

# THE GATES OF REPENTANCE, GATE 2:4

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

## **The Fourth Instance: WHEN YOU DELVE INTO TORAH**

If you accept Torah as true and right; if you accept that it's the very name of G-d spelled out full and bold; and if you accept that it was given us as a gift outright, awash with love and chock-full of the very secrets of the universe.. it's only natural that you'd take what's said there in awe and wonder, and that you'd be loathe to go against it.

Such a person-- who is by definition in search of spiritual excellence-- would be moved to teshuva (to return to G-d) each time he or she delves into a Torah text, much the way an opera aficionado would be moved to tears and depth of emotion every time he or she would sit down to an opera (though there's really no comparison).

To be sure, though, there are opera aficionados, and there are opera tourists, if you will. People who'll sit through an opera in order to claim to have done that, or in order to be dazzled for a time by the scenery and costumes. They miss all the subtleties and nuances, and are neither moved nor transformed by the experience.

There are likewise Torah tourists, so to speak, who will sit through a Torah lecture, skim a couple of pages here or there in a Torah text, or pick away at the history or science therein (which is simply far from the point). As opposed to Torah aficionados, who live to sit quietly and drink in the pure bliss and poignancies of Torah.

Rabbeinu Yonah's point is that a true Torah aficionado would be quickly moved to teshuva when coming upon something said in the Torah that was somehow in dissonance with his or her personality. He or she couldn't help but be thunderstruck by the contrast, and would start to improve and draw close to G-d.

He then cites a statement by the sages that's quite daunting. "It would have been better for the person who studies and does not fulfill to have had his face turned over in his afterbirth than to have been born" (J.T., Berachot 1:2).

That's to say that those of us who \*do\* delve into the holy Torah-- who might in fact be aficionados-- who nonetheless don't take it quite to heart, and don't apply it to our relation to G-d and to people in our lives, would have been better off not having been born. Since we'd have betrayed our life's goal, which is spiritual excellence. And we'd have blundered away our own inner resources day after day.

At bottom, though, Rabbeinu Yonah's point is that we're presented with an opportunity for teshuva each and every time we study Torah in depth-- as long as we take it to heart, and incorporate its values.

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