

# THE GATES OF REPENTANCE, GATE 1:19

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

Tenth Principle of Teshuva: CORRECTING YOUR ACTIONS THROUGH THE AGENT USED TO SIN

There's a phenomenon known as "the ugly duckling" syndrome. A young girl, for example, might be scrawny and short, she might have ears far too large for her face, and her glasses might be a little too thick and awkward. And she might be poked fun of throughout her school years.

Then, seemingly "out of the blue", she starts to blossom. She fills out and grows, takes more care of herself, invests in contact lenses, and becomes a raving beauty.

Such a scenario often ends with an old friend running into the now lovely young woman and being thunderstruck. For "the very same features" that had made the young woman such an "ugly duckling" proved to be her best points.

The same phenomenon happens on a spiritual level, as well. Someone known, for example, for being heartless perhaps, or cynical and aloof might take it upon himself to better himself. And so with the help of others and a lot of introspection and determination, this individual comes to be warm, accepting, and loving, and thus do a complete turnaround, measure for measure, point for point.

That's what Rabbeinu Yonah is referring to here, where he cites comments by our sages to the effect that, "The righteous become pleasing through the very thing they sinned with" (Shemot Rabbah 23:3), and "If you committed bunches of sins, then fulfill bunches and bunches of corresponding mitzvot" (Vayikrah Rabbah 21:4).

The point is we'd do well to "turn over a new leaf" "of the same book" we'd soiled if we're ever to achieve true spiritual excellence. Which is to say that the very area in which we'd been wrongful should be the one in which we shine.

Rabbeinu Yonah offers the follow examples. If you tend to boldly glare at the opposite sex in untoward ways, for example, you'd do well to learn to humbly and modestly avert your glance. If you tend to spend the better part of your time speaking ill of others, you'd be far better off speaking to others about the Torah concepts you'd been struck by. If you're known to lie and accept things at face value, then be honest instead, delve into wisdom and be kindly from the depths of your being. And if you're aggressive and too bold, try as much as you can to be peaceable and acquiescent.

At bottom, again, the process comes to no longer settling for personal mediocrity or worse, but

striving for personal and spiritual excellence instead. By "catching yourself in the mirror", noticing where this is wrong, or that's off, and bettering yourself in just those areas. To the point where they become your strong points rather than your faults.

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