

THE GATES OF REPENTANCE, GATE 4:3

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

We'll return to our discussion of the sorts of things we might do to seriously threaten our relationship to G-d, and how to make amends for them. And that will bring us to the very end of "The Gates of Repentance".

We discovered earlier on that we bring on serious breaches in our relationship to G-d when we engage in the sorts of heinous things that would have incurred excision (i.e., being "cut off" from G-d and the world) or a court-imposed death sentence when the Holy Temple still stood. We were told then that we'd only undo those sorts of sins through teshuva (returning to G-d) after having to endure trials and tribulations.

Rabbeinu Yonah offers here that other things, though, take the place of trial and tribulations-- aside from the ones he offered earlier on. They include taking those incursions so much to heart that you'd seem to be haunted and consumed by them.

That's not to suggest that you lapse into melancholy about your sins, G-d forbid! Only that you be as obsessed by them, if you will, as you'd be about anything worldly you wanted very much that slipped by you. After all, you'd have allowed your precious relationship to G-d to go by the waysides!

Rabbeinu Yonah then ends off by returning to the idea of engaging in true, heart-felt teshuva on Yom Kippur. He reminds us that though teshuva on Yom Kippur does indeed draw us closer to G-d once again, it nonetheless doesn't necessarily draw us closer to the *people* we offended that year.

In order to be atoned for our sins against them we'd need to go to them in all humility and ask them for their forgiveness, and *then* return to G-d as well. And if you have to (because the person you offended refuses to forgive you), you'd do well to try again and again.

There's a question as to whether you should recall all the sins you'd ever committed against G-d each and every Yom Kippur, or whether it's better to "let bygones be bygones", so to speak, and to just admit the mistakes you made that year alone.

There's actually a strong case to be made *against* enunciating your sins over and over again. First because if you did, you'd seem to be indicating that G-d hadn't forgiven you for those past errors already. Second, because you'd seem to be indicating that you'd only lapsed in the distant past and not more recently. And third, because you'd almost seem to be *boasting* about your past sins by citing them over and over again.

So we're taught that while we should indeed always remember how flawed we'd been in the past (since that would keep us humble, and remind us of how to better ourselves), we nonetheless shouldn't utter those sins in our confessions to G-d on following Yom Kippurs. (Some do say, though, that it's perhaps a good idea to at least *pray* about earlier sins, then. Because, in Rabbeinu Yonah's words, "there might be some you either hadn't thought of or remembered and hence hadn't confessed to" in the past).

And returning to the inspiring and consoling theme he started this work off with, Rabbeinu Yonah then concludes by saying, "ever so kind, G-d even forgives those who rebel against Him-- when they return to Him wholeheartedly."

We've indeed come to the very end of our sojourn through "The Gates of Repentance". We've managed to sense the preciousness of our bond to G-d Almighty. And we've come to realize how important staying the course of spiritual excellence is when it comes to strengthening that bond.

We've learned how best to return to Him when we've estranged ourselves from Him (Gate One); we've come upon the instances in which we're most likely to be moved to return to Him (Gate Two); we've discovered the sorts of thoughts, words and deeds that could set up such a schism between us and Him (Gate Three); and we've determined some of the things we'd have to do if we'd lapsed into more serious breaches and jeopardized our relationship to G-d in a more profound way (Gate Four).

Our prayer now is that G-d grant us the wisdom to take what we've learned to heart, to charge ahead toward true and inspired spiritual excellence, and to better ourselves and our world in the process.

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