

CHAPTER 2: MANKIND IN THIS WORLD □ PARAGRAPH 3

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Given free will, people and their actions can either be wholly good or bad, or mostly good or bad ¹. But that fact would seem to thwart the existence of a realm in which all are good and perfect that we just spoke of. What, then, does G-d do to ensure such a realm? He judges our actions and beings in the different ways, as we'll see.

Now in fact, it wouldn't be fair of G-d to judge only some or even only most of a person's actions and overlook the rest ², each and every thing we do, be it momentous or not, a part of the majority of our actions or not, will indeed be judged ³

But G-d decided to proffer the reward or punishment for each deed both in this world and the World to Come, the minority, mostly out-of-character actions here, and the majority, mostly in-character actions there.

Now, since the latter is the realm in which one's ultimate judgment is to be carried out ⁴, the reward for one's goodness in the World to Come will be a constant and eternal state of attachment onto G-d's presence ⁵, while the punishment there will be the denial of that ⁶.

G-d made it so that one's experience of either one of those realms of judgments would depend on the majority of his deeds. So, the few good things that the wrongful will have done in life and the few bad things that the righteous will have done will be judged in this world, and one will either succeed or suffer here accordingly ⁷.

That way, every action we take will in fact be judged, not just the majority of them, and the World to Come will be comprised of souls that would be utterly free of blemishes ⁸, and the souls of the righteous there could fully bask then in G-d's presence without the incidence of any wrongful elements which would have no claims to a place there.

Footnotes:

1. The latter is true of most of us, for in truth none of us is monolithic; each one has his or her good and bad side, or at least a relatively good or bad one. And there's not a thing we do that isn't a veritable cacophony of good and bad intentions and elements at the same time. Who among us, for example, hasn't donated to charity to impress others? The charity has been helped to be sure, but

we're often still the callous and self-centered person we were when we started. And who hasn't been insensitive to others when meaning to "help them grow"?

So it's never quite right of anyone to claim to be wholly righteous or wrongful. Still and all, the great majority of us are mostly good with a smattering of self-serving badness, while some of us are mostly bad, and somewhat good. 2. That is, since most of us are an admixture of good and bad, how are we to be judged? If we'd only be judged for some -- even for the majority -- of our actions, then not everything we do would seem serious enough to be taken into consideration, which simply isn't true. So, ... 3. That's so the wrongful can be rewarded for their few acts of goodness, and the righteous can be penalized for their few wrongful acts, proving that each action does in fact count. After all, wouldn't it be logical to penalize the mostly-wrongful since they were wrongful over all, and wouldn't it likewise be logical to reward the mostly-righteous since they were righteous over all? See *Messilat Yesharim* Ch. 4. 4. That is, while one will be judged in this world as we'll see below as well as in the Afterlife (see 1:3:4,11 above), one's ultimate experience of reward or punishment will only come about in the World to Come. That's because of the nature of the reward or punishment that comes about there, as we'll now see. 5. Indeed, can there be a better reward than that? 6. And indeed, can there be a harsher punishment than that? 7. That way one will have been cleansed of his few bad deeds if he'd been predominately good in life and he'll be found to be wholly righteous in the end accordingly. And conversely, one's few good deeds will have been recompensed for if he'd been predominately bad in life, and he'll be found to be wholly wrongful in the end accordingly.

This solution touches upon an ancient point of contention that still irks at many people: why do the good oftentimes suffer in life and the wrongful prosper? We'd expect truly righteous people to be blessed and to enjoy life's bounties as much as we'd expect wrongdoers to suffer right out. After all, isn't G-d just, and wouldn't that be the fairest of all circumstances?

This will be explored in 2:2:5 and 2:3:8 below and elsewhere in Ramchal's works. 8. By then.

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.