DA'AT TEVUNOT - SECTION 2: CHAPTER 5

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Da'at Tevunot 2:5 (# 76 - 79)

1.

Having spoken about the interplay of body and soul in various realms [1] we'll now concentrate on them in conjunction with G-d's ways in the world.

Now, all-in-all, there are physical phenomena and spiritual ones, Ramchal reminds us. The spiritual ones are far superior to the physical, in that while the physical subsist on a minimum amount of Divine illumination and in over-all scarcity, the spiritual are showered in a great deal of Divine illumination and in abundance [2]. Also, whereas the spiritual with all of their Divine illumination and abundance are rooted in G-d's manifest benevolence, the physical with their minimum amount of Divine illumination and their scarcity are rooted in G-d's more covert benevolence [3]. And while spiritual phenomena are rooted in holiness, physical ones are rooted in the mundane and in crassness [4]. That explains why, given that we're physical beings, most of our concerns are enmeshed in the physical and are frankly nonsensical and beneath us.

The reality behind this lies in the fact that hazy, dark physicality is a consequence of G-d *hiding* His countenance rather than manifesting it outright, while spirituality is a consequence of G-d *shining* His countenance, luminance, and holiness. For, at bottom G-d interacts with us by either concealing or manifesting His countenance [5].

But that pattern isn't only true of how G-d interacts with the body and soul; it also serves as the model for the way material, body-related phenomena and spiritual, soul-related ones *came about*. For the crasser, turbid physical phenomena came about as a result of G-d having hidden His countenance from the first, while the more laudable spiritual ones came about in the light of His countenance [6].

2.

Now, we can either rectify the world or can ourselves *be* rectified within it through our Divine service [7]. But the truth is that we can either have our physicality and its consequences hold sway over us, or allow our spirituality and its consequences to. If we follow our bodily inclinations rather

than the dictates of the soul we'll suffer all sorts of harm, whereas if we overcome our physical inclinations and rise above all of its nonsense by following the ways of the Torah instead, then the soul will indeed rule over and purify the body. And we will have rectified the world and ourselves [8].

We've all, in fact, seen how things are in this world, and we know only too well how quickly things come and go, and how preoccupied we all are with this and that. What's apparently driving so much of what we do? Things like the desire to eat and drink, and all sorts of ephemera, at bottom. Can it be that we were created for that alone? No indeed: we were created to grasp G-d's being [9], and to attain knowledge and wisdom rather than to be preoccupied with more and more material and baseless things.

Humanity has indeed debased itself and brought a lot of its own harm upon itself, and it has become more and more sullied through the ages. For while our ancestors were far wiser than we and more sharp witted, we've become fixated on physicality and materiality. How tragic is that, given that G-d has only created such things by turning His countenance away from them, as we'd said.

Is it surprising, then, how so roiled in darkness physical things are as opposed to things related to the soul, which derive their being from G-d's full countenance and abundance? Indeed, if one allows his body to reign, G-d will correspondingly hide His countenance from him, and that person will be very far from G-d Himself, from wisdom and knowledge, and he'll find himself engulfed in sheer physicality and the ephemeral [10].

3.

None of this is new, to say the least: Adam and Eve experienced a degree of this struggle themselves. As soon as they allowed their eyes and its blandishments to rule over them they experienced G-d's hiddenness and were forced to depend on their own devices. As it's written, "You'll eat bread by the sweat of your brow" (Genesis 3:9) [11], and it's said of us, "All of a person's toil is for his mouth, and yet his soul is not satisfied" (Ecclesiastes 6:7) [12]. Indeed, we grow more and more foolish as time passes.

There's a rule of thumb that touches upon this that would serve us well to know. It's that the narrower your purview is, the crasser are your thoughts and desires. After all, isn't it true that children [13] have no concern or longing for the pursuit of wisdom. Indeed, they fly out of school as soon as the day's over without giving a thought to important things. But it's also true that as a person's mind grows and his purview expands he longs for finer and more spiritual things. And that goes far to explain our circumstances.

Indeed, this truism is rooted in Adam and Eve's sin, as a consequence of which we've all become preoccupied with nonsense. That was rectified for a while when we received the Torah [14], but

humanity's low status was reinstated when our people worshipped the Golden Calf and committed other sins. As a consequence, the world has been thrust into darkness.

Things would be otherwise if we'd only allow our souls to rule over our bodies. G-d would shine His countenance upon us then and we could reach the heights that the Holy Seraphim angels are on, as we'll come to when G-d will pour His "spirit upon all flesh" (Joel 3:1).

All that has varied in the course of history, of course, with people being on a higher or lower levels than others and vice versa. But at bottom the point is that when there were people of higher caliber G-d's countenance shone upon them and the world itself.

In any event, once we understand the makeup of the body and the soul and their roots in G-d's either manifesting His countenance or hiding it which affects all of this, we'll come to recognize how G-d interacts with the world both benevolently and otherwise. We'll acknowledge the great wisdom involved in this, and come to understand how fundamental this is both to the human condition and to the functioning of the universe.

Footnotes:

[1] See 2:1-4 in connection with this world, the afterlife, the resurrection of the dead, and the world to come.

[2] See note 7 to 1:14 above about the mechanism behind G-d's emanation of light.

[3] I.e., in His hiding His countenance, as we'll see below.

One thing to be derived from this, though, is that while there's little Divine illumination and scarce signs of Divine benevolence in physicality, there's *some* and sometimes even *more* than just some, otherwise it couldn't exist because G-d wouldn't want it to.

[4] See *Derech Hashem* 1:3:2 about the contrasts between body and soul.

[5] G-d actually interacts with us by *both* concealing and revealing His countenance by degrees, instant by instant.

See 1:8:2 above as well as note 3 there, and 1:14:3 for reference to G-d's hiding and revealing His countenance. Also see *Clallim Rishonim* 16.

[6] That's to say that G-d created the spiritual realm full-facedly and lovingly while He allowed the physical to exist, to be sure, but "back-handedly", if you will. For, while physicality certainly serves His purposes it also seems to countervail them.

[7] Or neither may come about, as we'll soon see. Ramchal's point is that we're both major actors in the

course of G-d's plans as well as beneficiaries of it, *or neither*, depending on our moral decisions and actions.

[8] Much of what's said above about the relative worth of body and soul, human and universal rectification, and the affects our actions have upon the world is reiterated elegantly in the first chapter of *Messilat Yesharim*.

[9] So little is said about this point that this stark citation of it is stunning and memorable (though see 1:2:1 above),

[10] We made the point in note 7 to 2:4 that a lot wasn't being said there about the subject at hand, and that's also very true here. For, as it's indicated in 1:15, 17, G-d will ultimately reveal His countenance to all and forever. Ramchal's whole aim *here*, then, is to move us to goodness and *teshuva* rather than offer an opposing metaphysical viewpoint.

[11] That is, you'll have to work for your food because G-d will leave you to fend for yourselves by turning His countenance from you because you sinned against Him.

[12] That is, we all work hard for our food and are dissatisfied because we've separated ourselves from G-d in the process.

[13] … whose purviews are narrow …

[14] When we were temporarily placed once again on the high pedestal that Adam and Eve had been on before their sin.