

## The Influence of Kierkegaard's *Øieblik* on Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's view of Repentance

**Abstract:** In this article I address the philosophical sources of Soloveitchik's unique account of time and repentance as presented particularly in the second part of *Halakhic Man*. In the past, thinkers such as Max Scheler, Hermann Cohen and Henri Bergson have been suggested as sources of influence on Soloveitchik on this account. Yet while the influence of these thinkers is undeniable, a fuller appropriation of the philosophical layers at play is still required. This article therefore aims to show that the event of repentance in Soloveitchik's description is formulated in accordance with Kierkegaard's notion of *Øiebliket* - 'the moment'. I conclude with a short discussion about the place of Heidegger in Soloveitchik's interpretation of repentance.

Some philosophers regard repentance as a worthless, perhaps even harmful act for the individual. Spinoza, a typical representative of this view shared also by Kant and Nietzsche, writes that "repentance is no virtue, and does not spring from reason; but whosoever repents a deed is doubly oppressed and incapable."<sup>1</sup> According to this position, repentance is at best a futile act. The past is fixed, and acceptance of this fact, rather than regret over it, is the wiser reaction, both psychologically and philosophically. Contrarily, other thinkers addressed this topic in attempt to construct a cohesive doctrine which would mollify the tension between its philosophical

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict Spinoza, "Of Human Bondage or the Strength of the Emotions" Proposition 45, *Ethics* IV.

difficulties and its religious necessity. One of these thinkers is Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (1903-1993).

The present study aims to contribute to the understanding of Soloveitchik's view of repentance by suggesting Søren Kierkegaard's (1813-1855) notion of *Øieblikket* [the moment] as a key source of influence on Soloveitchik. What will be argued is that the event of repentance in his view is formulated according to Kierkegaard's *Øieblik* [moment]; in fact, it is *Øieblikket*.

Previous research on Soloveitchik's account of repentance, in particular as it is presented in the second part of *Halakhic Man*, has identified Henri Bergson,<sup>2</sup> Max Scheler,<sup>3</sup> Hermann Cohen<sup>4</sup> and Martin Heidegger<sup>5</sup> as sources of influence. Soloveitchik himself explicitly refers to Bergson and

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<sup>2</sup> Eliezer Goldman, "Teshuva vezman behagut harav Soloveitchik", in *Emuna be-zmanim mishtanim*, ed. Avi Sagi, (Jerusalem, 1996) 175-89.

<sup>3</sup> See: Max Scheler, "Repentance and Rebirth", in *On the Eternal in Man*, trans. Bernard Noble (London: SCM Ltd. 1960) 35-65. See also: Pinchas H. Peli, *On Repentance: In the Thought and Oral Discourses of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, (Jerusalem: Orot Publishing House 1980) 187-225; Idem, "Repentant Man – A High Level in Rabbi Soloveitchik's Typology of Man", *Tradition* 18:2, (1979): 149, 159 n. 50; See also: Yitzchak Blau, "Creative Repentance: On Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's Concept of Teshuva", in *Exploring the Thought of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, ed. Marc D. Angel (New Jersey: Ktav Publishing House 1997) 263-74.

<sup>4</sup> See: Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*, trans. Simon Kaplan, introduction by Leo Strauss (NY: Fredrick Ungar Publishing, 1972), in particular 178-215. See also: Lawrence Kaplan, "Hermann Cohen and Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik on Repentance", *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, 13.1 (2004): 213-58. Also Nietzsche, it has been suggested, plays a role in Soloveitchik's view. See: Daniel Rynhold and Michael J. Harris, "Modernity and Jewish Orthodoxy: Nietzsche and Soloveitchik on Life Affirmation, Asceticism, and Repentance", *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 101 No. 2 (Apr., 2008): 283.

<sup>5</sup> See below.

Scheler in the text, and the mark of Cohen, who was the subject of Soloveitchik's philosophy dissertation, is evident in *Halakhic Man* as it is in much of Soloveitchik's work.<sup>6</sup> In addition, we cannot ignore the obvious influences of traditional Jewish sources. In this respect Maimonides' *Laws of Repentance* in *Mishne Torah* is an obvious source of influence. Furthermore, as Kaplan suggests, "R. Soloveitchik emerges [in his views on repentance], as elsewhere in his writings, in his true stature as a great Lithuanian Gaon, as the outstanding representative in our time of the great Mitnaggdic tradition associated with the Gaon of Vilna, Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin and Rabbi Hayyim of Brisk".<sup>7</sup> While this is all fairly well established, I suspect there is another philosophical influence at work here, viz. Kierkegaard's notion of *Øieblikket*. As I hope to demonstrate below, the act of repentance in Soloveitchik's description (which, following Kierkegaard, becomes an *event*) takes the structure and features of the *Øieblik*. Soloveitchik was trained as a philosophy student in Berlin in the interwar period, a time when Kierkegaard was enjoying unprecedented popularity among the younger generation in Germany. That Soloveitchik read Kierkegaard is evident from many of his works. The Danish thinker is a frequent explicit and implicit point of reference.<sup>8</sup>

