

CHAPTER 5: PRAYER □ PARAGRAPH 2

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

What we'd said so far about prayer raises a thorny issue. If we're really enjoined by G-d to pray that every day's needs be fulfilled, then we're obviously forced to be very involved in the world. After all, we'd have to be aware of just what's needed, in what order and quantity, and of all the intricacies of the day. But that would seem to detract from our need to serve G-d and grow in our souls, which is so fundamental to our existence.

So let's explore how the two don't actually contradict each other. In the process we'll underscore an important Torah principle touching on how we're to be apart *from* the world while a part *of* it.

We're taught that G-d granted mankind reason and understanding enough to function in the world, and that He charged us to do just that in full. But G-d also expects us to do that as humans, with all the corresponding very earthly things that go along with that, rather than as angels. For we're *meant* to be earthly, and for some very good spiritual reasons (see 1:3:4, 1:4:4, and 2:2:1 above).

But there's always the danger that we might become too earthly, too comfortable with the world and forgetful of our mission. So G-d has us do things to avoid that.

(In fact, the Ba'al Shem Tov offered a wonderful parable for just that dilemma. He relates that there was once a king who had an only son whom the king wanted to be sure would be ready for his eventual royal duties. So the king had his son sent far, far away from the palace in order to fend for himself way out in the provinces. At first the prince dreaded the idea, he was deeply saddened by his surroundings when he got there, and raged against his fate. But then he started to acclimate to things and to find himself very much at home, and he eventually became completely distracted from the splendor of his past. Somehow or another he recalled his upbringing at a certain point, and he yearned to be with his father the king again, and to resume his own royal duties.

It's we -- actually our souls -- who are the prince, the Ba'al Shem Tov said, which is the moral of the story. We were taken from our Father's palace when we were born and placed in the outer provinces that are this world in order to ready ourselves on all levels for our royal mission. The important thing, he said, was to not feel too "at home" here, but rather to do what we have to do and to never lose sight of home and the King.)

One of the things G-d has us do in order to avoid over-concern with the world is to draw close to Him first in the thick of it all. And we do that by moving aside for the while from the terrible noise, praying to Him for help with everything we have to do, and following through on it. That way we can

be very busy with and very much in the world on the one hand, while attached to and consciously dependent upon G-d at the same time on the other.

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