

CHAPTER 2: MANKIND IN THIS WORLD - PARAGRAPH 4

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

2:2:4

Mercifully, there's another means of achieving a place in the World to Come. It comes down to a different way of being purified if you've been very wrongful but not wrongful enough to be annihilated ¹, and it involves the realities of *Gehenom* ².

Those individuals would be disciplined there ³ and then could be a part of the World to Come when the latter comes about. In fact, in the end there'd be very few who'd be annihilated -- only the utterly wicked ⁴.

Thus there are three realms in which we're judged: the World to Come, this world, and the Afterlife. But the particulars behind all of this are known only to G-d since He alone knows all of the details involved and the appropriate reactions to them ⁵. All we know is that at bottom His intention is to allow for a community of perfected beings who'd be able to bask in His presence forever to come about, and that that requires all of these details.

Footnotes:

¹ As we discovered in 2:2:3, the utterly wrongful and evil will be annihilated in the end, while the somewhat or even very wrongful will not. But how then would the wrongfulness of the very or somewhat wrong be undone enough for them to be a part of the World to Come?

² That is, by experiencing *Gehenom* the wrongful could experience the World to Come in the end.

There are two facets of the Afterlife (which we began to explore in note 4 to 2:2:3, and addressed in note 2 to 1:3:4 and note 2 to 1:3:11): "*Gan Eden*", and "*Gehenom*". *Gan Eden* (which translates as "The Garden of Eden" since it's the spiritual counterpart of the earthly Garden depicted in Genesis) is where the soul delights in G-d. And *Gehenom* (which is usually taken to be "hell" but is actually different) is where the soul suffers the consequences of its misdeeds.

The point is that there's yet another realm, aside from the world we know of, in which we're to be judged, the Afterlife.

While punishments will be meted out in *Gehenom*, to be sure, understand of course that they'll be

spiritual in nature. After all, the body will have been buried in the ground by then, so whatever happens afterwards would be non-physical by definition. The sort of "pain" the soul suffers in *Gehenom* can perhaps best be depicted as an existential anguish and moral discomfort brought on by catching sight of oneself for the first time.

And while there will be reward in *Gan Eden* for the righteous that's somewhat analogous to the World to Come experience of basking in G-d's light, it's still-and-all a far more dilute version of it.

Thus, the Afterlife is where the soul goes after death, and the World to Come is where body and soul re-unite after the Resurrection of the Dead (see 1:3:10-11).

See Ramchal's remarks in *Ma'amar Halkkurim*, "*Gemul*" and "*B'Gan Eden v'Gehenom; Klallei Pitchei Chochma v'Da'at* (10); *Kina'at Hashem Tzevakot* (2); *Otzerot Ramchal*, "*Iyov*" p. 185; and see Rambam's introduction to *Perek Chellek* in Mishna Sanhedrin, Ra'avad's introduction to *Sefer Yetzirah*, and Ramban's *Sha'ar HaGamul* on *Gehenom*.

³ Notice that the term "being purified" is used above rather than "being disciplined" as used here. The point is that the discipline isn't an act of revenge on G-d's part or of a mean-spirited "settling of scores" so to speak. For G-d doesn't benefit by one being disciplined -- the individual himself does, in that he's cleansed of his sins and thus becomes fit to be in G-d's presence in the World to Come.

⁴ In point of fact, though he doesn't say as much here (perhaps because *Derech Hashem* was intended to be a popular work with fewer fine distinction than others of his works) Ramchal indicates elsewhere that not a single one of us will be annihilated!

He says that, one way or another, we will *all* be cleansed well enough to be present in the World to Come. See his comments in *Da'at Tevunot* 38-44 and in *Klach Pitchei Chochma* 1-4. Also see *Leshem Shevo v'Achalma*, "*Hakdamot v'Sha'arim*" from 6:4 to the end of Ch. 9 there which cites numerous classical sources; and *Sanhedrin* 104b, as explained by Reb Tzadok HaCohen in his *Likutei Ma'amarim* (16).

⁵ For only He can read and hear out our hearts; only He can catch each and every nuance of good and bad in every choice we make; and He alone knows what will rectify each individual soul in the end.

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