

# THE GATES OF REPENTANCE, GATE 1:27

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

The Eighteenth Principle of Teshuva: KEEPING YOUR SIN BEFORE YOU ALL THE TIME

This may be the most challenging principle of them all. Because it flies in the face of two cherished expressions: "forgive and forget", and "get over it".

The truth be known, those expressions are indeed rooted in wisdom. It's just that we've come to misunderstand them. "Forgive and forget" and "get over it" are valuable pieces of advice-- when they're applied to our relations to others. They offer that it would do us well to sincerely forgive others who'd wronged us and apologized. And to then get beyond the hurt and let go of it. But we've come to misinterpret that.

Like so many other good ideas, we've taken to mistakenly apply the advice to *\*ourselves\** alone, rather than to ourselves in relation to others. And we've come to understand "forgive and forget" and "get over it" to mean we're to forgive *\*ourselves\**, forget our *\*own\** misdeeds and "get over" *\*them\**.

The thinking is that if I continue to dwell on my past misdeeds I'll grow weary of myself, develop a sense of low self-worth, lapse into hopelessness, and give up on ever trying to better myself in the end. But Rabbeinu Yonah disagrees.

He's apparently of the mind that if I forget my past sins and come to consider myself spotless that I'll eventually lapse into a sort of dread spiritual arrogance. But that calls for an explanation that's based on the answer to a very legitimate question.

Wouldn't I in fact have been forgiven by G-d for my past sins if I'd returned to Him and done teshuva for them? And if I'd been forgiven for them, wouldn't it be true to say that the "slate had been wiped clean", so to speak, and that I'm no longer guilty of them? So what's the use of dwelling on what once was, but isn't any longer?

At bottom the answer to that is just this: My closeness to G-d had indeed been rectified by my having done teshuva, and the "slate" has absolutely been cleaned. And any relationship I'd had with another person whom I'd hurt, then apologized to in a spirit of teshuva would have been rectified, too.

But my relationship to *\*myself\** and my own spiritual stature would be threatened. Simply because I'd likely grow complacent about myself, I'd compliment myself on my righteousness and all-round goodness. And I'd forget how very capable I still am of reverting back to spiritual mediocrity. (A fact

that's true of all of us, sad to say.)

I would have lapsed into spiritual arrogance. The only solution for that is true humility. The sort rooted in a realistic sense of my full self, which only comes about when I am wise and honest enough to recall \*all\* my capabilities-- good and bad. That's what Rabbeinu Yonah is talking about.

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