

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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BH

IT'S THE THOUGHT THAT COUNTS, ACCORDING TO THE YERUSHALMI

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You may have been taught that in Judaism, it is actions that count, not intentions. If so, your teachers (and mine) may not have taken a look at the Yerushalmi:

God (HaMakom) considers a good intention as a good deed and a bad intention as a bad deed ...

When does this apply? With regard to a Jew. But with non-Jews, it is the opposite: The Holy One Blessed be He does not consider a good intention as a good deed. Nor does God regard a non-Jew's bad intention as a bad deed.

It was taught in a baraita: Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai says: Behold, if a person was totally righteous his whole life but at the end, he rebelled, he has lost everything he accomplished in his entire life.

If a person was utterly evil his whole life but in the end he repented, the Holy One Blessed be He receives him.

Rabbi Yochanan said: And not only that, but all the sins that he committed throughout his life are now counted as good deeds. (Y. Peah 1:1, Artscroll 9b2)

This passage seems to fly in the face of everything I was ever taught about Judaism and intentions v. actions. I was always taught that actions are the things that count, not one's intentions. I was also taught that repentance at the end of one's life is ineffective. Although the Hebrew here makes it pretty clear that you can't just say, "I'm sorry" on your deathbed. You have to do teshuvah, i.e., confess, apologize and make restitution for whatever sin you did.

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever heard such teachings before? Or have you heard just the opposite, as I did? Why do you think we were taught this? Would you teach this to your students or children? Why or why not?
2. Do you agree or disagree with this teaching? Why do you think this teaching was suppressed? What made subsequent generations uncomfortable with this teaching?
3. Why would Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai and Rabbi Yochanan support these teachings? They lived in Israel during

terrible times. The former, especially, suffered greatly at the hands of the Romans. Yet these sages seem to be saying to the Romans, "Repent, become a Jew, and all will be forgiven." Why would they say such things?