

# DA'AT TEVUNOT - SECTION 4: CHAPTER 7

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

1.

"Each and every created being", Ramchal reveals, "is a representative of one of G-d's esoteric means of governing the universe" and "reflects upon it". That's to say that everything here alludes to something in heaven that controls what happens down here. Hence, observe anything closely, the implication is, and you'll grasp something about G-d's ways in the world. And humankind itself most especially "reflects G-d's governing principles" Ramchal underscores.

It follows then that each of the five essential epochs of time in which G-d governs the universe referred to in the previous chapter has its parallel in the human situation. Here's a layout of all five [1].

2.

Given that there's no more lawless and chaotic period of life than the months we spend as fetuses in the womb -- simply because there are no rules there (other than the laws of nature) and no planned or purposeful action on our part -- that time of life is analogous to the world's first epoch of time, the "two thousand years of chaos" [2].

The world's second epoch of time was much less chaotic. And while the first was exemplified by the time we were enslaved in Egypt, the second was represented by the period of time after we'd received G-d's Torah and thus had a code of action and a life's goal to strive for (though we would only have begun to). So it's analogous to our younger years when we "grow little by little, but still aren't mature" people yet either physically or mentally, even if we're already 12 and 13 years old and mature enough to observe the Torah.

The third is represented by the epoch of time in which G-d's reign was more manifest in Israel -- when the Holy Temple stood in place, and open and well-chronicled miracles took place all the time [3].

Understand though that while G-d's governance was more clearly in place then, our understanding of it then needed to be tangible and visible, as we weren't spiritually mature enough to have it otherwise, and because had there not been open miracles then hence our faith would have faltered. So that was clearly not the great instance of manifest holiness many would like to think; that will come later on [4].

Ramchal doesn't enunciate it here, but that epoch is clearly analogous to young-adulthood, when

sight and hearing are sharp and clear, and when what's manifest is most trusted.

3.

The fourth epoch will be characterized by a much fuller, riper sense of spiritual insight into G-d's governance in this world. We wouldn't need to depend on open miracles, as we would have come to understand G-d's more subtle ways in this world. The prophet alluded to that period of time as one in which "the earth will be as full of the knowledge of G-d (i.e., of His governance) as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9), "when G-d (will manifestly) return to Zion, which they will see with their own eyes" (Ibid. 52:8) much the way we saw with our own eyes when "G-d spoke to (us) face to face out of the fire on the mountain (i.e., Mount Sinai)" (Deuteronomy 5:4).

It's analogous to middle age, when one's self will have deepened, and one's brow will have been ruffled again and again by series of realizations about G-d's ways. It's the experience of the Messianic Age.

The fifth and ultimate epoch, in the course of which "more and more revelations" and insights will occur to us, as Ramchal depicts it, would be the pinnacle. It's analogous to full maturity, when the soul is sated with insight, no longer distracted by temporary goals, and knows the ways of the world in full. This will be the experience of The World to Come, in the course of which G-d's sovereignty will be revealed in full..

4.

At bottom, his points here are that while G-d's governance has and will continue to be more and more manifest in the course of history, it will be fully manifest and obvious in the end. And that we're now in mid-process and can only note G-d's governance -- as well as His justice -- to a degree [5].

It's also important to understand that while G-d could certainly have brought the whole process about in one fell swoop, just as He could have had us been born mature, He chose not to do either. That's because it's to our advantage to catch sight of the sweep of history as well as the course of a lifetime from a broad perspective so as to grow from the experience and appreciate its playing out.

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Notes:

[1] In order to understand the flow of thought here refer to 4:1:1 where we indicated that to that point "we've learned that all wrong and injustice ... will be undone in the end" but that in the interim G-d had "established a system of justice" and that we'd need to "lay out the details of that system", and that's what we're beginning to do now. See note 2 there also.

See Ramchal's discussion of these eras in Derech Hashem 2:8:4. For this chapter's Kabbalistic references see R' Goldblatt's notes 9, 13 (as well as note 64 on p. 485 of his edition), and R' Shriki's notes 114-115.

[2] See 4:6:1 and its source as noted in the footnote there.

[3] See those enunciated for example in Pirkei Avot 5:7.

[4] Many wonder why we don't see open miracles in our times on the assumption that such things would surely solidify our faith, but that's clearly not Ramchal's assumption. One might say that he almost sees such things as accommodations to the needs of lesser souls in need of material confirmation of what should sit well in their hearts instead.

[5] Understand of course that a person can experience each or some of these "epochs of time" each and every day by degrees, either in or out of sequence, depending on his or her spiritual station in general or at that specific moment.

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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.