

PROLOGUE

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

What Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzattos *The Way of G-d* is in its original form is a laying out cold and clear, layer by layer, the very most fundamental cosmic principles of the universe, and the most exhilaratingly profound and mystical things expected of us as a consequence of them.

For as he put it in his introduction, what he set out to do was to simply lay out the general principles of the Jewish Faith as revealed by G-d's prophets and taught in His Torah in an orderly, clear, and unambiguous way, which he did by first setting out the general principles of the faith, then expanding outward from there, step by step.

He assured us that ... somehow ... all the secrets (of the faith) will then be within our grasp and that all we'll need to do to realize them then would be to study his work carefully and earnestly.'

He ends his introduction by wishing us, his brother (and sister, fellow) seekers of G-d good fortune, and prays that G-d grant us the eyes to see and ears to hear the wonders of His Torah, which he then sets out to present.

Whod dare make such a claim -- and manage to fulfill it? Only someone of the caliber of Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (whom we'll be referring to as Ramchal, which is a Hebrew acronym of his name), who was a major Kabbalist, philosopher, and moralist.

Ramchal was born in Padua, Italy into a well known and distinguished Italian-Jewish family in 1707, and was quickly recognized as an illuy (genius) since he became adept at Biblical, Rabbinic, and Kabbalistic literature at an early age (in fact, were told that hed memorized all the writings of Rabbi Yitzchak Luria by the age of 14!), as well as at the science and literature of his time.

In response to an unwarranted polemic raised against him in a highly-charged anti-Kabbalah era (hot on the heels of false-messiah Shabbatai Tzvis heresies), Ramchal eventually settled in Amsterdam where he wrote and published his most famous work, *The Path of the Just (Messilat Yesharim)* as well as *The Way of G-d (Derech Hashem)* among many others. He and his family settled in Israel afterwards and all died there in consequence of a plague in 1746.

The original work is divided into four main sections which all delve into some very, very weighty and esoteric notions. And the four are subdivided into numerous sections.

The chapters that make up the first section, "The Fundamental Principles of Reality", are entitled "G-d", "The Purpose of Creation", "Humankind", "Human Responsibility", and "The Spiritual Realm".

The second section is entitled "Divine Providence", and its chapters are "Divine Providence in General", "Humankind in This World", "Personal Providence", "Israel and The Other Nations", "How Divine Providence Works", "The System Behind Divine Providence", "The Influence of the Stars", and "The Details of Divine Providence".

The third section is entitled "The Soul, Inspiration, Prophecy, and the Supernatural", and its chapters are "The Soul and Its Influence", "Theurgy", "Inspiration and Prophecy", "The Prophetic Experience", and "Moses as a Prophet".

And the fourth section is entitled "Divine Service", and its chapters are "Serving G-d in General", "Torah Study", "The Love and Fear of G-d", "*Shma Yisrael* and Its Blessings", "Prayer", "The Sequence of the Day", "Intermittent Observances", "Seasonal Mitzvot", and "Incidental Observances and Blessings".

Now, there's a world to be said about this layout, but suffice it to say that it goes from discussions of G-d's Being and what that implies ("The Fundamental Principles of Reality"), to the ways G-d interacts with us in the world ("Divine Providence"), to the mechanisms within us and the universe that allow us to interact with Him ("The Soul, Inspiration, Prophecy, and the Supernatural"), to how we're to do that ("Divine Service").

The present work itself is a paraphrase of and a stealth running commentary to the original *The Way of G-d* rather than a new translation of it, and it oftentimes takes liberties with its contents (and its numbering-system as well) for the sake of the modern reader.

That's both because my beloved teacher, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan (of blessed memory), already provided a masterful translation which I wouldn't dare argue with; and also because I realized that an adaptation would allow me to explain Ramchal's thoughts as we'd go along, rather than quote, explain, quote again, etc., and muddle things in the process.

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.