

CHAPTER 2:3 THE PURPOSE OF CREATION

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

1:2:3

In the last segment Ramchal focused on the idea that G-d intended for us to perfect ourselves ¹, since by doing that willfully and proactively, we become closer to Him. Ramchal's point here is that it's not just that we earn closeness to G-d by perfecting ourselves -- we in fact *become* close to Him through the very process of perfecting ourselves ².

It comes to this: as we've explained, G-d is utterly perfect ³, and all other instances of perfection are sorts of "offshoots" of G-d's own perfection, much the way that a tree's branches are offshoots of the tree itself. Now, just as one holds onto the tree itself when he holds onto its branch, one already "holds onto" G-d's own Being in a certain sense when he takes hold of and pursues spiritual perfection ⁴. Thus, perfecting yourself and drawing close to G-d are one and the same thing for all intents and purposes ⁵.

But there's yet another, even more erudite way of looking at it, according to Ramchal's explanation. G-d is said to either manifest or "shine" His face upon us when He approves of our actions ⁶, or to "hide" it from us when He disapproves ⁷. It follows then that every time there's an instance of imperfection, spiritual failing, injustice, wrongdoing somewhere, He hides His "face" from that event. And contrarily every time there's an instance of perfection, spiritual excellence, justice, and goodness, G-d manifests His "face" and presence in that event. So whenever we exhibit a degree of perfection we attract His attention and indeed draw closer to Him in the process.

In any event, everyone who does the latter, as Ramchal depicts it here, "draws close to Him, enjoys His beneficence, and is himself responsible for his own goodness and (eventual) perfection", which is the best one could ever hope for.

Notes:

¹ "Perfecting" ourselves seems to come down to being as competent as we can in fulfilling G-d's spiritual-, ethical-, and character-related expectations of us. As Ramchal put in the first chapter of *Messilat Yesharim*, the "*mitzvot* are the means to bring us to true perfection".

Yet see *Da'at Tevunot* 24 as well as elsewhere in *Messilat Yesharim* Ch. 1 where Ramchal equates "perfection" with the achievement of *Devekut* (see 1:2:1 above for a discussion of that). Thus, we might say that "perfection" is the culmination of the process of honing your mitzvah performance, and that the result of that is *Devekut*.

Yet see below where it's pointed out that G-d Himself is perfection. Thus Ramchal's point seems to be that one achieves *Devekut*, emulates G-d, and perfects his being when he excels in his mitzvah performance.

² Some of us perhaps wistfully imagine how sublime drawing close to G-d Almighty must be, while the more doggedly material and this-worldly among us haven't even an inclination to do that. The righteous, though, *dream* about it in the deepest, most vivid corners of their hearts. Accordingly, they sometimes grow impatient in their quest, and yearn for a short-cut, if you will. That's the issue Ramchal is addressing here.

In fact, it can be said that person's true self can best be determined by the contrast between what he dreams of and what he ignores. It would do us each well to determine just where we ourselves stand on the "dream to get close to G-d" continuum in order to know our own spiritual station.

³ See 1:2:1.

⁴ ... much the way a drowning person who takes hold of a life-preserver is essentially safely aboard the rescue ship.

Also see *Tanya* 1:4 which makes the point that someone who loves a king and wants to embrace him is satisfied with embracing his many royal garments because he knows that the king himself is within them.

⁵ Also see *Da'at Tevunot* 14, 18.

This is an extraordinary point. It indicates that since my efforts to draw close to G-d are themselves a degree of success, then even if I don't fully achieve it by the time I die I'll still and all be taken to have succeeded at it. After all, I was on the path and had "touched the tree's branch" and thus embraced the tree itself for all intents and purposes.

But isn't that unfair in a sense, since I will have seemingly earned so great a reward despite other faults I might have? Nonetheless see 2:2:5, 2:3:9 below, which point to the fact that there'll indeed be consequences to my failings despite the fact that I'll eventually succeed. Though this calls for a lengthier discussion than we can justify now, this helps to explain how anyone can ever hope for perfection, given that "there is not a righteous person on earth, that does (only) good, and doesn't sin" (Ecclesiastes 7:20); and it helps explain the fundamentals of reward and punishment.

⁶ As in, "May G-d shine His face upon you, and be gracious to you" (Numbers 6:25),

⁷ As in, "And on that day I will become angry with them and forsake them; I will hide my face from them" (Deuteronomy 31:17),

See *Klallei Pitchei Chochma v'Da'at* 7, *Klallim Rishonim* 8, and *Da'at Tevunot* 76- 81, 84.

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