

# THE GATES OF REPENTANCE, GATE 1:26

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

## Seventeenth Principle of Teshuva: EXPRESSING KINDNESS AND TRUTH

It wouldn't be enough for us to simply rectify the harm we'd done to others in order to achieve spiritual excellence. We'd also need to foster a deeper and fuller level of goodness and personal growth. The two areas of goodness and growth Rabbeinu Yonah focuses upon at this point are kindness and truth.

The sort of kindness we're referring to here isn't simple "niceness" and "pleasantness". It's rooted in a deeply-felt \*need\* to give, to ease another's burden, and to love. As such, it's a worldly manifestation of an immortal and transcendent inclination of the soul to be as kind and generous as its Source.

And the kind of truth we're referring to isn't simple "honesty" and "trustworthiness". It's \*ultimate\* truth, the full and actual facts about G-d, about life's meaning, and about our relationship to both. Which is to say, Torah and what it reveals to us. And the kind of participation in it we're talking about doesn't only involve delving into Torah, but advocating for it and supporting its teachers as well. After all, what person in pursuit of spiritual excellence wouldn't want to support its very textbook-- Torah-- and her teachers?

Then Rabbeinu Yonah seems to change gears, to our surprise. And to suggest that some less-than-altruistic individuals might imagine that they could somehow or another "make up" for past mistakes by being kind and championing truth. As if G-d could be "bribed", if you will, and convinced to overlook blemishes in our being in light of the fact that we also do good. We're told that that's simply not so. But let's explain.

Each one of us is a melange of self-contradictory drives and elements, and no one on this earth is all this or all that-- for the good or the bad. The worst among us have their good points, and the best among us have their flaws. Each drive and element takes on a life of its own, and each is to be accounted for in the end.

So while I might be kind and support Torah, I might also lie, annoy my neighbors, etc.; and while I might gossip and be lax in my observance, I might also offer a lot of charity, respect elders, etc. And each one of those enters into a mix that G-d alone can analyze.

Since everything I am and do comprises my being, I couldn't hope to undo a bad part of me by doing something good. I could only \*supplement\* the bad with the good. I'd have to do teshuva and

return to G-d for my errors and wrongful ways in order to undo my bad parts. And that's Rabbeinu Yonah's point.

That's to say, expressing kindness and truth will not undo my errors. Teshuva alone will. The expression of kindness and truth would allow me a "grace period"-- an extended period of time to return to G-d before having to suffer the consequences of not doing that. But, again, it does nothing to undo my errors. And assuming otherwise only leads to a false sense of righteousness.

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