

# THE GATES OF REPENTANCE, GATE 1:6

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

Rabbeinu Yonah starts off by citing an enlightening verse from King Solomon's Book of Ecclesiastes. "There is no one on earth (so) righteous that (he only) does good and does not sin" (7:20). Which is to say that each of us-- even the righteous among us-- is capable of sin and spiritual mediocrity from time to time.

Now, the more sensitive among us know only too well our own foibles. After all, who among us could claim to be with G-d, to have the best of intentions, to do just what's right, etc. all the time?

Yet sadly enough, there are times when we actually *\*do\** claim to be fully righteous. And it's usually just as we're about to err, just about to do something wrong. We call that "rationalization".

And it works like this. Tempted with the chance to do something less than uplifting, we take a quick check of the situation, factor in just how happy doing it would make us, then factor in what we just came up with to "prove" that it's perfectly alright to do it, "once you take into consideration that...", and we jump in, thrilled with both our righteousness *\*and\** street-smarts. (Hopefully we soon start to think it over, regret what we did and how we rationalized it, and we draw close to G-d and the side of righteousness once again.)

So, we all go off, and it's only human. The difference, though, between us and the righteous is just this. While they too sin once in a while, as we saw, they become *\*stunned\**, *\*repulsed\** by what they did, and they take it upon themselves never to "fall for that again", if you will-- never to lapse into spiritual mediocrity again-- if they can help it. And they take steps to ensure that.

We, though, often don't react that way. For if you know your heart well enough you'll admit that there are certain known-- even fairly serious-- sins we just don't take all that seriously. That we sort of pick and chose our morals and ideals depending on circumstances, influences, mood, and on "political correctness".

(A quick aside. Ever wonder why nothing's deemed *\*morally\** "correct" or "incorrect" anymore? Why just "politically" so? Assumedly because morals are *\*values\**-based, which implies judgment-- which is itself "politically incorrect"; while politics is *\*power\**-based, and never touches on values. Being "politically correct", then, allows one to be Machiavellian-effective without having to take morals and values into account.)

Nonetheless we're warned that not only would we need to *\*avoid\** sin to achieve spiritual

excellence. We'd also need to take the kinds of inner and outer \*precautions\* against sins that any good physician would have his or her patient take to prevent disease, or to prevent the worsening of an already-existing disease.

To do otherwise, we're told, is to be half-hearted in our search for spiritual excellence. For after all, once we commit ourselves to something as lofty as that, dare we fool ourselves into saying, "Well, I like this, but I don't like that?"

We'd do best to commit ourselves to spiritual excellence with the whole of our being the way anyone committed to any high ideal would.

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