

# CHAPTER 4:5 MAN'S STANDING IN THIS WORLD, AND THE SPECIFIC WAYS AVAILABLE TO HIM

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## *Derech Hashem -- The Way of G-d 1:4:5*

It's in fact the mitzvah-system that lays out the parameters that we're to function within <sup>1</sup>. Each imperative <sup>2</sup> is intended to allow one to earn and incorporate within himself a degree of perfection, and each prohibition <sup>3</sup> is meant to withhold a degree of murkiness and imperfection.

It's vitally important to know that each element of every mitzvah has been designed with humankind's true makeup and circumstances in mind, with the degree of one's own and the world's needs <sup>4</sup>, as well as with each thing's own needs and conditions for perfection.

Indeed, G-d who knows all of this in fact, and knows all of creation and the role each thing plays in creation, oversees everything and incorporated all of that in His mitzvah-system. As it's said, "G-d commanded us to follow all of these rules ... so that He might grant us goodness" (Deuteronomy 6:24) <sup>5</sup>.

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> ... spoken of in 1:4:4.

Many people see mitzvahs as mere "good deeds" -- as ways of earning Divine "merit badges", if you will. Others see them as concrete symbols of high ideals, expressions of Jewish peoplehood and culture, of uniquely Jewish ethical imperatives, and the like. And others tie them in with Jewish history and past circumstance (and come to dismiss them as irrelevant in modernity). But the mitzvah-system goes far beyond all of that. As we'll see below, it was instigated by G-d Almighty who took our hearts and minds into consideration when determining its makeup, and who wants to draw us close to Him, and made that its goal.

Ramchal's point here is that the only thing that takes the needs of both our body and our soul into consideration and can nourish both (see 1:4:2-3) is the mitzvah-system. For thanks to it I can, for example, eat for my body's sake and yet have it fulfill my soul's needs by reciting a *beracha* (i.e.,

blessing) before and after eating, eating to fulfill a Shabbos or *Yom Tov* obligation, etc.

Ramchal speaks about the mitzvah system in very many of his works. See for example *Messilat Yesharim* Ch. 1; *Adir Bamarom* pp. 3, 186; *Tiktu Tephilot* 267, "Da'at Tevunot 2" 9, 16, 44; *Klallei Pitchei Chochma v'Da'at* 8; Introduction to *Ma'amar HaVichuach*; *Da'at Tevunot* 70, 126, 158; and *Klach Pitchei Chochma* 46.

Also see *Avodat Hakodesh* 3:63; and *Sh'nei Luchot HaBrit, Torah Ohr, Re'eih*.

<sup>2</sup> I.e., each so-called "positive" mitzvah, which is a terrible translation of *mitzvah tasseh*, better translated as an act that it's a mitzvah to do.

<sup>3</sup> I.e., each so-called "negative" mitzvah, which is an even worse translation of *mitzvah lo-tasseh*, better translated as an act that it's a mitzvah refrain from.

<sup>4</sup> Thus the mitzvah-system in conjunction with the human soul, mind, body, and will could be said to be one huge "engine" with interrelated parts, along with interrelated processes that can sometimes be explained and otherwise not, that are sometimes manifestly successful and oftentimes only clandestinely so, but which is ultimately meant to move everything toward one end: closeness to G-d.

<sup>5</sup> This makes the point that the mitzvah system is part of G-d's means for beneficence (see 1:2:1-2).

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.