

THE GATES OF REPENTANCE, GATE 1:23

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Fourteenth Principle of Teshuva: CONFESSING

At bottom what confessing your sins amounts to is simply enunciating things you've done wrong to G-d Almighty. You needn't follow a set formula, and you needn't wait till Yom Kippur. And it can either entail a simple owning up to having done something, or a long and extensive offering of details, depending on the depth of your regret and the seriousness of your transgression.

But we live in such a cacophonous, over-bold, and invasive age of sights and sounds, claims and promises, that it's nearly impossible to confess to G-d. Our senses are so assailed, our fields of vision are so infringed upon day in and day out, and we're so assaulted with opinions and bold claims that we can barely think.

And when we do, we think of things peripheral to ourselves. In fact whole days, weeks and lives are spent outside the range of our own beating heart. And many a soul never once catches sight of his or her true being.

So the first step in confessing simply entails taking yourself off to the side somewhere, and hearing out your heart. There'll be silence for the first few moments, followed by lies and posturings. But at a certain point a "still, small voice" will make its way out of the din.

That will be the point where you'll come to actually hear your heart as it remembers things it would rather forget. That will be when you'd have to garner the gumption to say outright, "You know, I made a mistake. I...." The sensitive soul will discover things about him- or herself left dormant for years. The very act of articulation will be a cleansing and a rectification of the soul. And he or she will have achieved a deeper level of truth and of personhood.

But Rabbeinu Yonah adds an addendum to this, though, that many would find curious. He tells us to not only articulate our own sins, but the sins of our ancestors as well. But why? you might legitimately ask.

What that comes to is this. We are each an amalgam of self and lineage. As such, we carry our own "baggage" and the baggage of our ancestors. Because we tend to lapse into the old familiar ways we acted back home, and to carry out the spiritually numbing or deadening habits and behavior patterns we'd grown up with. In fact, many of those habits go back generations (unbeknownst to us).

Rabbeinu Yonah's point, then, is that we'd need to catch ourselves in our old, familiar sin patterns,

own up to them *as well as* the sin patterns we've embarked on on our own. And come to the point where we can cleanse ourselves of all that in our pursuit of spiritual excellence.

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