

PART 37: CHAPTER 7, VERSES 17 - 21

by Rabbi Yitzchak Schwartz

17. *What is man that You should make him important by taking notice of him?*
18. *That You should remember him every morning, and examine him every second?*
19. *How long will You not refrain from hitting me? You don not loosen Your hand from me even for the time it takes for me to swallow my saliva.*
20. *If I sin, what do I do to You, watcher of mankind? Why do You set me as Your target to hit me as if I was a burden to You?*
21. *And why don't You forgive my sin and overlook my transgression, since now I am going to die and lie in the earth; and then when You inquire after me, I will no longer be.*

Commentary:

Now Iyov begins to refute Elifaz's viewpoint that G-d exercises providence and scrutiny over man's behavior. How important is man that G-d should watch over him even in a casual way. Doesn't G-d have more important things to tend to than to examine my deeds and situation each day and every moment?

According to Elifaz, Iyov's suffering is directly orchestrated by the G-d of judgment. Iyov's physical condition is desperate. His body and soul are so ravished that he requires continuous monitoring. The slightest variance in his physical and emotional state could push him to the brink of death or emotional collapse. From a human perspective there can be only two possible reasons for such intense involvement in Iyov's desperate situation. Either Iyov is on the receiving end of horrible revenge; that requires the avenger to keep close tabs on the physical condition of his victim in order to preserve him alive for further torture. Or he is the recipient of a gift of love from G-d in order to secure him a greater portion in the world to-come than he previously deserved.

Elifaz claims that it is the latter. Iyov is unwilling to accept either option. After all, how great can a

crime be when committed by a mortal against the omnipotent G-d. Surely the results of his actions cannot be so powerful as to elicit such intensive involvement. Rather than administering such banal minutiae as boils and skin ulcers, the omnipotent G-d could simply press the undo button and correct the damage inflicted by the deeds of His human creature. Indeed it is the omnipotence of G-d, His eminence of stature, that removes him from involvement in the arena of human affairs. Are man's negative actions, i.e. his sins, so far reaching that G-d needs to **protect** Himself with wrath and revenge.

Iyov wonders; what positive purpose is there in sustaining my life? Does G-d have any benefit from my ongoing suffering? The amount of attention and care required to administer my afflictions in just the correct dose; strong enough to debilitate me, but less than a lethal potency, is surely not worth G-d's time and effort.

Here is Iyov's big error. Iyov claims that G-d is **too** great. His exalted stature catapults Him right out of the human arena. This is not only an erroneous observation, but potentially the basis for a very dangerous philosophy, the likes of which are only too familiar to human history. It is very convenient to remove G-d from our realm of activity. Life demands so much more responsibility when someone is looking over your shoulder. When that **someone** is G-d it can become quite daunting.

There are two ways out of this discomfort. The first is to deny G-d's existence. That solves all problems of guilt and responsibility. It also can turn man into an animal of monstrous proportions. The second way is to abide to a very religious theology that puts G-d at the top of a very tall pyramid. In fact, it is so tall that G-d **cannot**, or chooses not to look down to the bottom. The end result of this philosophy can be the same as the former.

There is often an additional hidden motivation for developing these type of viewpoints. If G-d is so great; man must be quite small. This may be the greatest affliction of human ego in our time. Freud reduced man to a bundle of emotional drives, Darwinism degraded us to descendants of apes. Man has been stripped of his true glory as the image [figuratively not physically] of G-d on this world. The discomfort that accompanies the **big brother** syndrome is more that compensated for by the honor that G-d has chosen man to carry out the greatest mission of all times, i.e. the elevation of human character and behavior to the level of the Divine. This is perhaps the most important thought to ponder on the days of judgment that are upon us. May we all be inscribed in the book of life for a healthy and prosperous new year.

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