

CHAPTER 4: SHEMA YISROEL AND ITS BLESSINGS □

PARAGRAPH 1:2

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Our last point was that evil and wrong exist for a good reason and play a part in G-d's plans for the universe. It's also important for us to know that, quite ironically, the existence of evil and wrong also serve to *affirm G-d's oneness*. But we'll get back to that shortly. Our own relationship with evil and wrong is this, though. We're taught that we're each expected to rid the world of it, and to integrate all the good within ourselves and the universe.

Now, that touches upon many arcane and profound themes, and legions of books have been written to explain it, so it clearly calls for a lot more than we can offer here. But it comes down to the fact that we've been placed in a world of good and evil so as to first struggle with evil and overcome it, to then free ourselves from its bonds, and to eventually utterly annihilate it from the world. And we're taught that our having done that will then enable goodness to be bolstered throughout the universe.

But let's return now to the idea that evil and wrong in the world somehow affirm G-d's oneness and sovereignty. That comes down to the fact that what evil essentially is, is a product of what's referred to as "G-d concealing His Countenance". What *that* means to say is this: though G-d is of course invisible, He nonetheless makes His presence known to us, in varying degrees. When His presence is palpable and overt, His "Countenance" is said to be "revealed" (that is, we sense Him paying full-face attention to us); and when He seems to be distracted and elsewhere inclined, His "Countenance" is said to be "concealed" (see 1:5:8 for more on this). Thus, when evil and wrong (which are the antitheses of G-dliness, after all) are manifest and widespread, "G-d's Countenance is concealed" from us.

It follows then that in order for evil and wrong to be annihilated (which we're aiming for, as we said), G-d's Countenance would have to be so overtly revealed that we'd "see" His oneness and sovereignty for ourselves. And in fact, all of that will come about in the ultimate future, when all of creation will be rectified.

But, not only will the world be rectified -- we'll also know for ourselves in retrospect the vital role each instance of evil and wrong will have played in the universe, and we'll finally come to understand how its having been undone allowed for G-d's Countenance to be "seen".

Let's offer a not too uncommon scenario to explain that. Suppose a very good person suddenly

turned ill. A sensitive soul would be bothered by that and wonder where G-d was in that instance. Then let's imagine that the patient's sudden condition proved to be minor but required that he be quickly operated on anyway; that, quite unexpectedly and unrelated to the operation, a small but virulent cancer-cluster was found which was quickly and thoroughly removed; and that the patient was thus spared a terrible tragedy in the process. Wouldn't the same sensitive soul we'd cited have his faith in G-d *bolstered* by that incident? And wouldn't G-d's wisdom, mercy, and sovereignty have been proved true in retrospect?

A world of things akin to that will be true in the ultimate future as well. For just as in this instance, the existence of "wrong" (the original illness) and the struggle to overcome it (the operation) will lead to the eradication of a greater wrong (the cancer) and the affirmation of G-d's reign, we'll likewise see much the same for our selves -- on a far grander scale -- in the ultimate future. Indeed, the reasons behind all instances of evil and wrong will be made clear in retrospect, evil itself will be undone, and G-d's Countenance will be revealed throughout the universe.

But, what has all this to do with the daily recitation of "Shema Yisroel", as we asked last time? It comes to the fact that when we recite Shema Yisroel we proclaim and affirm G-d's oneness and sovereignty -- the fact that "G-d our L-rd is one G-d" and manifest. (We recite it both day- and nighttime because different cosmic machinations are in place in the day and the night that affect the workings of the universe, and our reciting it those two times serves to affect each of the appropriate machinations.)

In short, then, when we recite Shema Yisroel we declare the ultimate truth of the universe: that G-d is the only utterly indispensable Being, and that everything is utterly dependent upon Him; that He's the Sovereign of the Universe who authorizes everything that happens with a benevolent end in mind; that He's the Source and Culmination of everything; and that He will bring about ultimate perfection in due time.

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