

THE GATES OF REPENTANCE, GATE 4:1

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Now that we're entering the last of the four gates we find ourselves coming full circle, and expanding upon a theme we introduced at the very beginning of this work. We'll quote from what we said there, and expand upon it here.

We pointed out that "the ultimate theme of 'The Gates of Repentance' and the meaning of teshuva itself is drawing close to G-d. For when we sin, we draw away from G-d, so to speak.... But when we do teshuva, we return to Him..., we return everything to its rightful place in our relationship to Him and in the world. We return our soul to the purer, clearer spiritual position it occupied before that sin was committed."

We then added that we can thus draw *closer yet* to G-d "the way a couple who'd somehow hurt each other's feelings, then apologized and made amends, would then find themselves even closer than before after the fact."

Drawing on the analogy between our relationship with others to our link to G-d we'll make the point here, in this gate, that sometimes apologizing and making amends isn't enough. Because there are instances in which the wrong done and the hurt felt is simply too deep to slip away (if one could say that G-d "hurts"). And sometimes more formidable measures are called for.

That's what we'll be concentrating on from here on, in our treatment of "The Gates of Repentance"-- more serious wrongs, deeper hurts, and formidable measures. As well as ultimate Divine forgiveness, atonement, and amends.

Rabbeinu Yonah comes to indicate all this by pointing out that the soul becomes ill, in a way, when we sin. And that the sort of teshuva (means of returning to G-d) we'd addressed to now acts as a remedy-- usually. Sometimes, though, the sort of healing that teshuva allows for isn't enough.

For as he puts it, it's a fact of life that "you sometimes find a body starting to heal, then nearly fully healing but still not entirely free of disease until the patient ingests a bitter tonic..." His point is that "that's also true of a soul infected with serious sin." The person who'd committed such a sin and had so separated him- or herself from G-d would indeed have to ingest a "bitter tonic" of a different sort.

As such, some serious sins bring tribulation in their wake; others hang over our head, so to speak, until Yom Kippur (when they're finally forgiven); and yet others can't be undone our whole life long. There are, however, always means of amelioration, as Rabbeinu Yonah will soon point out. Some of

those other means will be the focus of this last gate, too.

We'll delve into other serious sins that call for amelioration soon enough. But for now we'll concentrate on an infamous one: profaning G-d's name. That sin is based on the following.

Souls in search of spiritual excellence try their best to do good and to avoid wrongdoing. And when they follow that path for years and years, not only are they imbued with a certain intangible elegance and dignity from G-d, they're also held to a higher standard by Him-- *and by us*.

After all, they represent what's best in humankind, and what we ourselves **feel** we're capable of, but which we still and all don't know how to achieve. So when a person truly in search of spiritual excellence-- who has actually achieved some modicum of it-- steps forward, he or she represents the best of the rest of us-- and he represents G-d, too.

So when he somehow or another does or says something off the mark, it's noticed. And on a very deep and subliminal level, G-d (and the human potential) is made to look "bad" in others' eyes. Such a person is said to have "profaned G-d's name" by doing that-- to have lowered G-d's esteem on earth, if one can say as much.

Hence, profaning G-d's name is so catastrophic a "disease" that it's utterly "fatal". Unless the person guilty of it follows the ensuing "medical protocol".

He'd have to turn full circle and *sanctify* G-d's name. Which is to say, He'd have to do things that would restore G-d's reputation and raise His esteem among the rest of us, and have us "admire" (i.e., worship) Him again with renewed vigor.

But what could such a person do to sanctify G-d's name? He can go out of his way to "speak of G-d's might and glory, and of the majesty of His rule", as Rabbeinu Yonah puts it. And he can make it a point to uphold the truth that the Torah embodies, "help others searching for faith, and to eradicate untruth and injustice" in the world. "Because," as he puts it, "spreading truth and restoring it to its full strength brings honor to G-d" like nothing else.

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