

# THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 7:9

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

Does teshuva undo every sin -- or are there some that are simply too egregious or complicated to be forgiven outright?

Let's start off by reiterating a fundamental truism about sins. There are two kinds over all: those committed against G-d, and those against others. You can easily enough do teshuvah for the sins you committed against G-d by realizing what you did and engaging in heartfelt teshuva. But there's a certain motif it would help to follow, we learn. You're to repent the way you sinned, measure for measure.

So if, as Ibn Pakudah words it, you "bore evil in your heart or mind by harboring resentment against another, being jealous of him or her, hating someone, etc., you'd repent by improving your disposition, loving to do good for others and by forgiving them." That's to say that you're to use the very obverse of your original inclination to rectify it, by turning enmity around to love, and the like. (Notice, by the way, that harboring resentment, being jealous, hating someone and the like are cited as sins against G-d, not others! Why? Because while you hadn't done anything outright to another, so you couldn't be said to have sinned against him or her, you'd nonetheless sustained motions that are anathema to the worship of G-d.)

"If you sinned physically by eating something the Creator forbade you to eat, ... by profaning the Sabbath or the Holy Days" and the like, we're told, then you're to "repent for that particular sin and for others of the sort, then devote your heart to fulfilling Gd's will."

Now, that's easy enough to do if G-d grants you the health, well-being, and length-of-days you'd need. But other phenomena and requirements factor-in when you have to do teshuva for sins you'd committed against others.

For as Ibn Pakudah lays it out, "your victim may not be accessible, or he may be dead or far away by then; you may have lost the money (you'd stolen from him) and have no means of replacing it; your victim may not forgive you for defrauding, harming or speaking against him (which you'd need him to do to truly be forgiven); you might not recognize your victim or know the exact amount of money in question ... ; or the money might have become mixed in with other perfectly legal money, and it might not be easy to extract (the money in question) without a serious loss of your other, perfectly

legal money" and the like.

Other, more internal things could happen to possibly thwart teshuva. You might become so \*used to committing the sin\*, and it might have become so second nature to you that you'd find it very hard to overturn it.

And your teshuva can also be hampered, Ibn Pakudah also points out, if you'd shed blood or murdered someone, for after all, you can't necessarily restore anyone's health, or bring anyone back to life; if money was lost because of something slanderous you'd said against someone and you can't restore it; if you'd borne an illegitimate child, who obviously can't be undone; if you'd grown accustomed to lying, insulting or speaking against people and can't keep track of what you said in order to make restitution; if you've forgotten whom you spoke against; and the like.

So what's a well-meaning person who has indeed come to realize the depth and span of his sins to do, knowing all this? We'll see next time.

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