

THE GATES OF REPENTANCE, GATE 2 INTRODUCTION

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Gate Two: "Guidance in the Instances in Which You Can Be Moved to Return to G-d"

Rabbeinu Yonah is about to offer us 6 instances in which we're likely to be moved to teshuva (to return to G-d). And he points out that the particular instances in which *you're* personally moved to teshuva say a lot about you, as well as about your spiritual station. For if our tastes in clothes, furniture, and the like tell a lot about us, our "tastes" in the things that would motivate us to draw close to G-d certainly tell a lot about us, too-- on another, deeper level.

The instances are:

1. when you're overrun by troubles,
2. when you grow old,
3. when you're admonished by a sage,
4. when you delve into Torah,
5. when you face the onset of the Ten Days of Repentance, and
6. when you realize how vulnerable and mortal you are.

If I'm likely to draw close to G-d when I'm suffering, for example, that may indicate that I'm either willing to learn my lessons, or that I'd been shallow until that point.

If old age motivates me in that direction, I'm either a realist, or perhaps I'd been too enamored with prowess and power.

If a sage's admonishments touch me, I'm either easily swayed by wisdom, or perhaps I'm the sort of person who needs to be prodded by others.

If I'm motivated by Torah study, either the urge to draw close to G-d was just beneath the surface, or perhaps I just have to see things in black and white.

If the onset of the Ten Days of Repentance (the period of time spanning the beginning of Rosh Hashanna to the end of Yom Kippur) draws me closer to G-d in my heart, either I have a high respect for tradition, or perhaps only the sight of others engaging in things inspires me.

And if I'm inspired enough by the realization of how vulnerable and mortal I am in fact, I'm either more honest than others, or perhaps I'm of a darker frame of mind.

We'll discuss all 6 instances in depth later on.

It's pointed out that while indeed one or more of these instances would surely touch the heart of most, it would still and all be best to be *self*-motivated to draw close to G-d. For while each of these instances is a unique moment of import and clarity, they nonetheless come upon us from the outside, in. And it would be best for us to foster an inner longing.

We come upon that two ways: by living a moral life, and by honing our relationship to G-d.

We're to strive for moral "innocence" (which comes down to honesty and the fostering of a sort of kinetic goodness), "devotion" (to G-d and His mitzvot), and "purity" (of intention and ambition).

And we're to hone a true, heart-felt "fear and love G-d, and be abashed in His presence". That's to say, we're to be so thunderstruck by His palpable, muscular presence in the world that we're truly moved to draw close to Him.

Interestingly enough, Rabbeinu Yonah refers to that as "remembering" G-d.

May G-d grant us all the wisdom to be moved to teshuva of our own volition. But may He also grant us the humility to take advantage of the 6 instances in which we're likely to do teshuva if we don't come to it on our own.

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