

THE GATES OF REPENTANCE, GATE 1:11

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Second Principle of Teshuva: RIDDING YOURSELF OF THE SIN

Logic would seem to dictate that if we're to mend our ways and do teshuva (return to G-d), that we'd need to simply take it upon ourselves to stop doing the wrongful thing we'd done.

But would we actually be better advised to first concentrate on realizing just how remorseful we are for having done it (which would bring us back to last week's principle), and then stop doing it? After all, how serious would my resolve to stop doing the wrongful thing be if I hadn't really come to regret it?

In essence, the answer lies in what drove us to lapse like that in the first place. After all, sometimes we sin on a whim; other times, we sin by force of habit.

Rabbeinu Yonah draws an arresting picture of the inner-process we go through when faced with the choice between spiritual excellence and spiritual mediocrity. The process would resonate only too well with a sensitive soul who'd quickly catch him- or herself being thrust into the same maelstrom from time to time.

Every once in a while we lapse into spiritual mediocrity unwittingly. There it is, right before our eyes-- the chance to do something we'd be better off not doing-- in all its glory! Somehow or another, the forbidden or ill-advised seems to dazzle and delight the imagination. No matter how pedestrian or even soiled it may actually be, it suddenly becomes pretty, charming, inviting.

As Rabbeinu Yonah puts it, our impulses become intensified and start to overwhelm us, we find ourselves facing an onslaught of emotions and rationalizations, we're suddenly thrust into a veritable ocean of cravings, and we're abruptly ravaged by quick and chill winds. And we're caught-- speechless and victimized by our own heart's-draw.

It's not like we set out to do wrong. We didn't for example determine that morning to go out there and hurt someone's feelings by three in the afternoon. (There are of course people who *do* do those kinds of things; but they don't subscribe to classes entitled, "In Search of Spiritual Excellence"!)

In such instances, Rabbeinu Yonah counsels, we'd do well to work on fostering true, heart-felt remorse for what we did; then to work on our relationship with G-d Almighty all the more so, and draw close to Him again. Done in the right spirit, and coupled with a resolve to once again strive for spiritual excellence, we're far less likely to "fall for that" again. We'd thus have rid ourselves of that

particular sin on a very deep level.

In other instances, though, we'd be better off following another plan. If we're *entrenched* in a pattern of misbehavior; if we do something clearly off-the-mark repeatedly, energetically, lovingly, and purposefully; and we simply want what we want, right there and then, as usual-- then the following holds true.

In this instance we'd be better off simply dropping the bag, so to speak, right on the floor. To not set ourselves aside to dwell on the deeper notions of remorse and existential abandon. But rather to simply stop, and take it upon ourselves right there and then to never do that thing again. And *then* we'd do well to foster heart-felt remorse and re-establish our relationship with G-d.

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