

# THE GATES OF REPENTANCE, GATE 2:5

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

## **The Fifth Instance: WHEN YOU FACE THE ONSET OF THE TEN DAYS OF TESHUVA**

The days between Rosh Hashanna and Yom Kippur are known as the "Ten Days of Teshuva", since they're the most auspicious and daunting days of the Jewish year, and the time when we're most likely to engage in teshuva (returning to G-d). After all, it's the time of year when each one of us passes before G-d Almighty's eyes and is judged.

Which is to say that it's the time of year when we're each \*adjudged\* for who we are by now, given all our talents and in light of our circumstances; and when G-d offers a \*decision\* as to what will be our lot in the year to come as a consequence.

To use a common-enough analogy most of us experience, there comes an "auspicious and daunting" time in a course of a business cycle when our employer compares and contrasts our achievements with what's expected of us. And either deems us successful or not, after which he or she determines whether we'll retain our position or not, or be promoted or demoted in the year to come. Those are the times when people try to ensure their status and do all they can to better their skills-- i.e., when they engage in a form of secular "teshuva", if you will, though there's really no comparison.

Rabbeinu Yonah advises us to prepare for the trial we're about to face as seriously as we'd prepare for an actual day in court. After all, if you were facing a court date "wouldn't you shudder and tremble, mull over ideas, and do everything you possibly could, as quickly as you could" to succeed (in Rabbeinu Yonah's words)? That is, wouldn't you focus all your attention on the impending trial, scrutinize the evidence in your favor and against you, hire the best attorney, and pray?

You should consequently do the same in preparation for the great "trial" about to come your way in the course of this special season-- by "set(ing) aside periods of time in the course of the day and night to be alone in your room, and scrutiniz(ing) and examin(ing) your ways,... ris(ing) up in the early morning in order to do teshuva and rectify your deeds, and to pour out supplications, pray, implore, and plead."

But it's also important to point out that the Ten Days of Teshuva is a very propitious time of the year, as well. It's the time when we're advised to "Seek G-d out" since that's when 'He can be found' (Isaiah 55:6)-- when He's most approachable, if you will.

The lesson seems to be, then, that the Ten Days of Teshuva are of a double nature. They're defined by an impending trial, to be sure. But nonetheless by a personal audience with the Judge, and a chance to lay out your case, defend yourself in your own words, unpack your laden heart, and show just how sincere you are in your determination to improve yourself, and to thus draw close to the Judge Himself.

For indeed while all trials are threatening, they're also opportunities for reparation, recognition, and resolution. The soul in search of spiritual excellence would look forward to such a moment, when given the chance for it.

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