The discussion below begins with an exploration of the relevant features of the 'moment' as it is portrayed in Kierkegaard's oeuvre. We then turn to Soloveitchik's account of repentance with

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<sup>6</sup> For more on Cohen's influence on Soloveitchik, see: Aviezer Ravizky, "Rabbi J.B Soloveitchik on Human Knowledge: Between Maimonides and neo-Kantian Philosophy", *Modern Judaism* 6 (1986): 157-88.

<sup>7</sup> Kaplan, "Repentance", 241.

<sup>8</sup> See: Michael Oppenheim, "Kierkegaard and Soloveitchik", *Judaism* 31, 1 (1988): 29-40; David D. Possen, 'J.B Soloveitchik: Between Neo-Kantianism and Kierkegaardian Existentialism', in *Kierkegaard's Influence on Theology, Tome III: Catholic and Jewish Theology*, ed. Jon Stewart (UK: Ashgate Publishing 2012) 189-209.

specific emphasis on the elements drawn from Kierkegaard. Lastly, we conclude with a short discussion on the alleged influence of Heidegger on Soloveitchik's view of repentance and the role Kierkegaard had played in the development of both men's thought.

### **Kierkegaard's *Øieblik***

Much of Søren Kierkegaard's writings are explorations - sometimes ecstatic, other times serious, yet always complex and multilayered - of the individual's stance in front of God. An important notion explored by him is *Øieblikket*, often rendered as 'the moment' or 'blink of an eye'. Simply put, *Øieblikket* denotes the elevation of a mere instant in time to a defining moment that effects a complete change of direction in a one's life. It is an instantaneous event that initiates a change in one's worldview and reorients one towards a new goal. The departure point for this is Kierkegaard's reading of Corinthians 15:52: "It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed". In its scriptural setting, this verse describes the *parousia*, the second coming of Christ which will come to pass in a "moment, in the blink of an eye" and in effect will be a momentous event of dramatic transformation for humanity. According to Kierkegaard's reading of Corinthians, the incarnation and the second coming as an historical, collective event - eternity embodied in Jesus entering temporality and changing its meaning - is internalized and presented anew as an event occurring within the spiritual life of the individual. For Kierkegaard *Øieblikket* is a religious and existential event. In the elevation and alteration of an external and otherwise ubiquitous instant of time to a life-changing, internal moment touched by eternity, the trajectory of the individual's life shifts from its ultimately inertial course to a new and resolute path.

The presupposition of this position is a rejection of the perception of time as a succession of past, present and future in which ‘the day is a bird-in-the-hand that will fly’, in favor of a perception which renders time as an element of eternity.<sup>9</sup> The first account pertains to the notion of time as it is measured by hours, minutes and seconds, constituted by an ongoing sequence of moments in which the present is immediately replaced by the following moment, which, in turn, will instantly disappear. Such an understanding of time, Kierkegaard believed, is public in the sense that it is used and shared by everyone, and as such is external to the individual. The second account, however, emerges only by “replacing pursuit of a metaphysical “now” or “eternal now” with the “existential now” of personal, historical existence”.<sup>10</sup> Vital existential and religious events, like the *Øieblik*, occur within an internal and personal conception of time. Moreover, Kierkegaard asserts that “the moment is that ambiguity in which time and eternity touch each other, and with this the concept of *temporality* is posited, whereby time constantly intersects eternity and eternity constantly pervades time”.<sup>11</sup> It becomes clear then that the focal point of *Øieblikket* is none other than the ordinary present moment. The importance of the actual moment in time is paramount because it comprises of an actual experience in the individual’s life. Its significance is crucial, yet it also cannot be understood properly if rendered as a mere link in the chain of successive moments. Rather, its true importance is only grasped when perceived as open to eternity. Thus Vigilius Haufniensis, the pseudonym under which *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844) was released, avers that

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<sup>9</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety, A simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of hereditary Sin*, ed. and trans. Reidar Thomte (New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1980) 55.

<sup>10</sup> David Humbert, “Kierkegaard’s Use of Plato in his Analysis of the Moment in Time”, *Dionysus* 83.7 (1983): 149.

<sup>11</sup> Kierkegaard, “Anxiety”, 89.

