

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 7:10

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

If you find it difficult to do teshuva for your sins against others because of the complications we cited last time, then what you'd need to do would be to wholeheartedly and sincerely fulfill as many of the components of teshuva as you could, and G-d will somehow then make it possible for you to truly repent in the end. For He'll allow for the steps you can't manage to fulfill to be realized, and will grant you amnesty.

"So if, for example, ... you bore an illegitimate child, G-d will sever that line of descent", as Ibn Pakudah puts it. What that means to say is that somehow or another the illegitimate child will somehow die (in youth, or later on), or will be childless on his or her own, or have no grandchildren. That way your sin would have reached an end point rather than go on forever to your eternal discredit.

"If you defrauded or robbed someone," Ibn Pakudah goes on to say, "G-d will see to it that you have enough money to repay your victim, and that he'll accept it and forgive you. If you hurt someone or caused him a loss, G-d will fill your victim's heart with goodwill and love, and he'll forgive you for it ... If your victim moved away, G-d will see to it that you and he meet, that you surrender yourself to him, and that he forgives you. If you don't know whom you victimized nor the amount of money in question, Gd will see to it t donate funds to a public project like the building of bridges, the digging of public wells, or the digging of ditches on dry roads or the like, so that your victim will benefit from it (and thus be paid back on some level). If your victim died, (G-d would see to it that) you return the money in question to his heirs, and if you injured him or insulted him in public, (He'd see to it that) you confess to the deceased at his graveside before ten others (as you would have to do, see Yoma 87a) and thus be forgiven."

What that all implies is that G-d will ultimately provide opportunities for you to indeed make reparations in ways you might never have imagined if you set out to do teshuva as well as you're able to.

The greatest lesson we could learn from all that is, as it's stated here, that "in truth, only your mind and your scheming heart prevents you from repenting. For the gates of repentance will never be closed to you, and nothing will ever deter you if you truly want to draw closer to Gd." That's to s will always avail, so we need only make every earnest effort to return to Him in teshuva.

Ibn Pakudah then ends this chapter -- and the entire Gate of Teshuva -- with the following heartfelt entreaty. No soul longing for closeness to G-d could help but be touched by its pleas.

"I have now explained your obligation to repent, brother, and shown you how to return (to G-d). So any excuse or alibi you might have has been undone Awaken from your senseless sleep and have pity on your soul Elevate (it) to that place of honor, the sublime dwelling place of spirits who ascend and never descend. Hurry while the gate of repentance is open, and you will be accepted and forgiven."

He goes on to underscore how wrong we're each capable of being and what that does to our spirits and our relationship to G-d, and he finishes off by reminding us that we haven't all the time in the world to draw as close to Him as we'd like, for we're all *genuinely* mortal. "Imagine if someone were to warn the inhabitants of a town or city saying, 'Get ready to pass over to the Other Side! For I happen to know that one of you will be chosen to go this month, but I can't tell you whom!' Wouldn't you expect each and every one of them to prepare the way? How then can we all not be prepared, since death takes many from us every month! Shouldn't we be frightened for our souls every month and think about our situations, our provisions and our (eternal) dwelling place?"

But take heart, he reminds us, for G-d "never intended for you to continue acting foolishly and rebelling. He wants to walk with you on the path of kindness He has already called out to you slowly and softly ... to repent and hurry back to Him. So, hurry indeed, brother, and listen to Him! Hear His voice and cling to Him!"

"Surrender to the truth rather than desert it", he goes on to say, and "acknowledge the fact that Gd is always encouraging you to do somet have known nothing about otherwise (-- the mitzvah of teshuva)". And he ends the gate with this prayer: "May Gd, in His mercy, place those who hurry to Him and return to Him with a perfect heart."

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