

# THE GATES OF REPENTANCE, GATE 3:6

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

As we said we would at the outset, we've omitted quite a number of mitzvot from the Third Gate because we wanted to focus on especially spiritual themes here. So we go all the way down to the kinds of things we'd need to avoid in order not to lose a place in The World to Come.

We'll soon explain the gist of the World to Come, but we'd need to address something else beforehand: the meaning of life. Obviously, we haven't the space to delve into that here. So we ask your kind indulgence as we cite a thing or two from Rabbeinu Yonah (as absurd as doing it that way would be) and hope that you'll follow through on these ideas in other classical Jewish works.

As Rabbeinu Yonah puts it, "We were created to bring honor to G-d" and "to sanctify His name". That's to say that we were created for the express purpose of sensing G-d's Presence so viscerally that we're moved to do all we could to obey, revere, and worship Him. And to get to the point where we actually become \*hurt\* when His honor is besmirched, and would do all we could to restore it.

He also says later on in this section that among the ways to sanctify G-d's name (i.e., to restore G-d's honor) is to "indicate with everything you say, every blink of your eye and every action and movement of your hand, that what underlies man's existence, where his prominence lies, and what is so becoming, important, exalted and valuable about him is his service to and fear of G-d and His Torah".

Hence we see that our whole *raison d'être* is to serve and revere G-d; which is to say, to foster an intimacy with Him that takes the enormity and sheer metaphysical muscle of His full Being into account \*right here in the world\*. But as we'll soon indicate, this same intimacy -- and then some -- can go on into eternity in the World to Come.

He also says that if we want to achieve spiritual excellence we'd need to be sure not to fall into the trap of thinking that serving and thus drawing close to G-d isn't the most important thing we can do in our lives. Or that something else matters more. For those are the very attitudes that lead to spiritual mediocrity and to the sort of banality of the soul we find around us so often.

Now that that's clear, and we know what we need to concentrate on, it would do us well to discover something of the makeup of the World to Come, as we said we would. For -- and this is our point here -- those who commit the prohibitions enumerated below will not experience it. Unless of course they do *teshuvah* (return to G-d) wholeheartedly and deeply. For indeed the underlying theme of Rabbeinu Yonah's "The Gates of Repentance" (the text which this series of classes is based on) is

that *every* mishap can be rectified, every breach mended.

Rabbeinu Yonah refers to the World to Come as the experience of "true life everlasting". That's to say that it's the sort of eternity's worth of nourishment from, and intimacy and closeness to G-d he later refers to as the "great light that encompasses all delight". And while we indicated above that that can also be enjoyed to a degree in the world, that degree of it can only be had for "a lifetime" (which sounds *so* long to us, but proves to be so short in the long run). While the sort of spiritual bliss and lushness we're promised in the World to Come lasts forever, and it far, far transcends any worldly experience of G-d we might have.

Just what, then, are some of the things that would yank us away from this sort of eternal bliss, and rudely anchor us to a hollow life?

For one thing, going out of your way to commit some rather well-known sins purposefully, brazenly, unabashedly, and for all to see, like eating unkosher foods, and desecrating the Sabbath and Holy Days (though the reader would be wise to take the adverbs we attached above into account). Some of us might be taken aback by this. "Does eating kosher and being Sabbath observant really matter all *that* much?" they'd ask. "Doesn't being a good and kind person count, too?"

The short answer is that, yes, being good and kind certainly does lay the groundwork for spiritual excellence, as we've been saying all along in fact. But in the end our deeds must match our character. And a truly good and kind person would somehow or another come to the point where he or she realizes that indeed eating kosher and being Sabbath observant really *does* matter all that much. (So much more can and should be said about this, but we feel compelled to go on.)

Other World to Come denying acts and attitudes include refusing to believe that the Torah is Heaven-sent; claiming that some of it is pedestrian at best and fabricated at worst; and confusing Torah expertise with mere scholarship and thus demeaning Torah scholars while lauding wrongdoers.

Sad to say, we clearly admire a lot of wrongdoers today. Mostly because we haven't many spiritually and morally great models to emulate, and far too many paragons of unholiness. So perhaps one of the final points Rabbeinu Yonah makes here should stand out as a lesson for us all.

He indicates that our spiritual standing is best evidenced by who and what we praise. And that anyone who "praises good deeds, sages, and the righteous, ... is himself good and basically righteous" at bottom. Since we are what we admire. He even goes so far as to say that even if such a person had committed his share of sins, he'd nonetheless be accredited with being "a lover of righteousness" and as someone who's "rooted in what's right". And he'll be regarded as "a member of the community of those who honor G-d" in the end.

What that comes to teach us is to strive for closeness to those great souls there are out there, if nothing else, if we're to ever achieve spiritual excellence. And to not only learn to emulate their

ways, but to draw sustenance from their loftiness and partner ourselves to them on one level or another.

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