“only when the eternal strikes the stream of time and forms a synthesis of time and eternity does the particular moment gain significance”.<sup>12</sup>

The event of *Øieblikket* carries the capacity for radical transformation of the individual. As one commentator notes, one “comes into existence in the kind of transition which is a new birth or a rebirth, he becomes something other than he was.”<sup>13</sup> To understand how an otherwise unimportant point in time becomes the elevated moment in which God resides and which will effectively change one’s life, what Kierkegaard means by ‘eternity’ must be specified. Following the second account of time sketched above, eternity is not a measure of quantity, i.e. an infinite number of sequential ‘now’ moments, but a measure of quality. It is, as we see below, time in its fullness. In the external, scientific conception, time is monolithic; each moment is completely equal to the other. The only difference between moments is their location in the successive infinite series of time. Time here is the realm of the identical – a moment in the future, although currently unknown, will nonetheless be essentially similar to any other moment, present or past. The defining unity in time is in its sameness. In contrast, time as open to eternity introduces the possibility of genuine novelty. And as susceptible to eternity, it is the fertile ground for the non-anticipatable; it is open to fundamental change. The unknown, unexpected, genuinely new becomes a viable possibility. Therefore “in consequence of receiving the condition in the moment [*Øieblikket*]”, Johannes Climacus (Kierkegaard’s pseudonym) writes, “the course of [one’s] life has been given an opposite

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<sup>12</sup> *Søren Kierkegaard’s Journals and Papers*, eds. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975) 821.

<sup>13</sup> Koral Ward, *Augenblick: The Concept of the ‘Decisive Moment’ in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Western Philosophy*, (Farham, Surrey, GBR: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2009) 13.

direction, so that he is now turned about. Let us call this change *Conversion* [*Omvendelse*].”<sup>14</sup>  
Indeed, “a change takes place within him like the change from non-being to being”.<sup>15</sup>

As an idea which is to a large extent an internalization of *parousia*, *Øieblikket* is imbued with eschatological content. If, as Kierkegaard states by alluding to Galatians 4:4 - “But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son” - “eternity is the fullness of time”, then the ‘moment’ is nothing other than an internalized experience of *Kairos*, the fullness of time: “such a moment has a peculiar character. It is brief and temporal indeed, like every other moment; it is transient as all moments are; it is past, like every moment in the next moment. And yet it is decisive, and filled with the eternal. Such a moment ought to have a distinctive name; let us call it the *Fullness of Time*”.<sup>16</sup> Not the *amount* of time elapsed but the very essential *nature* of the temporal moment is what brings about this wholesale personal upheaval.

What makes Kierkegaard’s *Øieblikket* the fullness of time? First, it is full in the sense of fulfillment of time in its personal understanding. The ‘moment’ is an internal and subjective repetition of the incarnation and the second coming. It is therefore an event of dramatic change which represents a true, definitive relation of God and man. Second, it is full in the sense that it encompasses the past, present and future. The fullness of *Øieblikket* emerges from the coexistence of the past and the

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<sup>14</sup> Johannes Climacus, Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments or a Fragment of Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985) 18.

<sup>15</sup> As Crites notes, the Danish word for the related concept ‘Repetition’ – *Gjentagelsen* – insinuates a rebirth. See: Stephen Crites, “‘The Blissful Security of the Moment’, Recollection, Repetition, and Eternal Recurrence in Fear and Trembling and Repetition”, in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Fear and Trembling and Repetition*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University, 1993) 235.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 16. Emphasis in original.

future in the moment of the present. The defining unity in time is *within* the ‘moment’. It is infused with eternity, which in this context comes to mean a vantage point to the totality of one’s life. From this all-encompassing perspective, who one was, is and aims to be could be genuinely addressed.

The personal transformation erupted in *Øieblikket* is rooted in the flux of life and temporality. Within the inescapable process of becoming, the touch of eternity generates the desire to be who one truly is. The result is a personal transformation oriented towards the future. As Kierkegaard notes, “only so much of the eternal is present that it can have a constraining effect in the passionate decision, where the *eternal* relates itself as the *future* to the *person in a process of becoming* [...] In other words, when I join eternity and becoming, I do not gain rest but the future”.<sup>17</sup> The gravity of the future as the decisive element in the ‘moment’ is underscored for it bears the possibilities which determine the resolute trajectory of one’s life henceforth. In other words, while the decision is made in the present, the special sense of purpose it possesses derives and is directed towards the future, where it will unfold. The futural impetus – who one seeks to be, the pursue of one’s deepest aspirations - is what determines the impact of the event of *Øieblikket* on the self.

