

CHAPTER 2:8 MANKIND IN THIS WORLD

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Derech Hashem - The way of G-d 2:2:8

There's another important thing about determining how something affects your being in the community of the righteous in the World to Come and your status there ¹.

It's that there are certain good deeds that are adjudged *not* to earn you a place in the World to Come but to be rewarded for in this world instead. The situation of those in this category are a lot like that of the mostly wrongful ² -- with one important distinction.

Those we just discussed *do* make it to the World to Come thanks to their good deeds, albeit only after having been cleansed in the Afterlife for their sins. But because of the nature of their good deeds they'd only achieve the lowest degree of the World to Come, and the majority of their good deeds will be rewarded while they're alive.

What's tragic, though, is the fact that if those good deeds would have earned them a place in the World to Come, they'd have achieved a *lofty* one there ³.

Footnotes:

¹ Ramchal said in 2:2:5 that we can't fathom the very many calculations that go into reward and punishment, and he remarked in 2:2:7 that the community of perfected beings will be comprised of people on various levels. He'll now delve into both ideas.

² Who'll be rewarded in this world for their few good deeds but never experience the World to Come. See 2:2:6.

³ To understand the significance of this let's explore the following. Ramchal broke people down into three types in the fourth chapter of *Messilat Yesharim*: "those who fully understand" (what matters most and what's expected of us by G-d), "those of lesser understanding" (than they), and "the great majority of people".

The best of them, "those who fully understand", would yearn for nothing else but to grow in their beings, while the basest of them, "the great majority of people", would only want to stay out of trouble, if you will. Their positions are straightforward enough. It's the situation of "those of lesser

understanding" (than the first group but who are still and all more promising than the third group) though, that speaks to the subject above.

As Ramchal explains there in *Messilat Yesharim* "It's obvious to all thinking people that the division of spiritual levels in the world of truth, that is, the World to Come, is based upon the performance of righteous deeds. And that one who is greater in such things than his friend will be exalted above him, while one who is lacking in them will be lower".

Yet, Ramchal continues, "there are fools who only care to have it easy. They say: 'Why should we burden ourselves with all this saintliness and abstention? Isn't it enough that we're not bad and doomed to *Gehenom*? We're not about to exert ourselves when it comes to getting into the Garden of Eden (or the World to Come, the subject at hand). If we don't get a big portion (there), *we'll settle for a small one, and that will be just fine for us*. We don't plan to overburden ourselves with all this'."

Ramchal is thus making the point here, in *Derech Hashem*, that that position is heartbreaking. For had such people gone to the trouble to be more exacting in their expectations of themselves, they'd in fact have achieved a high level in the World to Come. After all, they're not like "the great majority of people": they have what it takes to be lofty. It's just that they're too lazy perhaps, or not inspired enough to strive for the excellence they can achieve. And they -- and those of us on that level -- are to be pitied for that.

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