

Getting in G*d's Way Rabbi Zev-Hayyim Feyer

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Parshat Ki Tavo

Thou shalt walk in G*d's ways. (Deuteronomy 28:9)

Indeed! We, mere mortals, are directed to walk in G*d's ways! Maimonides seems to soften the requirement when he declares, in his *Mishnah Torah*, that it means to resemble G*d "according to our capacity." The traditional commentators, beginning with the *Sifri*, explain it to mean that "just as the Blessed Holy One is gracious, so be gracious; just as the Blessed Holy One is merciful, so be merciful." And they continue to recount attributes of the Blessed Holy One which we are commanded to emulate.

I find two points very telling. First, it is only the "affectionate" attributes of G*d which our tradition instructs us to emulate. Nowhere do we find a formulation akin to "as G*d is angry, so be angry; as G*d slew the Egyptians, so you shall slay the Egyptians." Walking in G*d's ways, as our sages have understood it, means to imitate, as best we can, G*d's affectionate attributes – graciousness, mercy, gentleness, kindness – not G*d's attributes of sternness. Let us keep that in mind as we discuss the second point.

We are not instructed to "stand" in G*d's ways, but to "walk" in G*d's ways.

One may observe all G*d's Commands – however one understands those Commands – without making any spiritual progress; one can "stand" in G*d's ways. "My parents did it this way, and their parents did it this way, and I'm doing it this way." And that is certainly a significant level of holiness and not to be denigrated. But that is merely "standing" in G*d's ways. One's spiritual consciousness is not raised one whit when one "stands" in G*d's ways.

We are commanded to "walk" in G*d's ways, to move continually as we observe G*d's Commands. We are obligated not just to observe the Commands of G*d, but to do so in a way that will, to the best of our ability, lead us to a higher and deeper spiritual awareness. (Is it not interesting that "higher" and "deeper" can be synonymous in matters of spirituality?)

As we move, day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment, to a more intense, more mature, more developed way of "walking in G*d's ways," we will find that our spiritual consciousness develops, grows, is enhanced, moment by moment, hour by hour, day by day. If we merely "stand" in God's ways, we will get in G*d's way; if we "walk" in G*d's ways, we can be what we were meant to be from the beginning – co-creators with G*d, partners with G*d in the ongoing Creation of the Universe.

Shabbat Shalom.