

old. So Solomon, in his wisdom, said, "Let your garments be always white, and oil on your head not be lacking" (Eccles. 9:8).

¶ 3 Do not say that one need only repent of sinful deeds such as fornication, robbery, and theft. Just as a man needs to repent of these sins involving acts, so he needs to investigate and repent of any evil dispositions that he may have, such as hot temper, hatred, jealousy, scoffing, eager pursuit of wealth or honors, greediness in eating, and so on. Of all these faults one should repent. They are graver than sinful acts; for when one is addicted to them it is difficult to give them up. And thus it is said, "Let the wicked forsake his way and the man of iniquity his thoughts" (Is. 55:7).

¶ 4 Let not the penitent suppose that he is kept far away from the degree attained by the righteous because of the iniquities and sins that he has committed. This is not so. He is beloved by the Creator, desired by Him, as if he had never sinned. Moreover, his reward is great; since, though having tasted sin, he renounced it and overcame his evil passions. The sages say, "Where penitents stand, the completely righteous cannot stand." This means that the degree attained by penitents is higher than that of those who had never sinned, the reason being that the former have had to put forth a greater effort to subdue their passions than the latter.

¶ 5 All the prophets charged the people concerning repentance. Only through repentance will Israel be redeemed, and the Torah already offered the assurance that Israel will, in the closing period of exile, finally repent, and thereupon be immediately redeemed, as it is said, "And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you shall take it to heart among all the nations, wherever the Lord your God has driven you, and shall return to the Lord your God, and hearken to His voice according to all that I command you this day, you and your children, with all your heart, and with all your soul, that the Lord your God will turn your captivity, and have mercy upon you, and will return and gather you from all the nations, wherever the Lord your God has scattered you" (Deut. 30:1-3).

¶ 6 Great is repentance, for it brings men near to the Divine Presence, as it is said, "Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God" (Hos. 14:2). Again, it is said, "And you have not returned to Me, says the Lord" (Amos 4:6). Further, "If you return, O Israel, to Me shall you

return" (Jer. 4:1), which means "If you return in repentance, you will cleave to Me." Repentance brings near those who are far away. * But yesterday this person was odious before God, abhorred, estranged, an abomination. Today he is beloved, desirable, near [to God], a friend. So you find that the same expression with which God thrusts sinners away from Him, He employs to bring the penitent near to Him, whether they are individuals or communities, as it is said, "And instead of that which was said unto them: 'You are not My people,' it shall be said unto them: 'You are children of the living God'" (Hos. 2:1). Of Jeconiah, while he was wicked, it was said, "Write you this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days" (Jer. 22:30); "Though Coniah, the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, were a signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck you therefrom" (*ibid.* 22:24). But after he had in his exile repented, it is said of his son, Zerubbabel, "In that day, says the Lord of Hosts, will I take you, O Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, my servant, and will make you as a signet, says the Lord of hosts" (Haggai 2:23).

¶ 7 How exalted is the degree of repentance? Just last night a certain individual was separated from the Lord, God of Israel, as it is said, "Your iniquities were making a separation between you and your God" (Is. 59:2). He cries aloud and is not answered, as it is said, "Yea, when you make many prayers, I will not hear" (*ibid.* 1:15). He fulfills religious precepts and they are flung back in his face, as it is said, "Who has required this at your hand to tread my courts?" (*ibid.* 1:12); "Oh, that there were even one among you that would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain; I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand" (Mal. 1:10); "Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifice and eat flesh" (Jer. 7:21). Today, the same individual (having repented) is closely attached to the Divine Presence, as it is said, "And you that cleave to the Lord your God, are alive, every one of you this day" (Deut. 4:4). He cries and is immediately answered, as it is said, "And it shall come to pass that before they call I will answer" (Is. 65:24). He fulfills religious precepts and they are accepted with pleasure and with joy, as it is said, "For God has already accepted your works" (Eccles. 9:7). Yet more, they are eagerly desired, as it is said, "Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant to the Lord as in the days of old and as in ancient years" (Mal. 3:4).