

THE GATES OF REPENTANCE, GATE 3:5

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Last time we touched on how our thoughts and feelings can draw us closer to or further away from spiritual excellence. This time we examine how what we say or don't say does that. The first subject Rabbeinu Yonah addresses in that context is that of mentioning G-d's name.

We personally find it curious that G-d's name is uttered so often by non-believers, yet so rarely by believers. The difference is that non-believers mention His name flippantly, irreverently, and railingy. While believers are reticent to mention it either because they'd rather not mention it in vain-- or because they'd rather not appear so "religious".

But be that as it may, there are simply points at which it's inappropriate to cite G-d's name. Because doing so would indicate a certain lack of love for Him or respect. And a soul in search of spiritual excellence would never want to be "out of love" with or disrespectful of G-d Almighty.

So we're advised not to mention His name, for example, if we ourselves are unclean or if we find ourselves in an unclean place. It's also suggested that we only mention His name when we determine we're in a state of holiness. (This too might explain why believers don't cite G-d's name all that often.)

Jewish courts would have relevant parties take oaths in G-d's name, in antiquity. Hence we're also warned not to take false oaths, since that would entail taking G-d's name in vain. In fact, it's even praiseworthy not to take any "electable" oaths, even where justified. So as to avoid taking G-d's name lightly.

And we're certainly never to curse anyone through the name of G-d; or to say things like, "so help me G-d!"

Now on to other ways we either augment or diminish our beings by what we say. We're enjoined not to verbally abuse anyone by perhaps reminding him or her of a flawed past which he or she hadn't done teshuva (returned to G-d) for. And not to belittle anyone who'd been placed in a vulnerable position.

We're warned not to "place an impediment before the blind" (Leviticus 19:14). Aside from the literal meaning of the words, the Torah also means for us not to take advantage of or exploit someone else's lack of know-how or insight, or his naivete. Hence we'd be best off only offering advice altruistically rather than for self-serving purposes, to not go about bearing tales about someone

behind his back, and the like.

For though, the truth be known, nothing would fit better with our need to prove ourselves competent or praiseworthy than doing just that, it's low and mean.

Because so much of our being and so many of our deeds are affected by our conversations, we're also advised not to talk about idolatry and the like, or to foster conflict in our communities (when it's for untoward purposes).

And we're bidden never to demean Torah scholars. Since they hold the key to our understanding G-d's ways in the world, and His wishes for us.

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