

CHAPTER 4:10 MAN'S STANDING IN THIS WORLD, AND THE SPECIFIC WAYS AVAILABLE TO HIM

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Derech Hashem -- The Way of G-d 1:4:10

At bottom, though, our spiritual standing ultimately depends on G-d either "shining His face" upon us or "withholding" it from us ¹. For, the more G-d shines His "face" upon us, the purer and more perfected we become, while the more it's withheld from us, the less pure and perfect we become.

But the truth of the matter is that either phenomenon depends on us and our decisions, since G-d Himself doesn't withhold His countenance of His own volition but only in response to our turning away from Him ². Hence, it's our deciding to draw close to Him or not that determines the outcome.

We manifest His shining His face upon us by fulfilling His mitzvahs ³ and deny ourselves it by sinning, measure for measure. It's the mitzvah system that enables that manifestation, in that each time we engage in it we expose ourselves to a greater illumination of G-d's countenance, while each time we ignore it we allow it to be withheld to a degree and we demean our beings.

Notes:

¹ That's to say that even though your spiritual status is largely determined by your following the mitzvah system (1:4:5), loving and fearing G-d (1:4:8), and by engaging in Torah study (1:4:9), it's ultimately determined by G-d drawing closer to or further from you, which is the mechanism that brings it about.

As to the significance of G-d shining or withdrawing His "face" from someone, that comes to this. As we all know, when someone looks intently at someone he admires, his face brightens and he senses himself growing warmer; well, that's all the more so true if he looks intently at someone he loves. Thus, G-d shining or withholding His face is a barometer of His feelings towards someone.

As such, while there's a lot that we can do to draw close to G-d on our own, what's most effective is doing all we can to have G-d want to draw close to *us*. For like all close relationships, a bond with G-d should be reciprocal. It isn't enough to try your best: you need to "convince" Him to succeed as well, so to speak.

See 1:2:3 above (and note 7 there for references) as well as 1:5:8, 2:8:3, 3:1:3, and 4:5:1 below for more

on this idea.

² That is, while G-d is always inclined towards loving us and peering upon us intimately and warmly, we oftentimes reject that love, disappoint Him, and have Him "look away", if you will.

³ Recall that loving and fearing G-d, and studying His Torah referred to in note 1 above are mitzvahs, too, albeit especially potent ones.

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.