

THE GATES OF REPENTANCE, GATE 1:4

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

He starts off by delving into some of the stark and chilling reactions people might have to their own spiritual mediocrity, once they begin to truly strive for spiritual excellence. And he refers to *sighing*, *trembling*, *worrying*, and *crying* in reaction to it. We'll take this opportunity to introduce a theme that will come up again and again in our discussions: our reactions to *spiritual* issues as opposed to our reactions to *worldly* issues.

Now, some people would be taken aback by such raw emotional responses like sighing, trembling, etc in the face of spiritual introspection. "After all," they're likely to say, "We're talking about religious issues... not anything that important!"

Yet if (G-d forbid) our career was crumbling, our marriage failing, or our health were being threatened we'd certainly find ourselves sighing, trembling, worrying, and crying, to say the least. Why? Because those sorts of things are clearly important to us all.

It's our contention that spiritual development and the drive to achieve spiritual excellence are certainly important, too. In fact, we contend they're even more important than those others *in the big picture*. And that the sensitive soul in search of spiritual excellence would likely think so, too.

Rabbi Yonah's point in this paragraph then, is that once such sensitive and striving souls would discover to their dismay that they'd lapsed into spiritual mediocrity, they'd surely *sigh*, *tremble*, *worry*, and *cry* in reaction to that.

And he points out that we'd surely never lapse into an instance of spiritual mediocrity *another time* if we'd sighed, trembled, worried, and cried about such a lapse *the first time*. For after all, anyone who'd gone through that once wouldn't want to go through it again!

At this juncture Rabbeinu Yonah goes somewhat into the dynamics of ill judgement. He explains just what would ever move a person to lapse into spiritual mediocrity in the first place.

It comes down to the fact that our all-too-human but decidedly earthy impulses are often swift and aggressive enough to overtake our better judgements. And after all, who among us *hasn't* been thrown into a tailspin by a "crazy impulse" to do something he or she regretted later on, in a more rational moment?

The solution? We're to "ask for advice how to grow in the fear of G-d" and how to "be alert to our impulses' assaults". That's to say, we're to study holy Mussar (ethical, spiritual) texts that divulge the

secrets of great spiritual growth and excellence (i.e., "the fear of G-d"). And we're to read and know our own hearts well enough to know our own failings.

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