

THE GATES OF REPENTANCE, GATE 1:15

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

The Sixth Principle of Teshuva: FEELING ASHAMED

Perhaps it isn't said simply because it's so obvious, but we'll say it anyway. The greatest problem we have with G-d is the fact that He's... well... invisible.

If it weren't for that little fact, the struggle for goodness would be so much easier. It would all be clear. We'd do everything asked of us by Him in order to grow in our spirits. After all, He'd be **right there**. And we'd go out of our ways not to do anything to embarrass ourselves in front of Him.

For as Rabbeinu Yonah points out, we're very cautious not to embarrass ourselves in front of friends and co-workers. We squeeze ourselves into tight clothing, for example, or act painfully polite and neat in company. Simply because we'd be **ashamed** to be seen for what we really are.

Some people go out of their way to avoid embarrassing themselves for other reasons. They might be ashamed to be seen wearing certain designer clothing, drinking certain wines, or driving certain cars. Simply because they try to live by "higher standards". While others go out of their way to live up to certain professional, artistic, or academic high standards. And the lot of them would be **ashamed** to be caught off-the-mark.

Interestingly enough, though, higher standards are invisible, too. Those who live by them seem to take them very much to heart, however, and to just **know** when they're acting below standard. As if some huge, intimidating Standard-Thing were right in front of them, shaking a finger at them when they'd gone off.

Of course Standard-Things don't exist, yet standards are kept to all the time. Why? Because individuals with standards have internalized them. Because they mean so much to them, and touch a very deep point in their hearts.

Why is it then that we lapse into spiritual mediocrity from time to time, and aren't ashamed for example to pray listlessly, or to give nothing to charity? To phrase the question another way, what is it that has us overlook invisible G-d, and not live up to His standards for us?

Rabbeinu Yonah offers that it's simply because don't take Him seriously. In his own words, it's "because G-d is removed from our innermost being."

The righteous and those in search of spiritual excellence are sometimes simply *mortified* in G-d's presence when they catch themselves living below standard. That moves them to teshuva (to return

to Him), and it should move us to teshuva, too.

And in reference to what we said at the very beginning, perhaps this isn't said either simply because it too is so obvious, but we'll say it too. The greatest problem we have being righteous is the fact that spiritual mediocrity is... well... **too visible**. And too alluring.

So Rabbeinu Yonah offers this practical advice in our quest. We'd do well to sequester ourselves from time to time in order to reflect deeply upon G-d's real (albeit invisible) presence in the world. And upon how deeply connected we are to Him as He watches over us, reads our hearts, and knows our every dream.

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