The prominence of individuality and inwardness is characteristic of Kierkegaard’s thought. In agreement with this overarching feature, *Øieblikket* too has a profound personal character. Corresponding to the internal, existential perception of time, it occurs within the interior domain of the individual. To be sure, the possibility of this life changing event is available to all; yet its actual occurrence pertains to solely one person. In continuation to this, *Øieblikket* also has an

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<sup>17</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, eds. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992) 307. Emphasis in original.



individualizing effect. Since it provides an exclusive and weighty perspective on one's life, the totality of one's existence is perceived in its utmost uniqueness and distinction. A related point is that the rendezvous with eternity lacks any specific content. What makes it significant is the very fact of its occurrence, not any conveyed content. This being the case, the possibility of increasing its impact by including others as addressees of the conveyed content is quashed.

### **Soloveitchik on Time and Repentance**

Much of Soloveitchik's thought deals with the individual's capacity for creativity and particularly self-creation. Repentance for him is the exemplar of self-creation because it brings about a new, altogether different person than before: "Repentance, according to the halakhic view, is an act of creation – self-creation. The severing of one's psychic identity with one's previous 'I', and the creation of a new 'I', possessor of a new consciousness, a new heart and spirit, different desires, longings, goals".<sup>18</sup> By abandoning the sinful past, one departs from her past self and brings about an entirely new self. To make sense of the exceptional idea that "man cancels the law of identity and continuity which prevails in the "I" awareness by engaging in the wondrous, creative act of repentance",<sup>19</sup> this position requires an alternative notion of causality embedded in a new approach towards time.

Two temporal distinctions are at play in Soloveitchik's account of repentance. The first is between internal-experiential and external-scientific modes of temporality. This distinction could be traced back to Bergson and his distinction between the physical concept of time and what he calls '*durée*',

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<sup>18</sup> Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, trans. Lawrence Kaplan (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983) 110.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 113.

offered in his '*Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*' (1889).<sup>20</sup> Max Scheler developed his account of repentance within a similar distinction when he intimated that all previous dealings with the notion of repentance suffer from a "false notion of the internal structure of our spiritual life" and experience of temporality.<sup>21</sup> Significantly, both thinkers are cited by Soloveitchik. According to this first distinction, in the external concept of time the past is perpetually fixed, the present is fleeting and the future is unknown. Time as internal duration, on the other hand, comprises of an ongoing continuation of the past and anticipation of the future; a stream of continuous experience that began in the past and cannot be understood apart from its dynamic position in the flow of temporal sequence. The present is comprehended then only through the movement of the past into the present and onto the future. Thus the supposedly bygone past remains an essential element of the now. And, Scheler would add, by returning to a past event through memory and experiencing the accompanied guilt, an extraction and isolation of the past event from the enduring flow of consciences can be achieved, thereby opening it to new interpretations, and hence to change. Through this method a reevaluation of a past event is possible and subsequently the prospect of a new composition of meaning is enabled. The Bergsonian and Schelerian conception of time leads to what Soloveitchik calls 'atonement'. By atoning, i.e. abandoning sin, stating the verbal confession (*Viduy*) and regretting our sins, we could be divested from our status as evil doers.

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<sup>20</sup> Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, 120; idem, "Kodesh and Chol, Sacred and Profane: *Kodesh* and *Chol* in World Perspectives", *Gesher* 3:1 (1966): 5-29; idem, "Avelut Yeshana and Avelut Hadasha: Historical and Individual Mourning", in *Out of the Whirlwind: Essays on Mourning, Suffering and the Human Condition*, eds. David Shatz, Joel B. Wolowelsky and Reuven Ziegler (New Jersey: Ktav Publishing House, 2003) 14-8.

<sup>21</sup> Scheler, *Repentance and Rebirth*, 39.

Ultimately, it is this approach that furnishes the spiritual status of the religious type often contrasted to halakhic man, *homo religiosus*. This religious type “views repentance only from the perspective of atonement, only as a guard against punishment, as an empty regret that does not create anything”.<sup>22</sup> For Soloveitchik, atonement “is only a peripheral aspect of repentance” as it lacks the creative power which constitutes repentance’s full import.<sup>23</sup> Halakhic man’s repentance does not just revisit specific events in the past but spawns a wholesale internal disruption, leading to the creation of a new self.

Contrary to the atoning *homo religiosus*, halakhic man is an active agent engaged in self-creation. The distinction regarding temporality that pertains to him is the one offered by Kierkegaard: between scientific time and time with eternity. To recall, according to the former the past is “a dead past”, bygone and immutable. Repentance and self-recreation, accordingly, can be nothing other than empty and fantastical concepts. Within this framework eternity is an endless series of evanescent ‘now’ moments. But the second account of time - which is, in Soloveitchik’s view, Judaism’s account of time – asserts, following Kierkegaard, that “there can be no eternity without time”. This account is the framework within which repentance as an obliteration of past sins and a creation of a new self is possible.<sup>24</sup> That this is so is demonstrated by statements which clearly mirror Kierkegaard’s *Øieblikket*. For example, Soloveitchik states that “everlasting life only reveals itself through the medium of the experience of time – the hour is transformed into infinity,

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 113.

