


The sins are blotted out and disappear without a trace. Such repentance wishes to erase the past moment, and achieves its freedom from the past by making it disappear.

There is a second, stronger view of this change according to Resh Lakish: "Great is repentance; by it intentional sins are made like merits..." My sins would become something held in my favor, something good. This claim suggests that a mended relation can be stronger and better precisely because each party has had to transform the relation. I have had to recognize my fault and have struggled to re-approach the other; the offended one then has had to forgive me and accept my apology. Here repentance re-visits the past and embraces it. It calls it into the present and mends it. The past here is not blotted out but is more like a text re-read and given new meaning. Soloveitchik compares this repentance to an elevating fire that has

been fanned by sin.

But the Talmud itself juxtaposes Resh Lakish's two views of changing the past and then resolves their conflict: "It is not a problem: there — from love, there — from fear."

A familiar distinction preserves both possibilities: Repentance can come from love or from fear. When I fear punishment, repentance manages to make my sins into simple mistakes, as though nothing happened. When I repent out of love for the other, my past sin becomes a credit. For a loving "return" has the power to change the past radically, making what was ill-intended into a loving desire. Regretting and troubled by our past, we are given a command to repent — to change our past by repenting. While repenting out of love for another may be the higher form, even repentance out of the fear of pain and judgment in the future has the power to change our past and cleanse us. 



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