

DA'AT TEVUNOT - SECTION 4: CHAPTER 12

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

G-d's love for us -- which is effulgent, wide, and (frankly) unfathomable -- is still and all often tinged with a strict insistence on this or that. For like a parent who wants his child to be good, wise, and faultless, G-d would have us follow the goodly path He laid out for us, and thus rewards us when we follow suit and punishes us when we don't (though of course He'd rather not have to punish us) [1].

He'd also prefer that we follow a judicious, more temperate path of neither over-reach nor under-achievement (known as "The Golden Mean"). So along the very same lines, He often acts judiciously and kindly (a sort of "Golden Mean" of its own) toward us, though He's inclined toward tolerance and acceptance.

The point of the matter is that when He determines that we're to be punished for one thing or another, that judgment is often tempered and toned down; and that He often gives way to His tender love for us despite us, for as it's written "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion" (Exodus 33:19) -- often whether he deserves it or not (see Berachot 20a, Rosh Hashanah 17b) [2].

So we see that Divine Justice is meted out in one of three overarching ways: tolerantly (i.e., the way of chessed as it's termed), intolerantly (i.e., the way of gevurah), or judiciously (i.e., the way of rachmanut).

Notes:

[1] See Klallim Rishonim 24 for the Kabbalistic backdrop to this chapter as well as R' Friedlander's Iyyun 40; R' Greenblatt's very important notes 4-7, 12, as well as his notes 66-70 on p. 485 of his edition; and R' Shriki's note 121.

[2] See 4:2.

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.