<sup>23</sup> We are in agreement with Goldman who concluded that neither Bergson’s notion of time as duration nor Scheler’s view of memory can furnish a satisfactory philosophical background for Soloveitchik’s approach on repentance.

<sup>24</sup> See also: Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Mind: An Essay on Jewish Tradition and Modern Thought* (New York: Seth Press, 1986) 47-50.

the moment into eternity. Man can glimpse eternity only through the consciousness of time”.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, “in the midst of finitude there appears traces of infinity; in the midst of the fleeting moment and ever-enduring eternity. The symbol of this outlook is the idea of repentance, which is identical with true creation”.<sup>26</sup> In the existential-religious experience, time is perceived as a realm of eternity in which “a blurring of the boundaries dividing time from eternity, temporal life from everlasting life” takes place.<sup>27</sup>

Mirroring Kierkegaard’s ‘moment’, an authentic moment of repentance transpires, according to Soloveitchik, when “past, present and future merge and blend together, and this new three-fold time structure arises before us adorned with a splendid unity. The past is joined to the future, and both are reflected in the present.”<sup>28</sup> Repentance therefore appears as ‘the fullness of time’ and enables a merging of the ternary temporal tenses into unity. It is grounded in the understanding that in the present moment there is a past that is still alive, persisting also after its apparent expiration; and there is also a future which is not hidden and unknown but has in some sense already been revealed: “Such a past enters into the domain of the present and links up with the future [...] such a future, drawing upon its own hidden roots, infuses the past with strength and might, vigor and vitality. Both – past and future – are alive. Both act and create in the heart of the present and shape the very image of reality.”<sup>29</sup> As past, present and future united, this moment reflects the image of eternity. Here, as in Kierkegaard, eternity is referred to not as quantity but as

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 118.

<sup>26</sup> Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, 123.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 118. Soloveitchik terms this mode of time - ‘*Kedushat zman*’ (holiness of time).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 114

<sup>29</sup> Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, 114.

quality of time. Significantly, repentance understood through the moment impregnated with eternity is not merely an action or emotion (of say, regret or guilt), but an event, an occurrence.

Soloveitchik makes it clear that in the convergence of the three temporal modalities, it is the future that is prominent: “when the future participates in the clarification and the elucidation of the past – points out the way it is to take, defines its goals, and indicates the direction of its development – then man becomes a creator of worlds. Man molds the image of the past by infusing it with the future, by subjecting the ‘was’ to the ‘will be’ ”.<sup>30</sup> Repentance is an event in which a defining overlook on one’s life is received. As a moment of self-transformation, the past is revisited from the point of view of the present projecting towards future goals and aspirations. Who I truly strive to be re-determines and re-defines who I was in the past: “the future imprints its stamp on the past and determines its image [...] the future transforms the thrust of the past”.<sup>31</sup> His resolute decision to distance himself from past transgressions henceforth (*Kabala la’atid*) – the final chord and linchpin of repentance - has the power to alter the past in light of this determined future. The past is alive both because it grounds the meaning of the present and the future and because *its* meaning is grounded in the present and the future. Hence the future is not only what has not yet come to pass but also what grants the past its meaning.

A further point in Soloveitchik’s account reflecting the Kierkegaardian ‘moment’ is his stress on the fleeting present moment in which the drama of repentance takes place. The locus of the rendezvous with the eternal which for Soloveitchik is part and parcel of repentance occurs in the transient present moment: “not only the infinite past but also the infinite future [...] arise out of

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 116-7.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

the present moment, fleeting as a dream.”<sup>32</sup> In a contemporaneous essay to *Halakhic Man*, Soloveitchik similarly draws attention to the needed “appreciation of the enormous implications inherent in the fleeting moments of the present. No fraction of time, however infinite, should slip through the fingers, left unexploited; for eternity may depend upon the brief moment”.<sup>33</sup>

In resemblance to Kierkegaard, the time awareness at play in the event of repentance harbors eschatological import. For Soloveitchik, the touch of eternity in the future-oriented moment points directly to the messiah. Because the moment of repentance is directed to the impending, it points to and becomes a vessel of the ultimate future: “Halakhic man’s future does not terminate with the end of his own individual future at the moment of death but extends into the future of the people as a whole, the people who yearn for the coming of the Messiah and the kingdom of God”.<sup>34</sup> In the ‘moment’, the yearning for the fulfillment of the promise of redemption is exposed. Indeed, “the splendor of antiquity and the brilliance of the estachon envelop halakhic man’s time consciousness”.<sup>35</sup> While the particular Christian inflection of the ‘moment’ identified in Kierkegaard are absent from Soloveitchik’s account of repentance, its formal eschatological signification is preserved. We see then that not only is repentance shaped as an event of *Øieblikket*, but that the account of temporality undergirding it is halakhic man’s time consciousness.

