

THE GATES OF REPENTANCE, GATE 1:8

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Many tzaddikim (great and holy ones) like Rabbeinu Yonah seem to transcend space and time, and to speak to the ages. After all, they're divulging immortal truths rooted in Divine Will, and needn't concern themselves with whom they're addressing, or at what point in the continuum their readers live. Other times, though, they speak directly to their generation.

This week we find Rabbeinu Yonah expressing his disappointment in his contemporaries. It seems they'd slipped into spiritual mediocrity and insensitivity in particularly onerous ways. And they were being told just where they went wrong.

It seems, among other things, they were sometimes disingenuous, insensitive, impious, stingy, slanderous, hateful, haughty, and the like. And they were being advised as to how to get back on-course.

What proves to be most off-putting to those of us "overhearing" all this is that we find ourselves falling into the very same ruts, steering off-course the very same ways.

Who among us isn't sometimes disingenuous and can't quite be taken at his or her word? Who isn't insensitive to others' feelings? Who's always pious and never goes off the mark? Who's not stingy and ungenerous from time to time? Who never takes comfort in citing others' faults? And who's never "full of himself"?

So, what's a person who's slipped into such patterns to do? Rabbeinu Yonah's advice both for his contemporaries and us is to keep a record of the day.

In point of fact, many people keep journals that cite the more prosaic or accomplished moments of the day. But the kind of record Rabbeinu Yonah seems to be talking about is closer to the diaries many of us kept when we were younger that listed our fears and triumphs, dreams and realizations.

We're advised to keep a sort of "state of the spirit" diary each day. One in which we'd recount just where we'd striven for spiritual excellence that day, and where we'd settled for mediocrity.

And to read from it from time to time in order to stay the course, and to allow for the deepening of the self that is teshuva (the process of returning to G-d).

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