

# CHAPTER 4:7 MAN'S STANDING IN THIS WORLD, AND THE SPECIFIC WAYS AVAILABLE TO HIM

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

## *Derech Hashem -- The Way of G-d 1:4:7*

There are two sorts of activities over-all <sup>1</sup>: the ones you do because G-d Himself rules that you must, which encompasses all of His mitzvahs; and the ones you do for one personal reason or another, which are the things you do for your own material benefit <sup>2</sup>. As we'd already explained, you engage in the mitzvahs in order to follow G-d's charges and fulfill His will. You do that, incidentally, on two levels at the same time when you fulfill a mitzvah: first, by doing the specific thing He asked you to do just then <sup>3</sup>; and secondly, by perfecting yourself in the process in the way that only that mitzvah can enable you to <sup>4</sup> as G-d wants you to so as to benefit from His benevolence <sup>5</sup>.

When it comes to the sorts of things you do for personal reasons, you'd need to be sure that they accord with G-d's will and don't involve anything forbidden. And they should be motivated by the need to maintain your health and well-being rather than to just satisfy your urges. You'd also do best to intend to serve G-d well and energetically when you do them <sup>6</sup>.

Doing that will lead toward personal perfection, it will allow you to achieve the high standing that mitzvah-performance allows for <sup>7</sup>, and it will enable you to ennoble all of creation in the process <sup>8</sup> since it will have been used to serve G-d <sup>9</sup>.

Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> ... that we're to "apply ... to this end without ever wavering from it", as cited at the end of 1:4:6. That's why *sinful* activities aren't mentioned here though they comprise a large percentage of our activities as well, sad to say.

<sup>2</sup> This is based on the following dilemma: we learned in the previous segment that we were to "constantly engage with G-d", "attach ourselves onto Him", and to "apply all of our activities to that end." But the truth be known, we engage in many, many things that seem to have nothing to do with G-d. For while we may in fact do what we can to fulfill His mitzvot and thus draw close to Him, as well as to avoid the sorts of things that would alienate us from Him, much of what we do can best be

termed "discretionary" or mundane, and seems to have nothing to do with Him. So how can we ever hope to draw close to Him given that fact? Fortunately there's a way. And it's based on the metaphysical phenomenon depicted below.

<sup>3</sup> By praying just then, celebrating a particular Holy Day at the time, giving charity to a particular cause being solicited, etc.

<sup>4</sup> That's to say that my donating to a particular worthy cause just then not only helps the cause and does good in the world, it also helps me on a very deep level and rectifies errors I might have made along the way touching on not being charitable. For in fact, G-d wants both to happen -- both the inherent good, and the repair.

See *Da'at Tevunot* 160.

<sup>5</sup> See 1:2:1 above as well as *Klallei Pitchei Chochma v'Da'at* 1.

But, again, those situations only come up once in a while. So what are we to do the rest of the time to better the world and ourselves? We're thus told that we can grant the same potency and possibility to nearly all the more ancillary things we occupy ourselves with in the course of the day ("nearly all" because what's about to be said can't be applied to illegal, immoral, or inconsiderate items or acts).

<sup>6</sup> That is, you should have in mind that your engaged in them since no one can do much to draw close to G-d when he or she is ill or debilitated (rather than to simply be in "tip-top shape"). See *Messilat Yescharim* Ch's 9, 13 as well as *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chaim* 231, *Berachot* 63a, and *Pirke Avot* 2:12, and *Hilchot Dei'ot* 3:3.

<sup>7</sup> See *Messilat Yescharim* Ch. 26.

<sup>8</sup> See *Messilat Yescharim* Ch. 1.

So, follow this regimen and even the more mundane sorts of things become infused with a mitzvah-quality that's nearly on par with more clear-cut mitzvahs! And they become expressions of acquiescence to G-d's will, and means of perfection. The very food we munch, exercise we do, shoreline we walk, etc. thus serves to fulfill G-d's will in this world.

<sup>9</sup> See 4:9:2 below.

---

Rabbi Yaakov Feldman has translated and commented upon "The Gates of Repentance", "The Path

of the Just", and "The Duties of the Heart" (Jason Aronson Publishers). His works are available in bookstores and in various locations on the Web.