The importance of Kierkegaard’s notion for Soloveitchik is exhibited further in a tangential discussion presented in the middle of his exposition on repentance in *Halakhic Man*. Halakhic man

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<sup>32</sup> Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, 119.

<sup>33</sup> Soloveitchik, *Kodesh and Chol*, 17.

<sup>34</sup> Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, 117-8.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 188.

holds a twofold relationship vis-à-vis the Jewish tradition: he is both a passive receiver of the transmitted tradition and an active participator in it. Equipped with the time awareness that breaks down the barriers between past, present and future, events and figures from the past could come alive and be reencountered. Thus halakhic man “walks alongside Maimonides, listens to R. Akiva, senses the presence of Abaye and Raba”, as “all of them emerge into one time experience”.<sup>36</sup> Soloveitchik also invokes this time framework to explain the halakhic obligation to revive critical historical events of the Jewish past. The quintessential example of this is the requirement to recount the story of Exodus on Passover eve. Also the edict to remember the revelation at Mount Sinai, the Sabbath and Amalek are mentioned by Soloveitchik as obligations to revive and relive an historical event in an act of transcending time based on *Øieblikket*.<sup>37</sup>

The Kierkegaardian notion maintains its important role in Soloveitchik’s *The Lonely Man of Faith* (1965), written two decades later, as well. There the moment of the covenant with God is described as a communal *Øieblik* - the unification of the temporal experience of Adam the second, the lonely man of faith, with his fellow community members. “In the covenantal time experience community”, Soloveitchik contends,

“man of faith finds deliverance from his isolation in the ‘now’ for the latter contains both the ‘before’ and the ‘after’. Every covenantal time experience is both retrospective, reconstructing and reliving the bygone, as well as the perspective, anticipation the ‘about to be’ [...] In prospect, he beholds the full eschatological realization of this covenant, its

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 120.

<sup>37</sup> Soloveitchik, *Whirlwind*, 14-8. See also: Jeffery R. Woolf, “Time Awareness as a Source of Spirituality in the Thought of Rabbi Josef B. Soloveitchik”, *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 32, 1 February (2012): 54-75.

promise, hope and vision [...] generations which advance toward him from all sides and engage him in the great colloquy in which God Himself participates with love and joy”.<sup>38</sup>

The structure and constitutive elements of *Øieblikket* are clearly discernable here as well.

As stated from the outset, Soloveitchik is an eclectic thinker who draws on a variety of sources. It would be wise, therefore, to be cautious: not all the affinities presented above necessarily express direct influence. For instance, the futural emphasis of *Øieblikket* is merely a point of contact for Soloveitchik to express the already existent futural emphasis of repentance bequeathed to Jewish tradition from early on and deepened by Maimonides (and which resonates strongly in Cohen as well).<sup>39</sup> In the same vein, the claim that one’s self undergoes such a dramatic change that one becomes a new person is reflected, as we have seen, in Kierkegaard, but in fact stems from Maimonides’ view that the person who repents gains a new self.<sup>40</sup> Ultimately, however, these examples may in fact illustrate the reason the notion of the ‘moment’ was found well suited to cloak Soloveitchik’s view on repentance in the first place, as it corresponds to different elements of repentance already found in the traditional lore and thus indicates its suitability for deployment in a Jewish context.

In comparing Soloveitchik’s account to Kierkegaard’s, it would be a mistake to overlook the revisions and shifts of emphasis that have occurred. First, the past for Soloveitchik bears greater significance than for the Danish thinker. Indeed, the sins of the past are the core catalyst of the act

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<sup>38</sup> Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “The Lonely Man of Faith”, *Tradition* 2, 7 Summer (1965):42, 44.

<sup>39</sup> See: Maimonides, *Laws of Repentance* 1, 2; 2, 3. On Soloveitchik’s critique of the Musar movement’s emphasis on the past in their approach to repentance see: Kaplan, “Repentance”, 30.

