

# THE GATES OF REPENTANCE, GATE 1:3

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

Last time, Rabbeinu Yonah revealed the great opportunity for spiritual excellence that teshuva (returning to G-d) really is. This time he describes the sorts of people who wouldn't take advantage of the opportunity. And we find that there are two sorts.

The unlearned, whom Rabbeinu Yonah characterizes as "asleep, inert, and oblivious". And individuals "so alienated from G-d that they don't believe there are consequences to sinning", i.e., to spiritual mediocrity. He then indicates that their opposite is the righteous Torah scholar who's *also* liable to slip into spiritual mediocrity, but who's nonetheless sure to quickly do teshuva. All this calls for explanation.

First off, there's unlearned, and there's unlearned. Most of us are learned, which is to say, we're educated. But not all of us are scholars, nor are all of us analytical or used to doing research. So in a certain sense, very many of us could be said to be relatively unlearned, or unscholarly.

But I dare say most of us aren't "asleep", which is to say, *unaware*. Most of us aren't "inert", which is to say, *dull and blunt*. And certainly very few of us are "oblivious", which is to say, *intellectually and emotionally comatose*. So it's easy to assume that we'd likely be open to teshuva if we knew enough about it and came to realize how important it was to our goal of becoming spiritually excellent.

Still and all oftentimes, the truth be known, we're *kind of* asleep, inert, and oblivious. And we overlook the chance to do teshuva.

Other times we catch ourselves being rather blasé about the fact that our actions have "real world" consequences-- that they affect our very beings as well as others we love. Yet in our more sensitive moments we're certainly capable of acknowledging this. And we either sit stunned and immobilized with the realization of that; or we own up to our moral power, and use it for goodness from then on.

Rabbeinu Yonah's point seems to be that when we are in fact *unaware* of the effect we have on others (i.e., when we're "asleep"); when we're *dull and blunt* when it comes to other people's feelings (i.e., when we're "inert"); and when we're *intellectually and emotionally comatose* (i.e., when we're "oblivious")-- we're also *alienated from G-d*!

After all, our relationship to Him is said to mirror our relationship to others. Consequently, if we're emotionally and spiritually alienated from others, we're alienated from G-d too. And we'd be the sort

of people who wouldn't take advantage of the opportunity to draw close to G-d that teshuva is.

Quite a daunting thought!

What are we to do then? As Rabbeinu Yonah indicated, we're to become \*learned\*, i.e., we'd be wise to become serious, righteous students of Torah. For while they too are only human, and they too are liable to err, they invariably jump at the chance to do teshuva once they realize what they've done. For their Torah studies constantly remind them of teshuva's ultimate goals-- spiritual excellence and closeness to G-d.

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