

# THE GATES OF REPENTANCE, GATE 1:9

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

As we indicated early on, this paragraph serves as the end of Rabbeinu Yonah's "introduction" to "The Gates of Repentance", and it reiterates his point that what teshuva is, is the process of drawing closer to G-d. From here on we go to the major thrust of this first gate-- the 20 principles of teshuva.

What those principles will prove to be are means of going deeper into ourselves to discover what our spiritual motivations and ideals are, and means of achieving spiritual excellence.

We'll discover that they're not a linear, ordered list of issues we'd need to delve into and work on. Because there'll be times when principle 13 (for example) comes into play, to be followed by principle 3, perhaps.

They'll also prove to be \*barometers\* of where we stand on a particular spiritual plane at any one time. I might find (for example) that I've already come to realize principle 5, but that I'm nowhere near having realized principle 19, perhaps.

And Rabbeinu Yonah's other point in presenting us with the 20 principles is to indicate that there are \*degrees\* of teshuva and consequent closeness to G-d; that they go from slight and surface-deep, to intense and all-encompassing; and that we each waiver in our closeness to Him from time to time in various and complex ways.

At different times in the very same life-period, year, day, \*moment\*, we go from level to level of closeness to G-d. In fact, there are moments when we're actually on two different planes at the same time.

But in order to lay out the degrees of closeness to Him in a linear fashion we'd offer that there are times when we merely acknowledge G-d's presence; others when moved to call upon Him; others when we enjoy a more palpable awareness of Him; others when we have a rather clear, intimate awareness of His presence; and others when we perhaps enjoy a full-throttled, deep and fulfilling closeness to Him.

Rabbeinu Yonah makes a couple of final points here. One is that teshuva involves the \*cleansing of your heart\* till it glistens. For each one of us is either spotted, streaked or stained in our beings. We might have sullied our words, done what we'd later regretted having done, dwelt upon unthinkable things, or perhaps been mischievous inside and out, by degrees. We'd do well to change course knowing that.

And his final point is that training in teshuva is best started when one is young. When he or she is free enough to dedicate the necessarily hours and years to the fine and subtle art of self-knowledge and self-mastery. But that every rung up the ladder is an accomplishment, nonetheless; and that each one of us is capable of spiritual excellence.

From this point on, we'll be discussing the principles of teshuva in terms of our spiritual status, as we've been doing all along. But also in terms of our purity of heart at any one moment, and in relation to our closeness to G-d.

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