

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 7:2

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

As in all other human efforts, teshuva is also oftentimes only barely effective, other times more or less so, and here and there utterly effective. So let's see what goes into each.

We'd do well to start with this point, though. It's axiomatic to our tradition that, thanks to our Torah, we know what to do to achieve spiritual excellence. So while, for example, it would never occur to me to eat a sumptuous kosher meal on a Saturday afternoon with friends to achieve that, it's still- and- all genuinely true that that's one way to. And while on the other hand it wouldn't ever occur to me that phoning one of those friends later that afternoon would *denigrate* my spiritual standing, that's true too. So, unless we know what we're doing at any given moment, we're open to good or bad choices without knowing which is which. Clearly, then, Torah knowledge is fundamental to our goals.

But there are two other factors to consider. There's the input of our baser instincts (our "yetzer harah") which we'd spoken of already, and our overall commitment to spiritual excellence. Now back to teshuva.

Anytime I'm faced with the choice to do something I know to be wrong or not to, and my yetzer harah gets the best of me and I actually do sin -- and I merely *regret* what I did, then I'd have to do more to achieve full teshuva. Because being sorry is only skin-deep, since it indicates that I hardly care about my spiritual status; and it's thus barely effective.

But if I know what's right and wrong, and I honestly want to avoid sinning, yet I sin despite myself because my yetzer harah manages to get the best of me anyway, then I'd need to take what I did to heart and enter into full teshuva (which we'll depict later on). But it would be clear that I could be ambushed again in the future and open to persuasion, that my teshuva was only more or less effective, and that I hadn't fully rectified my being.

My teshuva would only have been utterly effective, then, if I'd fully engaged in it, if I'd managed to bridle my yetzer harah (which takes many years of fully committed effort, you understand), and if I'd concentrated upon these other elements of spiritual excellence as well.

Take a few moments to appreciate all that's involved in these other elements, because while each

one alone would undo one's world and alter his being forever, the lot of them together will undoubtedly lead to true spiritual excellence. We fully appreciate that each calls for a lengthy explication, but space will not allow for that, so we'll just list them.

True and utterly effective teshuva would also entail ceaseless introspection, an ongoing the fear of Heaven, an awareness of how wrong it is to sin in the presence of G-d Almighty, and a deep and heart-felt regret for one's lapses.

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