

CHAPTER 2:1 THE PURPOSE OF CREATION

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

1:2:1

People often ask why G-d created a universe in which people suffer ¹. The assumption lying behind the question is of course that life should be good, but where does that come from? After all, it's easy enough to assume that life should be bad, or even indifferent. Why would we think otherwise? Apparently, because the human heart knows only too well that G-d is good, and is stunned when things seem to contradict that.

Ramchal and others too ² affirm our assumption that G-d, in fact, is good ³. And he adds that in fact He created the world in order to "bestow goodness upon others" from the first ⁴.

The logic behind the assertion that G-d created the world in order to bestow goodness is as follows.

We know that G-d Himself is good ⁵; it's axiomatic that good entities do good things ⁶; and it's obvious that there have to be recipients of that goodness. It thus follows that G-d created the universe in order to "bestow goodness upon others" -- i.e., He created an atmosphere in which beings could exist to receive His goodness.

Ramchal then continues with the point that since, as we determined, G-d is utterly and perfectly whole ⁷, then He would logically be expected to bestow only wholly *perfect* goodness. And what is the only sort of perfect goodness that G-d could bestow? The experience of Himself! Hence, we enjoy G-d's goodness most completely and most manifestly when we experience Him.

Such a full and utter experience of G-d Himself is referred to as *Devekut* (clinging on to G-d) in Hebrew. It's an ongoing theme in Kabbalah, Mussar, and Chassidic literature, and will be discussed in this work a number of times ⁸.

Perhaps the most cogent illustration of *Devekut* is the one found in *Sanhedrin* 64a, where the experience is likened to that of two sticky dates attached to each other. The Talmud's point there seems to be that it's an instance of two separate entities adhering on to each other for a time and becoming one for all intents and purposes (since it's hard to determine just where one date ends, and the other begins), and of being affected deeply by the process.

The truth be known, Ramchal speaks elsewhere about what could only be referred to as "ultimate

Devekut", in the End of Days ⁹). But that's not the subject at hand. His point here is that we can, in fact, attach ourselves on to G-d in different degrees in this world. And that while the ability to do that varies from person to person, each realization of it perfects us more and more so, brings us closer to Him, and it allows us to enjoy His true goodness (i.e., Himself).

Notes:

¹ Ramchal especially stressed the importance of dwelling on these sorts of fundamental existential questions in *Derech Eitz Chaim*.

² See Ramchal's *Da'at Tevunot* 18, *Klach Pitchei Chochma* 2, *Ma'amar HaChochma* ("Hasephirot"), and *Iggerot Pitchei Chochma v'Da'at* (end). Also see *Emunot v'Deot* 1:4, *Pardes* 2:6, and *Eitz Chaim, Sha'ar Haklalim* 1.

³ Until now we've proved that God exists and laid out His characteristics. We'll now address His relationship with His creation and determine that He is purposeful (rather than simply present), engaging (rather than removed), and benevolent (rather than malevolent or indifferent).

⁴ Do people suffer? Decidedly so. So, how does that square with the idea of G-d's benevolence? Ramchal seems to offer an explanation with a statement that he makes below that G-d only bestows goodness "to the degree that (His recipients) can benefit from it". The point seems to be that while G-d always bestows goodness *ultimately* He also allows for wrong and bad outcomes because benefitting people who can't accept, endure, or handle some level of goodness or another would harm or hurt them. So He allows those people to suffer, and to also concurrently manage to endure more and more goodness step by step. That way He'll ultimately bestow pure goodness upon them, too ... when they're ready for it.

Elsewhere Ramchal offers other explanations for why this world was created that seem to contradict this one. He says at one point that G-d created the world to allow for an environment for human free-will (*Adir Bamarom* p. 88), which we'll expand upon later on in this chapter; later on in this work he'll explain that the world was created so that mankind could attach itself upon G-d's being in the World to Come (2:21, 4:1:4), which we'll address a little later; and elsewhere he says that He created it to reveal His *Yichud* -- literally, His (utter) Oneness, but which actually refers to His utter and sole sovereignty and rule (*Da'at Tevunot* 34; 4:4:1 below). He clears up the apparent contradiction by offering that G-d wanted man to earn His benevolence by his self-elected acts of righteousness (*Da'at Tevunot* 44). And that G-d's ultimate reward (and act of benevolence) would be to, indeed, reveal His *Yichud*.

⁵ After all, He gives altruistically (what's in it for Him anyway?) and takes nothing in return (what would He need?). See Rabbeinu Tam's *Sefer HaYashar*, Gate 1.

⁶ See *Da'at Tevunot* 18 as well as *Emek HaMelech*, *Sha'ar Shehuai HaMelch 1* and *Shomer Emunim* 2:14.

⁷ See 1:1:2.

⁸ See 1:2:3-4; 1:3:1,6; 1:4:4; 2:2:1,5-6; 2:8:2; etc.

⁹ See note 4 above as well as the first chapter of *Messilat Yesharim*.

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