

THE GATES OF REPENTANCE, GATE 3:9

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

We indicated last time that we were about to embark on a fairly long discussion of issues that come up when we interact with others. And we focused there on the first of the four character types that invariably offend others most especially, "maligners". We focus now on the second type, "liars".

Lying is so, so pervasive in our day and age, and so acceptable, that it hardly seems prudent to mention it and thus indict so many otherwise good people. But the wise will take Rabbeinu Yonah's revelations to heart, and be moved to do teshuva (to return to G-d); and the statements will have served a good end as a consequence. We take succor from Rabbeinu Yonah's statement that honesty is indeed a "basic instinct of the human spirit", though. And we're thus reminded that we'd all prefer to be honest if we could.

Nonetheless the person in search of spiritual excellence couldn't help but notice how pervasive lying is-- even on his or her own part.

We're taught that there are nine categories of liars. The first are outright heinous liars who can't be trusted for anything, and they include people who are underhanded in business or who use subtle innuendoes that can't be pin-pointed as lies.

The second kind of liar is exemplified by the "con artist" who coaxes someone into believing he's his friend and confidant, when he's not at all.

The third kind undermine others through some sort of ruse. They don't actually rob or assault anyone. What they do is connive and swindle their victims into giving them something.

The fourth kind make things up or change things around when they relate things to others-- oftentimes without being aware of what they're doing. As a rule, though, such people just *love* to lie, and they're utterly inspired by the infinite creative possibilities of untruth.

The fifth is the type of person who tells someone he's going to do him a favor or give him something when he knows from the outset that he's not going to do it.

The sixth kind promises to do someone a favor or give him a gift and actually means to, then winds up not doing so, which is tantamount to breaking a covenant and a trust.

The seventh is the kind of person who deludes someone into believing he'd done him a favor or complimented him, when he hadn't at all.

The eighth type extol themselves for qualities they don't have, or exaggerate the ones they do.

And the ninth don't actually lie about things so much as change things around simply because it brings them some sort of satisfaction.

But don't fall into the trap of saying bitterly, "Oh, I know people just like that!" Because, the truth be known, we're each guilty of some or all of this.

While you may not be an outright liar (or you just may be), have you never gained someone's confidence and somehow taken advantage of that? Have you never come up with some sort of ruse to get something from someone? Have you never "changed things around" or sort of tweaked at the edges of truth? Have you never promised something you knew you couldn't fulfill, or didn't follow through on a promise you intended to keep? Have you never somehow or another convinced someone you'd done him a favor or complimented him to others when you hadn't? Have you never bragged about things you've never accomplished or made the things you'd done seem greater than they were? And have you never at least changed things around to your advantage to avoid embarrassment, perhaps?

Not a person among us hasn't lapsed into spiritual mediocrity that way. It would thus do us all well to take this to heart, rather than lie to *ourselves* about our innocence as we often do.

[Subscribe](#) to *Spiritual Excellence* and receive the class via e-mail.