

CHAPTER 4: THE DIVINE MERIT-SYSTEM □ PART 1

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

What sets us humans apart from all other species, Ramchal offers -- be they animal, vegetable, mineral, or angel -- is the fact that we alone were granted free will and the ability to affect the heavens by our deeds in ways we spoke of.

That means to say that we were endowed with the ability to change the route of history and the very course-ways of the cosmos by our actions. For we can make a particular move that will play itself out one way and rotate our local reality and beyond in one direction, or make another one and have it rotate a wholly other way accordingly.

(It's an awesome ability -- one that only a loving G-d who believes we're capable enough to do it right often enough and who had granted us the instructions to do it correctly -- His Torah -- would allow us.)

Needless to say though, G-d realizes that many of us will do good things with that freedom that will benefit the course of human and cosmic progress, while many will abuse that ability and dampen progress. So He instituted a merit-system, if you will: one in which the effective would be rewarded, and the ineffective would be penalized. It's customarily referred to as the system of reward and punishment, but since the terms "reward" and "punishment" bear such a heavy and unsightly series of connotations, it would serve us better to understand it as we laid it out.

In any event, while everything we do is weighed on the scales of what's popularly known as "measure for measure", "as you sow, so shall you reap", "you only lie on the bed that you make", and the like (see Sanhedrin 90a), there's more to it than that. Since not everything is as it appears to be.

And so we're taught that only G-d can make that judgment-call, since He alone is privy to all the facts and circumstances, and only He can determine the weight and import of any particular deed on the course of cosmic progress. After all, while certain things look terribly wrong on the surface, they might actually be very right in context.

The next point to be made is that not everything connected with this merit- system plays itself out before our eyes. A lot occurs here, but a lot also goes on beyond the here and now: either in the Afterlife or in The World to Come, as we'll explain.

Rabbi Yaakov Feldman has translated and commented upon "The Gates of Repentance", "The Path

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