was by throwing away something ‘physical’. But once he did that he was free.

So to in audible confession to HaShem, we do something physical to ‘cast away’ our sins. Because spiritual repentance is not enough.

This is also the connection to the holiday of Shavuot.

All the other religions, even those who claim to replace Judaism (G-d forbid) are based on the spiritual revelations of one or a few individuals and, for the most part, what they demand from their followers is spiritual allegiance.

Not so Judaism. It is based on (and is the only religion to make this claim) the fact that the ENTIRE JEWISH NATION (some 2 million people) heard G-d PHYSICALLY SPEAK.

And Judaism demands of it’s followers the fulfillment of hundreds of physical commandments.

And this is the Holiday of Shavuot that we have been celebrating for over 3,320 years: That G-d actually spoke to ALL the people and ALL the people actually did His commandments.

And just as in our story Reb Yitchak got his money back, so we Jews have been ‘repaying’ G-d by learning His Torah ALOUD for these thousands of years (Go to any Yeshiva to hear what I mean) and G-d has been ‘repaying’ us by miraculously, physically keeping us in existence although the entire world (including perhaps the majority of the Jewish people) has been trying to destroy us.

Indeed, this will be one of the main accomplishments of Moshiach: to bring all the Jewish people back to learning Torah and fulfilling its commandments. (One of the definitions of ‘Tshuva’ is to ‘Return’ to G-d what we owe Him).

Then the entire world will rejoice even more than Reb Yitzchak did in our story. The Jews return to Israel, the Holy Temple will return to Jerusalem and even the dead will return to life.

Just one more good deed, word or even thought on our part can make it happen and bring ...

Moshiach NOW!

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