

THE GATES OF REPENTANCE, GATE 1:10

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

The First Principle of Teshuva: **EXPRESSING REMORSE**

Remorse is a very deep and all-encompassing series of realizations and reactions. It begins with your suddenly catching yourself doing something untoward. It goes from there to your being stunned by the fact that you'd actually done what you thought you'd never do. And it ends in a whirlwind of dissonance and sorrow, often culminating in the cry, "What have I done?"

Many a sensitive soul has suffered the pangs of remorse. But Rabbeinu Yonah asks us to go a step further, and to consider what our misdeed has done to our search for spiritual excellence, and most especially, how it has affected our relationship to G-d.

His first point is that "What have I done?" should mean, "What have I done to my relationship to G-d?"

He writes that we're to realize just how "bitterly wrong it was to have abandoned G-d"-- to have caused a rift in our relationship with Him, to whatever degree. And to know as well that there are "consequences to be paid" for that. Which is to say that not only would we have caused a rift, we'd *know* it too. We'd soon sense a certain chill in the relationship, in that we'd find it harder to address Him, and He'd find it harder looking at us full-face (so to speak).

But while Rabbeinu Yonah's first concern is that relationship, and justifiably so; our first concern is usually our own personal standing. So Rabbeinu Yonah addresses that, too.

In that light "What have I done?" takes on a whole other perspective. It suddenly metamorphoses into, "What have I done to *myself*?"

Everyone knows the price to pay for having eaten that too-large piece of cake, for example. Not only is there a sense of remorse, but there are actually chemical, biological consequences to our having eaten it. As we all know, there are a lot of calories to contend with, all that fat and sugar, etc.

Fewer realize the price to pay for having lied to someone who then discovered the truth, for example. Our word is tainted, our reputation is besmirched, our motivations are thrown into a bad light, our actions are watched closely, our sincerity is questioned, etc.

And fewer yet realize the existential and personal price to pay for lapsing into spiritual mediocrity. The steam goes out of our spiritual practise, we become blase about our beings, we settle for rationalization and small-mindedness, etc.

In order to re-inspire us toward spiritual excellence Rabbeinu Yonah points out that we have a lofty, a veritable *Divine* mission in life; a "career goal" of the highest magnitude, if you will. And that it's cheapened and compromised when we settled for spiritual mediocrity.

For that goal is "to be conscious of G-d", which is to say, to realize viscerally and deeply that G-d is present all the time, right before our eyes, so to speak. We're to "fear" Him, a highly misunderstood term, which means to say that we're to react in the very core of our beings to the reality of G-d's presence all around us. And we're to "reign over our bodies", which is to say, to know our being and its expected reactions well enough to do everything we could to avoid harming it either physically and spiritually.

And though Rabbeinu Yonah doesn't say as much, it seems logical to assume that doing teshuva after our realizations and remorse would then allow us to say, "Look what I've done!"

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