CHAPTER 3:3 HUMANKIND

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Derech Hashem - The Way of G-d 1:3:3

Nonetheless, G-d decreed that there'd be a limit to our need to strive for perfection, after which we'd be recompensed [1]. So there are two epochs of time over-all: that of humankind's efforts and struggles, and that of its reward and recompense [2].

It's in fact because G-d's benevolence far exceeds His ill-will when it comes to His interactions with us [3] that He allowed for a limited amount of time for our efforts, and a countervailing never-ending amount of time for reward and on-going perfection [4].

Notes:

[1] The clear implication here is that there might not have been a time limit, and that we'd need to go on with the struggle forever. But we're told that G-d decided otherwise, mercifully.

One might argue that the cost of that decision is our mortality, and would wonder if the decision is merciful at all. But given that at bottom life is a spiritual battlefield, a time limit is a gift. Those for whom life isn't a spiritual arena, though, for whom it's a "Garden of Earthly Delights" instead perceive death as unkind, but the point is that it's no such a thing, and that the recompense in the Afterlife is more delightful than any worldly pleasure (while the penalty one experiences in Gehennom, which lasts at worst only 12 months and is followed by spiritual reward, is understandable and meant for purification).

The Afterlife will be discussed below in 2:2:1, etc. and elsewhere.

[2] In fact there's a third epoch: before humankind was created, but our concern here is humankind, as we'd said, so that third epoch is irrelevant.

[3] See *Sotah* 11a, *Sanhedrin* 100b, as well as *Yoma* 76a for discussions of G-d's kindness outweighing His strict judgment.

In fact, *on all levels* there's more goodness than malevolence -- more to be enjoyed or benefited from than to be endured in the world. For all-in-all (with notable exceptions) the world is largely at peace; there are more instances of kindness than cruelty; more health than disease; more order than

chaos; more reason than insanity, and the like. And while we might not recognize that, it's because our perspectives are skewed and cynical. (See *Moreh Nevuchim* 3:12.)

[4] That indicates that one reaches ever higher, deeper, and achieves greater levels of perfection *ad infinitum* in the World to Come, given that one draws closer and closer to G-d whose Being is infinite.

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.