

# EIGHT CHAPTERS □ CHAPTER 6:4

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

There's a single hidden, deep, very private element in our being that enables each one of us to choose between doing good or wrongful things: our free will. We'd discussed it before and we'll come to it again further on in other contexts, but it's important to understand it in the following one. As Rambam puts it, "In truth, everyone is capable of being as righteous as Moses or as wicked as Jereboam". That is, we have it within us to be as great or as lowly as we ourselves choose to be, thanks to our free will.

Indeed, "no one forces, decrees, or draws a person in either direction. He alone, of his own volition consciously inclines himself in the direction he so chooses". And as such, "it follows that a sinner alone brings harm upon himself", no one else. The point is that since we're answerable to no one else's proddings if we sin and do harm, we'd need to take self in hand and repent if we'd gone off.

Just realize how great repenting is, though. For, "the very person who, just yesterday, was completely separated from the G-d of Israel" because he'd turned his back on Him defiantly, "who would cry out and go unheeded ... who would do mitzvot, and have them rent from his hands" because of his bad choices, who'd then turn around and change his way "is now attached to G-d" instead. Indeed, "his cries are answered immediately" instead, "and (all of) his mitzvot are received easily and happily ... and are even yearned for!" because he'd repented.

That being so, we should find out just how to regain our spiritual standing and repent. But not so fast. Because there are quite a number of things we'd have to tend to before we could even start to repent. For as Rambam tells it, "There are twenty-four things that (are likely to) thwart repentance"; and as any sensitive soul knows, most of us tend to lapse into some of them all the time. So let's see what they come to.

Among several others, what holds us back from repenting includes being in the habit of (in Rambam's words) "causing many to sin, inclining someone away from the path of goodness onto the path of wrongdoing", "isolating yourself from the community, arguing against the words of the sages, mocking the mitzvot (or) one's teachers, hating criticism", "cursing the multitude", "using another's personal failings to one's own advantage, casting aspersions upon people with good reputations", as well as "tale bearing, slandering, being hot tempered, arousing evil thoughts, and associating with wicked people".

Not only is that true, but we're to always bear in mind that we're not to repent "for concrete

transgressions, like promiscuity, robbery, or theft, alone." For "just as a person has to repent for those sorts of sins," Rambam says emphatically, we also have to repent for unbecoming personal traits like "anger, hostility, envy, sarcasm, the pursuit of wealth or glory, the pursuit of food, etc." So there's clearly a lot to do.

But let's turn next to the ultimate reward due those who thus draw close to G-d indeed, and the actual process of repenting.

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