

THE GATES OF REPENTANCE, GATE 1:25

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Sixteenth Principle of Teshuva: AMENDING YOUR MISDEEDS AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE

We're about to take an early foray into the realm of forgiveness. Rabbeinu Yonah will delve into it at length in the final section of this work, which is a long way off.

In short, what forgiveness is, is a recognition of the efforts you've made to better yourself and to no longer settle for spiritual mediocrity. And an acceptance of the person you've now become-- *as well as of the person you'd once been*. After all, what you'd been before was lovable, too; there was just that blemish to contend with, and now it's gone.

In the end, the whole point of teshuva is to be forgiven. in fact. Both by the person you'd hurt or harmed, and by G-d. So as to restore your relationship to *both*. We'll come back to this shortly.

Let's discuss another matter beforehand. Despite all our efforts to explain the human heart, and to underscore the importance of knowing yourself, sensing your own spiritual stature, owning up to where you'd gone off, and working to rectify yourself from within, there's work to be done on the outside as well.

After all, in simple terms, if I'd stolen money from you, then had a turn of heart and come to know just how very wrong, and demeaning it is to my humanity to steal-- yet I'd never returned the money I stole from you-- all I'd have become was a good-hearted crook. It would behoove me to return the stolen money first and foremost. Then ask you to forgive me.

The same would be true if I'd insulted or harassed you one way or the other. I'd first need to apologize to you before I could ask for your forgiveness.

Rabbeinu Yonah is thus making the point that it would do us well to undo any harm we'd done in the world before we asked to be forgiven for it.

But not only would we need to apologize to the person we'd wronged-- we'd need to apologize to G-d as well. Since, as we said above, we'd want to restore the relationship we'd had with both G-d and the person we'd sinned against. Since every sin, and every descent into spiritual mediocrity, somehow or another draws us away from G-d. And we'd need to heal *that* relationship, too, by apologizing to G-d as well as the victim of our insensitivity.

His final point, though, is this. If we'd indeed apologized and made amends to whomever we'd hurt or harmed, G-d will surely forgive us (even if that other person didn't!) if we'd made proper amends,

and done all we could.

After all, who knows better than G-d the lovable person we indeed are, despite our myriad blemishes?

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