

CHAPTER 6: DIVINE PROVIDENCE □ PART 5

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

There are a couple of more things to explain when it comes to Divine Providence. First of all, how can we be said to be free to interact with G-d any way we decide to when it's clear that He knows beforehand just what we're going to do!

After all, as Ramchal asserts, "G-d truly knows everything; nothing is hidden from Him" -- regardless of whether it's in the past, present, or the future. And so it follows that He knows what I'm about to do at any one time. It also follows that whatever I'm about to do has, for all intents and purposes, already been done (as far as G-d is concerned) -- so how can I not do it?

And if I can't help but do it, how can I be said to be free to do what I want to do? Hasn't it all been set in stone beforehand, so to speak? Claiming that I'm free to do whatever I want to do, moment by moment, seems to suggest that I could change the "script" even after it had been read!

But Ramchal assures us that despite His knowing everything beforehand, "G-d's management and judgment of the world aren't founded on His foreknowledge". That's to say that G-d overlooks what He knows will happen, and allows us the freedom to do as we see fit. (Much the way a wise parent who's sure that his or her child will be terribly drowsy in the morning nonetheless allows the child to choose to stay up late to study, so the child will learn how to better allocate time.)

Though Ramchal doesn't speak about it here, he explains at many points that G-d not only suspends His foreknowledge when it comes to the workings of the universe, He does the same with a lot of His attributes here. For were He to act here at full-throttle, we're taught, the world would dissolve in His presence because it couldn't endure such outright exposure to Him. This is the import of G-d's statement that, "You cannot see My face, for no one may see Me", i.e., no one can experience G-d fully, "and yet live" (Exodus 33:20).

In any event, the point here is that instead of relying on His foreknowledge, G-d allows us our free will. He has also allowed for a system of justice to hold sway in the world, so that we answer for our own deeds.

The very last point here, then, is the makeup of this system of justice: what is it like? Is it some sort of arcane, utterly bizarre system that we couldn't ever hope to fathom and participate in? In fact, we're taught that the Divine justice system actually "resembles that of earthly forms of governance" -- except that it's the angels whom G-d calls upon to play an active role in the world (spoken of before) who are active in it.

For this system relies upon "witnesses offering testimony, prosecutors seeking sentencing, advocates pleading their client's case" just as our own -- except, all of them are angels. And the system is utterly "fair and accurate", as Ramchal is sure to underscore.

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.