

# THE GATES OF REPENTANCE, GATE 1:14

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

## The Fifth Principle of Teshuva: WORRYING

This week we delve further into the psychology of the righteous. The righteous are a "misunderstood minority" on many, many levels. For one thing, they're taken to be mythical entities from the distant past, when they're not (thank G-d). And for another, they're taken to live ever blissful and serene lives, when they don't. What separates them from us, for the most part, is that they worry and fret over things that truly matter, and then act accordingly; while we worry and fret over *\*frivolous things\**,... and then act accordingly.

Picture a room full of sculptures at work, if you will. Imagine the rush and tingle of creativity in the air, the cries of "Yes!" as each comes upon the very form that best expresses an experience he or she wants to set in clay, and the like. Imagine also, though, their gnarled brows, the odd and neurotic way their toes tap, and the "harumphs" they make as they punch down their clay in failure. Imagine, too, the rank and tangible air of *\*worry\** in the room when they determine that they simply can't sculpt.

They worry if they'll ever create again, if they'd ever actually created anything of value in the past, if they'll ever want to create again, if they'll ever be asked to create, and on and on. They worry *\*a lot\**. Why? Because sculpting matters to them, because it can be a noble act of self-expression and self-fulfillment, and because the very thought that they might never engage in it again *\*threatens\** them.

Now, you and I wouldn't worry about that simply because we're not sculptors. And, frankly, we'd think they were overreacting, since they're very likely to create again. But all *\*they\** can do is worry.

In a way, that's the lot of the righteous. They too worry about their creative acts-- of righteousness and holiness. Will they ever be righteous again? Were they ever truly, selflessly righteous in the past? Would they have the courage to be righteous in a decidedly unrighteous world again? They worry a lot.

You and I "know" a person really can't be righteous in this world, so we wonder what they're worried about in the first place. And besides-- we say in all naivete-- once you're righteous, you're always righteous, right? Wrong. For if that were so, the opposite would be true as well: once you're sinful, you're always sinful. And that would preclude teshuva (the act of returning to G-d after having sinned) altogether.

So it seems the righteous have as much right to worry about their spiritual stature as we do about ours. And they do, while we don't.

Rabbeinu Yonah also cites a verse that subtly uncovers another difference between the righteous and ourselves. It indicates that while the righteous fret about their ways and judge themselves rather harshly in the process (in that they worry about how they'd failed spiritually in the past, and how they just might fail again in the future), they never do that when it comes to others. They overlook others' faults, and always give the benefit of the doubt. While we're guilty of quite the opposite. We're quite sure we're right on target, and just as sure that everyone else is wrongful, mean, and of bad intention. The contrast between those who have every right to criticize others and to praise themselves, and ourselves, is quite stunning.

We're also informed about what moves the righteous to seek spiritual excellence. It seems their primary impetus is the stark realization of just how generous G-d has been to us all, and how indebted we all are to Him as a consequence. The righteous dwell upon the reality of that in their lives, and wish nothing more than to repay their Maker for all His graciousness.

And finally while they, like us, could very well settle for an "adequate" degree of closeness to G-d by simply fulfilling the minimum requirements of teshuva (returning to Him)-- which comes down to just expressing remorse, admitting the harm you've done to other's directly to them, and getting rid of the sin-- they prefer to delve deeper and in a more heartfelt way within their beings, and to follow through on all 20 of the principles of teshuva that Rabbeinu Yonah is laying out in this work.

[Subscribe](#) to *Spiritual Excellence* and receive the class via e-mail.