

# THE GATES OF REPENTANCE, GATE 1:22

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

## The Thirteenth Principle of Teshuva: TAKING YOUR MINOR SINS SERIOUSLY

Moral and good people do everything they can to avoid committing serious transgressions. That's simply a "given". But such individuals aren't necessarily in search of spiritual excellence. They're striving for a simple goodness that might very well have nothing to do with the life of the spirit. And so they feel it's all right "not to sweat the small stuff" when it comes to ethics.

True students of spiritual growth, on the other hand, would not only avoid serious transgressions, they'd also do all they could to avoid minor ones, too. And they do so in full realization of the following four spiritual truths.

One, since spiritual excellence draws us close to G-d, and it follows that \*each\* instance of spiritual mediocrity-- large or small-- draws us away from Him to some degree, it would thus behoove us to be wary of \*any\* lapse. And we'd do that best by heeding Rabbeinu Yonah's advice that, "rather than concentrate on the 'insignificance' of the sin itself, concentrate instead on the significance of the One who warned you about it."

Two, since we easily lapse into spiritual mediocrity by degrees, tiny step by tiny step (the way people who eat fatty foods slowly add plaque onto their arteries, till their heart grows gravely ill, G-d forbid), it would thus do us well to "watch each bite".

Three, since once we establish a pattern of destructive behavior we have a hard time breaking it, it would thus serve us best to catch ourselves at the first hint of spiritual mediocrity.

And four, since it's clear that if we fall for small lies today, for example, that we're likely to be immured to lying and fall for big lies tomorrow, it would thus be wise for us to reject small lies. Which is to say, we'd do well to take small lapses seriously, because they're likely to seem quite acceptable after a while, and grow into large, festering ones soon enough.

Rabbeinu Yonah's final point here is that individuals in search of spiritual excellence wouldn't only take their minor \*infractions\* seriously. They'd take smaller, "minor" chances to do \*good\* seriously, too.

That's to say, they'd turn around the above cited statement, "rather than concentrate on the 'insignificance' of the sin itself, concentrate instead on the significance of the One who warned you about it". And read it as follows as well: "in order not to concentrate on the 'insignificance' of a

chance for spiritual growth itself, concentrate on the significance of the One who encouraged you in it."

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