

CHAPTER 5: THE DIFFERENT REALMS AND THEIR SPECIFIC SITUATIONS □ PARAGRAPH 4

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

According to what we'd said, everything begins up above and streams down below. But there's one exception to that which touches on man's place in all of this. Since G-d wanted man to have free will

¹ He enabled him to circumvent this pattern and to initiate actions on his own from down below so as to stream upward ².

So there are two contradictory thrusts in the universe: the natural state of things going from up above downward starting with the Transcendent Forces ³, and the free-will based one ⁴ going from down below upward starting with man's freely made actions ⁵.

Now, as a rule, we can only control physical things, since we're physical beings ourselves who do physical things ⁶. But given that there's a connection between the upper and lower realms ⁷, those upper realms are indeed affected when lower realm things are set off, and they thus affect an unexpected stream upward from down below.

Still-and-all we must remember that not all of man's actions are free, since some of them are decreed upon him based on reward and punishment ⁸. So, the latter sorts of actions are initiated up above as usual, while the former ⁹ are initiated down below ¹⁰.

Notes:

1. See note 2 to 1:3:1 for a discussion of free will.
2. ... as well as downward and sideways.

That is, while everything in the physical world is a passive and powerless recipient of whatever streams down upon it from up above, man alone can actively and freely affect that stream and even have it turn back upon itself so that it streams upwards.

Man is thus a true and very potent anomaly in the universe -- as long as he acts out of his free will. If he were to simply accept the stream from above without input, then he too would be a passive recipient of what's above and would affect nothing in the heavens.

Of course there are things we simply can't do even if we freely decide to -- like fly off into the distance on our own. So it's important to point out that the freedom of will we have is the freedom to make ethical and mitzvah-related choices -- to do particular things that affect others and the world at large, or to refrain from doing them. Everything else is beyond our control.

Understand, though, that man could very well affect things in the material world even when he doesn't act out of free will, since the laws of physics, chemistry, and the like all come into play despite man's intentions.

3. This is known philosophically as the "deterministic" system (because it's the one determined by G-d without man's input).

4. This is termed the "non-deterministic" system (since it isn't determined beforehand).

5. We're thus to see the playing-out of the universe as a great dance within which the Transcendent Forces sometimes lead and we follow; and other times when we lead and the Forces follow.

6. See the end of note 2 above.

7. See 1:5:2.

8. That is, G-d Himself isn't beholden to our free will; He is above it and can affect changes despite our freely made actions.

See 2:3:4.

9. I.e., man's freely made actions.

10. See Ma'amar Halkkurim, "b'Hashgacha" and Sefer Derech Eitz Chaim

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.