

A Short Teaching on Hilchot Teshuva
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Please read the Gospel of John 8:1-11 (sometimes organized as John 7:53-8:11)

In the literal sense with moral context, the gospel story has homiletic value in gaining an understanding of our bias in making moral judgments. Dare to throw a stone if you are without sin, and, if we are fulfilling the law precisely then the male 'Client' would be the first to cast the stone, and, then rightly, be stoned himself as well (xRef Dt 17:7 and Lev 20:10). All ordinary human moral teaching (Noahide law, if you will allow me) but limited in scope. Unfortunately, theologically, there are problems if we remain there. We must look to the spiritual senses (Allegorical, Moral, and Anagogical).

Some sins demand death (same references). It may appear Jesus is in contradiction to justice and the Law. Yet Jesus said he no way was abolishing the law but rather fulfilling the law (Matt 5:17). We must then need a tune-up on our understanding of the demands of the law.

The Law of Repentance (Hilchot Teshuva) makes clear some sin requires death. This death is not a punishment; rather it is the sinner 'need[s] to die to complete the[ir] atonement'. Forgiveness and atonement are linked without exception. Jesus brings both into greater clarity and harmony with an effective exchange of propitiation.

If we start with the woman and read from John 8:11 to 8:3 (backwards) we can begin to see a new perspective. This woman understood the law the same way as her countrymen. She stood in the midst with and without her accusers ('where she had been', John 8:9, NAS). She may not have been happily 'set in the midst'; however, being a Jew, she was prepared to accept her 'complete atonement'.

Jesus exercised his juridical power, knew the facts of the case, and passed a judicial sentence. He, Jesus, would complete the atonement. She is forgiven for her sin by her faith and can rest assured of her complete atonement by his promise.

At this point please read Luke 23:39-43.

As you can easily see the woman of John 8 and the repentant thief of Luke 23, are having the same experience (dialog and circumstances notwithstanding). Both are encountering Jesus within the law. Both are receiving the same forgiveness and atonement. The death atonement is a future promise for the woman, and for the thief it is a witnessed, promise exercised. Jesus completes and fulfills the 'complete atonement' by his death on the cross. Not punishment, atonement.

John 8 talks of Jesus being Lifting Up in a two set doublet (stooped down – lifted up, twice). John 8:6-7 and again 9-10. Jesus Lifted Up (ἀνακύπτω) has a double meaning of reversal and to rise elated (ἀνά) (κύπτω). We know from John 12:32 there Lifted Up (ὑψώω) has the dual meaning of to crucify (bring low/stoop) and to exalt (resurrect).

What then can we conclude? Profitable spiritual understanding of John 8:1 ff, is not a Noahide morality, but G-d's love overcoming sin. Full atonement is entered by faith and completed on the Cross. The law is divinely fulfilled and the woman and all of us are spared capital punishment.