

CHAPTER 4:4 MAN'S STANDING IN THIS WORLD, AND THE SPECIFIC WAYS AVAILABLE TO HIM

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Derech Hashem -- The Way of G-d 1:4:4

Despite the fact that we're bound to materiality from the first and our souls are so stifled, nonetheless, on some arcane level ¹ G-d arranged things in such a way that we'd be elevated in the end anyway. In fact, the very problem will prove to offer the solution ² and our physicality itself will enable us to turn darkness to light and the shadows of death into beams of light ³.

For when we function within the parameters that G-d established for us when it comes to physicality ⁴ and we have the right intentions ⁵, the physical things we do allow for perfection and enable us to be elevated. Those parameters take into account our state of being and are just what's needed to allow us to draw close to G-d and to bask in His presence in this physical world and beyond. As such, when we use our physicality within those parameters we garner what you need to ascend and avoid what keeps us back from drawing close to G-d.

In fact, if it weren't for the aforementioned decree of death ⁶, our souls would instantly become empowered and our body would be weakened, and we'd be purified enough to indeed draw close to G-d when we acted within those parameters. But since that decree is in place in fact, the soul itself is purified on the spot to be sure (on an inchoate level), but the body is made more only *potentially* pure -- until the time when both will indeed achieve perfection in tandem.

Notes:

¹ The Hebrew term for this level translates as "from the depths of the guidance (of) His wisdom". Ramchal uses it and similar expressions in 1:5:6 and 2:3:1 and elsewhere below, as well as in *Da'at Tevunot* (11, 44, 48, 52, etc.), and in various other works. It refers to the Kabbalistic concept of *Reisha d'La Ityada* ("the unfathomable beginning"), which is the source of all inscrutable Divine decisions and reckonings. See *Klallim Rishonim* 34, *Da'at Tevunot* 168-170, *Klach Pitchei Chochma* 78-88, etc.

² Ramchal's term is, "man's lowliness will (itself) prove to be his greatness (in the end)". See *Klach Pitchei Chochma* 49, and also see Zohar 1, 245b as well as *Emunot v'De'ot* 6:4 and *Pardes Rimonim* 31:5.

Let's try to illustrate that excellent principle with an analogy. Suppose there was once an utterly ignoble soul who'd somehow hit bottom. He became a drunk and a derelict perhaps, as well as brash, mean, wayward, and wanton. Suppose after a time he came to realize what he'd done to himself, turned himself around, worked hard and invested wisely, and became a *mentsch* (a fine, upstanding individual). Let's even imagine that he became a selfless and ardent philanthropist after a time, and an advocate for all sorts of good causes. Then suppose there was another individual then who'd been born into a good family, had a sterling upbringing, was educated in the best of schools, and eventually inherited a great deal of wealth. Then imagine that they both advocated for and contributed toward the same noble causes.

The first individual would certainly be lauded more than the second one for his benevolence. Everyone would speak in awe of how someone like him, who'd once been such a cur and a dog, had turned himself around so and become so good. Everything good he did would be tripled in value in everyone's eyes as a consequence, while the self-same acts done by the second person would simply be admired, and no more. ("After all," people would reason, "we'd only expect as much from him".)

Indeed, the first person's initial lowliness would itself prove to be his greatness in the end.

This is the logic behind our having been thrust into a world that seems to foil our soul's dream of closeness to G-d. For by transcending our limitations and using the very same environment in which we could easily fail as a base for succeeding we will have met the greatest challenge of all, and our lowliness will have indeed proven to be our greatness in the end.

It's important to realize, by the way, that we're contrasting mankind with supernatural beings like angels with this point. For, while we have to contend with conflicting urges and inclinations and we're always threatened with defeat, they don't have to. Angels can't help but do good and holy things -- that's all they're "programmed" to do. As such, any goodness and holiness they bring into the world is only to be expected (like the acts of the second person we cited above), while any goodness and holiness we might bring into the world is a triumph of the human spirit and a personal victory (like the acts of the first person).

³ "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, light shone upon them" (Isaiah 9:1). See Ch. 26 of *Messilat Yesharim* for illustrations of overturning physicality to spirituality.

⁴ See 2:6:1-5 for a different discussion of these parameters.

⁵ Which is primarily to draw close to G-d but could also be to act selflessly and lovingly. But see Ramchal's *Sefer HaHigayon* 5 which speaks of two people doing the same thing which could wind up being either reprehensible or laudatory depending on each one's original intentions.

⁶ See 1:3:9.

Rabbi Yaakov Feldman has translated and commented upon "The Gates of Repentance", "The Path of the Just", and "The Duties of the Heart" (Jason Aronson Publishers). His works are available in bookstores and in various locations on the Web.