

CHAPTER 3:7 PERSONAL PROVIDENCE

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Derech Hashem - The Way of G-d 2:3:7

It's important to know that G-d oversees each and every particular person's ¹precedents and antecedents, and supervises all of the elements involved when He interacts with us with an eye toward the big picture and with a view as to how they're all interconnected ².

As such, every individual is judged with his ancestry, his progeny, and his own situation and circumstances in mind. And he's only handed his charges, challenges, and unique path in serving G-d after all of that's taken into account ³.

But that's only true of his worldly situation. The truth is that one's situation in the World to Come will only be determined by his or her own actions. That's why the prophet said that "a son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, and a father shall not bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself (alone), and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself (alone)" (Ezekiel 18:20) ⁴.

So if it's decided, for example, that someone is to be born wealthy and powerful, then his children will be wealthy, too, unless their situation changes ⁵, and they'd only be wealthy in this instance because of him. (The same idea is in place when it comes to poor parents and their children.)

Indeed, parents endow their children with a number of things, our sages pointed out ⁶. So, one can be born into good circumstances thanks to his parents' situation or sometimes because of his parents' merits, or into bad ones for those same reasons. Or he can be worthy of success for his own *children's* sake. It's also true that a person could succeed or fail because of his environment or associates ⁷.

Footnotes:

¹ And thing's ...

² That is, while we only take our own situations into account when we consider our standing, G-d is like a chess-master who oversees each piece in relation to the others and moves with an eye toward positioning and the endgame.

See *Da'at Tevunot* 124 where Ramchal likens the workings of the universe to a clock whose pieces all work together in synch and with close, precise interaction.

³ Also see 2:3:1 above and 2:3:10 below.

⁴ That is, one's worldly standing is influenced by many factors, as each one of us is part of the community at large and is judged in regard to his or her place in it; but one's eternal standing is rooted in his or her own efforts alone. For, while we're all cogs in the wheel of history, we're each the lone factor in our own existential standing.

⁵ That is, unless other things factor into their worldly standing that leave them undeserving of wealth.

⁶ I.e., their looks, strength, wealth, intelligence, and longevity (*Eduyot* 2:9).

⁷ So, not only do the people we're most attached to affect our situations -- oftentimes situations and people we don't even know about factor into it.

This series is dedicated to the memory of Yitzchak Hehrsh ben Daniel, and Sarah Rivka bas Yaakov Dovid.

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