

CHAPTER 3:1 PERSONAL PROVIDENCE

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Derech Hashem -- The Way of G-d 2:3:1

As we'd said, our role in life depends on the existence of right and wrong, and on our choosing right over wrong ¹. Yet there are a lot of factors in all of this, and it's also important to know that it's not only our actions that can be right or wrong but our personal qualities, too ².

Being egocentric, for example, is wrongful ³ while being humble is a good thing ⁴; being compassionate is good while being cruel is bad; being satisfied and happy with your lot in life is good ⁵, while its opposite is bad; etc.

But know that it was G-d who determined what would go into human nature in light of our ultimate tasks in life and brought about all of these qualities -- along with their causes and effects, and everything else connected to them -- and it was He who allowed them to exist in the human heart ⁶.

There's yet another factor in all of this. People would have to exist in various *circumstances* in order for these qualities to be played out, which would then become a "testing-ground" for each one of us, in that we'd each be forced to contend with bad traits and yet given the opportunity to transcend them and chose good ones instead ⁷.

And so if wealth and poverty didn't both exist, for example, there wouldn't be an opportunity to express compassion or cruelty. As such, wealth exists so the wealthy can be tested to see if they'd be compassionate or cruel to the poor. And the poor are tested to see whether or not they'll be satisfied with and grateful for what little they have or not ⁸.

The wealthy are tested other ways besides. To see if they might become haughty because of their wealth, or overly-worldly and then abandon their Divine service. Or to see if they might be humble and subservient despite their good fortune and reject worldliness, and strive for Divine service and a Torah-based life. There are many other such examples of these sorts of challenges.

The point of the matter is that G-d distributed these challenges among us all as a part of His plans for us ⁹. As such, each one of us thus has his or her own challenges in our battles with the *yetzer hara* ¹⁰. Our task is to meet those challenges as best as we can, and our success will be judged precisely

in light of our assigned circumstances ¹¹.

The whole of this can be compared to the successful functioning of a government, with subordinates and superiors ¹². Each subordinate is to fulfill his assignment as best as possible under his circumstances, each superior is to assign them according to the needs of the state, and each subordinate's success is to be judged according to his actions under his circumstances ¹³.

Now, while we aren't privy to know just how all of this is to be carried out as a whole, we're nonetheless to realize that in the end everything will function as it must ¹⁴.

Footnotes:

¹ See 1:3:1.

² See 1:2:5 and 2:2:5 above and *Messilat Yescharim* Ch. 4.

As was pointed out in 2:2:2 (see note 3 there), there's a fundamental difference between one's own personal spiritual strivings and that of all of humankind's. While the previous chapter addressed humankind's efforts, this chapter will address the individual's. It's also true that while the previous chapter is based on the dynamics of reward and punishment, this one will take other phenomena into account.

³ See *Messilat Yescharim* Ch.11.

⁴ See *Messilat Yescharim* Ch. 22.

⁵ See *Messilat Yescharim* Ch. 11.

⁶ See 1:2:4. Also see *Klach Pitchei Chochma* 81-82 about G-d hiding the factors that go into all of this from humankind.

The point is that none of our circumstances are just par for the course or merely a natural part of the human condition: they were all implemented on purpose by G-d for the reasons soon to be explained. After all, G-d could have created us and the universe any way He cared to -- its being what it is now was all part of a purposeful decision on His part.

So while each and every person is born into a vast and cacophonous array of circumstances and phenomena that seem to defy order or purpose, and appear random at best or deliberately and cruelly confounding at worst, yet as every person of faith knows, there's certainly a plan in place.

⁷ See *Shemot Rabbah* 31:3; *Tanchuma, Mishpatim* 8; *Petachim* 65a, *Kiddushin* 82b *Bava Batra* 10a, 16a, and *Sanhedrin* 100b.

⁸ See *Messilat Yescharim* Ch's. 1 and 8.

⁹ This alludes to a more transcendent scale of Divine governance which is largely beyond our ken. See *Moed Katan* 28a and 2:7:2 below regarding *mazal*. Also see *Da'at Tevunot* 160-164,170 and *Clallim Rishonim* 34.

¹⁰ I.e., in the battle of opting for goodness over wrongfulness. See *Messilat Yescharim* Ch. 1 about life's many moral trials.

¹¹ As such, G-d allowed for situations to exist in our lives that would either vex us and thus challenge us to overcome, or that would tantalize us and thus challenge us to transcend -- all so that we'd fulfill His wish that we better ourselves spiritually and ethically. So in a very real sense, everything we see and experience is meant to test our mettle; to act as fodder for our ever-churning self to advance.

The other point is that the fact that we're each to be judged by our circumstances implies that what would be sinful for someone in his station would not be in another's, and vice versa; and that G-d factors all of that into His assessments.

¹² Ramchal actually uses the analogy of a citizenship being subordinate to its king, but we've tried to bring the analogy up to date.

¹³ See *Messilat Yescharim* Ch. 22.

¹⁴ Since G-d isn't simply a superior -- to hearken back to the analogy cited in the previous paragraph -- but an omniscient one at that with a plan.

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