

CHAPTER 4:8 MAN'S STANDING IN THIS WORLD, AND THE SPECIFIC WAYS AVAILABLE TO HIM

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Derech Hashem -- The Way of G-d 1:4:8

What we all need to bolster is our love and fear of G-d ¹. We do that initially by reflecting on His great loftiness versus our own terrible lowliness, and by surrendering ourselves to Him accordingly and being abashed before Him. And then we're to long to be among those who serve Him, and to sing praises to His exaltedness ².

Those are very potent ways of drawing close to Him and of cleansing the murkiness of our physicality as well as of allowing the soul to shine ³. They elevate you step by step to the point where you draw close to Him ⁴.

Notes:

¹ That is, besides infusing our directly mitzvah-related and everyday tasks with the conscious will to draw close to G-d (as spoken of above), we're to go about that in a certain spirit -- that of the love and fear of Him.

² We foster -- and bolster -- the love and fear of G-d this way, as Ramchal lays it out. We begin by ruminating upon the essential, profound, and unfathomable difference between humankind and G-d Himself, and as a result of that realization we just naturally surrender ourselves to Him *in love* and are bashed in His presence *in awe and fear* given that He has encouraged us to draw close to Him. And we very humbly long for nothing more than to be His servants and devotees.

See 4:3:1 below as well as *Hilchot Teshuvah* 10:1-3 and *Yesodei HaTorah* 2:1-2.

³ That's to say that not only are these good means of drawing close to Him as we'd discussed, but they're also good means of enabling our souls to undo any impediments to that closeness.

⁴ Ramchal combines love with fear here rather than delving into both separately and in greater detail. He does do the latter in *Messilat Yesharim*, though, so we'll cite from that work now to illustrate the point.

In short, "loving" and "fearing" G-d comes to having an intense and emotional relationship with Him that's expressed either by an ardent yearning for Him, or a stunned dread of Him.

But it turns out that there are two sorts of love and two sorts of fear. A "lower" and "higher" one, depending on the intensity involved. The lower sort of love of G-d would entail your wanting to make Him "proud" of you much the way we'd like our parents to be proud of us. As such the person expressing that sort of love "would act as a loving son would to his father and would do more than his father would ask for." He'd even do things "his father only unobtrusively hinted at" rather than asked for straight out. And "he'd deduce that such-and-such -- something beyond what he was told -- would make his father happy" and set out to do just that (Ch. 18).

Thus, one who loves G-d this way would go beyond the common expectations of a devotee, and would want nothing better than to please G-d. This sort of love of G-d is rooted in respect and admiration.

The higher sort of love for G-d is depicted in more romantic, quickened terms. One enjoying it would "literally desire and long for closeness to G-d" and "pursue" Him much the way "one would pursue anything" or anyone "he longed for". It's said that "even the mere mentioning of His name, enunciating of His praises, and being occupied in His mitzvot and G-dliness would become a treat and delight" to such a person (Ch. 19).

The lower sort of fear of G-d is marked by the feeling of dismay at going against His wishes because of the possible repercussions. It's very easy to come by this sort of fear since "everybody has an instinct for self-preservation" and because, after all, "there's nothing more likely to keep you away from doing something harmful to yourself than the fear of injurious consequences" (Ch. 24). Nonetheless, this sort of fear doesn't befit intelligent and inquisitive spiritual seekers, we're told, as it's rather primitive.

The second, higher sort of fear (or "awe") is referred to as "reverence for G-d's Grandeur". It's rooted in the realization of two truisms: "that G-d's Presence is found everywhere and that He involves Himself in everything, great and small"; in the teeming appreciation of the fact that "nothing is hidden from G-d, either ... great or small, scant or imposing"; and in the idea that "wherever you are, you stand in His Presence" (Ch. 25).

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.