<sup>40</sup> See: Maimonides, *Laws of Repentance* 2, 5.



of repentance, and although obliterated, they are nonetheless central to the event itself. This reflects the fact that repentance relates both to the personality of the individual and to the specific past transgressions. More than a focusing of one's possibilities from the past and taking responsibility over them for future, repentance comprises of specific reference to specific deeds and personality traits. Additionally, the role of community is different in both accounts. In both, as we have seen, the encounter with eternity embraces the individual and hence is stamped by an ultimate personal mark. Yet for Soloveitchik – and this position is prevalent throughout his writings – the individual is never understood as an isolated entity lacking a historical community. This is noticeable in the way Soloveitchik connects the personal future with the ultimate eschatological future. The religious and existential condition of halakhic man is intertwined with the Jewish community: “the Jewish people’s all-embracing collective consciousness of time ... is an integral part of the ‘I’ awareness of halakhic man”.<sup>41</sup> As a Jew, one is defined by a twofold existential status – as a singular individual and as a member of the Jewish community. These two components are inseparably entangled.<sup>42</sup> In contrast to Kierkegaard’s believer (or ‘knight of faith’) who stands in his or her individuality in front of God, halakhic man’s religiosity is at once personal and communal.

### **Soloveitchik and Heidegger**

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> This position is also expressed in Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “Community”, *Tradition* 17, 2 spring (1978): 15. See also Soloveitchik’s lectures addressing the communal aspect of repentance in: Peli, *On Repentance*, 107-37; Gerald Blidstein, “On the Jewish people in the Writings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik”, *Tradition* Vol. 24, 2 (1989):21-43.

Before we conclude, a parenthetical yet relevant discussion is appropriate. Kierkegaard's notion of a life defining 'moment' left a profound mark on twentieth century thought.<sup>43</sup> One instance of this influence is Martin Heidegger's version of the 'moment' presented in his *Being and Time* (1927). Heidegger writes, "in resoluteness, the Present is not only brought back from distraction with the objects of one's closest concern, but its gets held in the future and in having been. The *Present* which is held in authentic temporality and which thus is *authentic* itself, we call "*moment of vision*".<sup>44</sup> The authenticity of Dasein – simply put, Heidegger's term for human being - is generated in a 'moment of vision' (*Augenblick*, the German rendering of the Danish *Øieblik*) in which Dasein comes towards itself as projecting into the future in the process of drawing upon its past in the fulcrum of the present, thereby constituting an ecstatic future-oriented fusion of time.

These apparent similarities bring rise to a possible connection between Soloveitchik and Heidegger. And indeed, the connection has been suggested by some scholars. Kaplan briefly states, "with respect to Heidegger, compare Rabbi Soloveitchik's definition of Teshuva to the following description of Heidegger's conception of time" and then three short sentences are cited from the

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<sup>43</sup> Nietzsche too offers a certain version of an elevated, decisive moment essential to his idea of 'Eternal Return' in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883), which he terms *Augenblick*. Although some resemblances exist, there is no direct connection between this and Kierkegaard's notion. See: Ward, *Augenblick*, 35-68. Also Schleiermacher in his *Fifth Speech on Religion*, discusses "the moment in which [individuals] have been filled by the intuition that has made itself the focal point of their religion" and is hence "sacred to them"; see: Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 112.

<sup>44</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper & Row Publishers 2008) 387. Emphasis in original.

*Encyclopedia of Philosophy* concerning the futural projection of Dasein.<sup>45</sup> Kaplan expresses the hope to ‘touch upon the topic in the future’, which he does in the form of re-citing the aforementioned point with no further elaboration. In this later essay he does state there that “not only is the similarity between the two conceptions [of time in Soloveitchik and Heidegger] striking, but R. Soloveitchik specifically refers to Heidegger’s *Being and Time* in the notes to *Halakhic Man*. The influence then is undeniable”.<sup>46</sup> Peli also refers to Heidegger in passing as a source of influence on Soloveitchik when he writes “one may apply time in line with the thinking of Bergson and Heidegger”.<sup>47</sup> On the whole, little has been written on the general affinities between the Heidegger and Soloveitchik. This paucity is reflected in the above unelaborated claims of Heidegger’s place in Soloveitchik’s approach to temporality, and an examination of Heidegger’s influence on Soloveitchik surely deserves a separate study. Yet with respect to the “undeniable” influence of the German philosopher on Soloveitchik suggested by Kaplan, a glance at the footnotes referring to *Being and Time* in *Halakhic Man* do not offer support for such a claim. Heidegger is explicitly mentioned in note 4 and note 147, but both notes are in fact deeply critical of his thought and its ethical ramifications, and as such cannot be taken as evidence of influence.<sup>48</sup> If anything they prove Soloveitchik was familiar with Heidegger’s thought well enough to criticize

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<sup>45</sup> Lawrence Kaplan, “The Religious Philosophy of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik” *Tradition* vol .14 no. 2 (fall 1973): 63 n. 63.

<sup>46</sup> Kaplan, “Repentance”, 240

<sup>47</sup> Peli, *On Repentance*, 33.

