

CHAPTER 3: TORAH AND MITZVOT □ PART 1

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

We now leave behind our explorations into what the Jewish Tradition says about G-d and the Spiritual Realm, and touch upon how it depicts us and our world. As such, this is where we contend with tachlis -- our life's purpose and the point of it all. It's not as vast an area of thought as G-d and the Heavens, but it hits so close to home that we can't help but wonder about it.

Our raison d'être (and the world's) is this. As Ramchal puts it, "The impetus behind creation was that man ... should attach himself unto G-d, and enjoy His genuine goodness as a consequence." Now, this is obviously a rather complex statement that impacts upon so much, so let's do our best to explain it bit by bit.

The first point to consider is that it signifies that the world at large and the very cosmos was created so that we humans might come about and do what's expected of us. This idea raises the hackles of those who think that we humans are too "anthropocentric" -- too convinced of the central role we play in it all. But the glaringly huge effect that humans have on everything we come into contact with seems to underscore the truth of our central role (see Zohar, Parshat Tazriah 40; and Sanhedrin 37a for traditional statements).

In any event, we're told that man was created so as to "attach himself unto G-d". That means to say that we're here for one primary purpose, which is to grow as close to G-d as we can by loving Him and standing in awe of His presence, and living our lives for that reason. We're to do an array of many other things here too, to be sure; but they're all to touch upon our relationship to G-d Almighty.

What do we gain from doing that? We get to "enjoy (G-d's) genuine goodness", which means to say that we get to bask in His presence and to enjoy a state of supreme blessedness and happiness -- both in life and in the Afterlife.

That's it then -- that's our life's purpose. Everything else falls by the waysides.

Now, this is a stunning and utterly upending revelation for many of us. It denies so much of what we'd thought, and challenges us to do things that would never, ever have occurred to us. After all, the truth of the matter is that most of us aren't at all concerned with our relationship with G-d. And I dare say that that's exactly Ramchal's point -- that it's fundamentally important for us to know what matters most so that we can begin to focus on it.

But, so many other things must factor into this, and we'd need to know how we could ever develop

such a relationship to G-d in the first place. So we'll have to clarify all that before we can follow through on it.

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.