

THE GATES OF REPENTANCE, GATE 4:2

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

As we pointed out last time, just as there are things we do that hurt our beloved so deeply that a mere apology wouldn't do, there are likewise things we do that "hurt" G-d so much that they call for more than teshuva (returning to Him). We cited how deeply profaning His name erodes at our relationship to G-d then; we'll go on now to cite three other instances of relationship-threatening situations.

The first comes involves our purposefully and deliberately bypassing a mitzvah that we're asked to fulfill, like praying daily, eating matzoh on Passover, etc. We're taught that if we indeed bypass such a mitzvah, but we then have our regrets and engage in teshuva, that our "dalliance" will be forgiven on the spot.

But it would serve us well to offer a sacrifice to G-d in that instance, aside from engaging in teshuva, we're taught. Since, by definition, a sacrifice (the Hebrew word for which is related to "karove", the term for "close") vouchsafes closeness to G-d. And it would be analogous to my bringing a gift to the one I'd hurt and apologized to.

Now that we no longer have the Holy Temple we can't do that, of course (though we hope it will rebuilt by the time you read this). So we're taught that we can accomplish much the same by reciting and delving into the Torah verses having to do with burnt-offerings (Leviticus 1:1-17, 6:1-6), along with the Talmudic insights.

The second instance involves our purposefully and deliberately doing something we're asked *not* to, like eating something unkosher, defaming someone, etc. We're taught in that instance that if we have our regrets for acting that way and engage in teshuva, that we'll indeed be forgiven-- but not right away. We'd have to wait until the next **Yom Kippur**. This waiting period would be something like a "cooling off period" two people who love each other but hurt each other's feelings might have to experience before they could truly reconcile.

Many of us simply misunderstand the implications of Yom Kippur. We see it as a harsh day of fasting, brow-beating, flagellation, and the like. The truth of the matter is, though, that while not easy, Yom Kippur could very well be taken as a day of spiritual therapy, if you will-- a "retreat" away from it all, a day-long program of insight and self-revelation in which one simply doesn't have the chance or the inclination to take the time to eat. To use our analogy to a relationship, it's also to be taken as a day of rapprochement between us and the Beloved we'd drawn away from.

We help the process along, ironically, by eating more so than usual the day **before** Yom Kippur. But not merely to fill our bellies and assuage our fear that we're going to "starve to death" by fasting the next day. We're taught that we're to eat well the eve of Yom Kippur to *celebrate* the fact that Yom Kippur is approaching and that we have a chance to reconcile with G-d; and in order to fortify ourselves for the extra prayers and entreaties we'll be offering the next day (Yom Kippur itself).

And the third instance involves our purposefully and deliberately committing an act that would have incurred excision (i.e., being "cut off" from G-d and the world) or a court-inflicted death penalty when the Holy Temple still stood in Jerusalem. The kinds of sins we're referring to here involve engaging in certain blasphemous and nefarious deeds. Those kinds of serious sins would indeed be forgiven if the person committing them would engage in teshuva and experience Yom Kippur. But he would have to endure a certain amount of trial and tribulation in his life before being fully atoned for. And that would be analogous to the very real anguish and pain the person who had hurt his beloved's feelings would experience knowing that he'd seriously threatened their relationship, and that the two of them might never reconcile.

But you can temper that anguish, and thus undo some of the tribulation you'd suffer, by being more charitable. For, after all, what trial and tribulation is at bottom is having to do without, and suffering a loss of one sort or another, etc. So when we **voluntarily** "suffer a loss" by giving to another, we abrogate the need to "suffer" any other way.

If you can't afford to contribute money per se, then console and sympathize with the poor and act as their advocate to others who can afford to help them; donate your time and energy to others by perhaps visiting the sick, burying the dead, and the like; and study Torah for other than self-serving purposes. If the degree of your sin deserves it, then take it upon yourself to fast more than would be expected, do without other things you ordinarily enjoy for a time, or endure a share of vexation and sorrow for what you'd done.

And if you do indeed have to suffer trial and tribulation despite your best efforts (or at any time, regardless of your having sinned or not), understand that they may very well be the sorts of "admonishments out of love" that G-d expresses toward us. We're taught that He often does that to somehow or another better us, and to give us the opportunity to step back and learn the lessons we need to, which we wouldn't otherwise take the time to.

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