<sup>48</sup> For a short discussion on Soloveitchik’s critique of Heidegger, see Daniel Herskowitz: “Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik’s Endorsement and Critique of Volkish Thought”, *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* (forthcoming).

it.<sup>49</sup> It is also worth remembering that Heidegger's God-less account of *Augenblick* is at odds with the overall religious import of Kierkegaard's *Øieblik* and Soloveitchik's *teshuva*. Furthermore, in the time of *Halakhic Man*'s composition Soloveitchik was under the strong influence of the Marburg neo-Kantian School which differed from Heidegger in many fundamental philosophical issues.<sup>50</sup> The harsh remarks directed at Heidegger in this work exemplify the disparity and reciprocal antagonism between these two approaches, and in effect lessen the plausibility of influence from Heidegger's direction, at least in this period. Heidegger's imprint on Soloveitchik, there is reason to believe, is evident elsewhere (mainly in his later writings).

Recently, in a rich three and a half page long footnote, Elliot Wolfson presents what is to date the longest elaboration on Heidegger and Soloveitchik.<sup>51</sup> There he writes, "Worthy of a separate investigation is the intriguing resemblance between Soloveitchik's affirmation of the compresence of the three temporal modes in the eternality of the moment and the three ecstasies of time in the thought of Martin Heidegger".<sup>52</sup> Wolfson is clear that he does not "wish to convey the opinion that Heidegger's views are in any way identical to Soloveitchik", although he does state that despite some fundamental disparities, "one cannot ignore some striking similarities between the two".

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<sup>49</sup> See: Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff, *The Rav: The World of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, Vol. 1 (New Jersey: Ktav Publishing House, 1999) 195.

<sup>50</sup> As exemplified historically in the Davos disputation of 1929. See: Peter Eli Gordon, *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>51</sup> Elliot R. Wolfson, "Eternal Duration and Temporal Compresence: The Influence of Ḥabad on Joseph B. Soloveitchik", in *The Value of the Particular: Lessons from Judaism and the Modern Jewish Experience*, Festschrift for Steven T. Katz on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday, eds. Michael Zank and Ingrid Anderson (Leiden: Brill 2015) 195-238.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 208-9.

Ultimately, what Wolfson finds “far more tantalizing” is not the question of influence, but rather “the fact that affinities between Heidegger and Soloveitchik can be explained by the latent kabbalistic dimension of the latter’s understanding of time channeled through his study of Ḥabad”.<sup>53</sup> I suggest in this paper that the temptation to explain the similarities between the two accounts of the ‘moment’ in Soloveitchik and Heidegger as testament of influence of the latter on the former is rooted in the fact that Kierkegaard’s role in the formulation of this notion in both thinkers has been overlooked. It would be more accurate therefore to explain the existing affinities mentioned by Kaplan and Wolfson and hinted to by Peli between Heidegger and Soloveitchik as reflecting the shared influence of Kierkegaard on them.<sup>54</sup> This, however, can serve as a complementing explanation to the ‘kabbalistic channel’ offered by Wolfson, which perhaps highlights what was stated above, that elements of Kierkegaard’s ‘moment’ corresponded to perceptions Soloveitchik had inherited from a variety of Jewish traditions.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, I shall reiterate the points regarding time and repentance in Soloveitchik’s account that reflect Kierkegaard’s *Øieblik*: Repentance is an event of self-creation. As such it has a critical influence on one’s being. The possibility of full repentance is reliant not on the sequential conception of time but on the distinction between internal and external temporality, wherein

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 211. Wolfson mentions some – although not all – of Soloveitchik’s explicit and implicit reactions and responses to Heidegger.

<sup>54</sup> What emerges from an examination of these three versions of ‘the moment’ is that Soloveitchik and Heidegger are at times in agreement on the exact issues in which they differ from Kierkegaard. See Daniel Herskowitz: “Authenticity, Repentance and the Second Coming: ‘the Moment’ in Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Soloveitchik”, *The Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* (forthcoming).

external time is physical and impersonal, and internal time is existential and personal. In internal time, temporality and eternity are not two fundamentally distinct realms, but are in fact intertwined. Hence internal temporality is qualitative, not quantitative. The moment of encountering eternity provides a vantage point to one's life which engenders personal transformation. Eternity is infused in the ordinary present, evanescent moment. And although engaging with eternity has a dramatic effect on one's being, it does not debunk the gravity of ordinary temporality. In the encounter with eternity, the present encapsulates the past as well as the future, positing a ternary temporal unification. While all three time tenses reside in the moment, time in its most profound form is future bound. Future goals and aspirations could determine the past and present and therefore, in a sense, repentance is based more on the future than on the past. This future-orientation pertains to the fact that the 'moment' has also an eschatological overtone.