

DA'AT TEVUNOT - SECTION 5: CHAPTER 9

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

1. King Solomon said it best: "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Ramchal would add, though, that the same principle also holds true for everything in heaven; for just as everyone is said to have his or her day in the sun, every system in heaven has its day, too, as we'll explain.

What Ramchal will do in this chapter is conclude section five, which discusses our interactions with G-d and what results from them; and how that ties in with reward and punishment, which is actually the section's overarching theme [1]. (After all, everything we do as we interact with Him and others has its consequences, and every consequence brings on a judgment call on G-d's part.)

2. Ramchal starts out by reiterating a vital point made earlier that our people enjoy a special relationship with G-d. As he puts it here, we're "rooted in holiness", "linked to G-d's being", central to the human drama, and eminently important -- even the lowliest of us. For, as our sages put it, "even when one of them sins he's (still and all) a Jew" (Sanhedrin 44a) [2].

Yet our work-a-day relationship with G-d -- the here and now of our give and take with Him -- isn't based on that stunning reality that lies deep within. We have to respond to the good and bad things we do just as anyone else, and we too are to be judged in this world accordingly. As this world is rooted in justice and order.

In a similar way, each and every week has its special day, the Shabbat, along with its other simple weekdays. The Shabbat is unique because it's the day that G-d set up to function as the storehouse of the entire week's spiritual nourishment. Yet despite the spiritual luster of the Shabbat and the central role it plays, the world's events are most especially carried out in the course of the rest of the week, when we're more active.

And while G-d certainly blesses us as a consequence of the Shabbat, His chosen day, He nonetheless most especially blesses us for the acts of kindness, selflessness, and charity we can only do during the week.

At bottom the point is that while there is a spiritual realm that matters very, very much and lends cadence and nuance to the day-to-day, it's what we do when we're carrying out our material works in this world that we're judged for; and no one should depend on his or her spiritual core to get by,

as we must all answer for our actions.

3. We're to also understand that G-d Almighty, who is holy Himself, has emanated all sorts of holiness in the world, from minimal levels of it to deeply and unfathomably high levels (which are still and all far removed from His own degree of it). And a lot of that is affected by our interactions with Him and with those holy phenomena.

Along with holiness G-d also allows for a lot of repair and betterment in this world that sorely needs them, and they too are affected by our actions and by the degree of closeness to G-d we achieve accordingly. And that's especially where our people and our Divine service come in, since we have it within us to foster a lot of holiness and betterment by our service.

Indeed, our living in the world and serving G-d at one and the same time is the most important thing we humans are capable of in the end. While a lot of that was accomplished in very esoteric ways when the Holy Temple stood and the Kohanim were able to facilitate the process there and then [3], the principle still stands.

The point of the matter is that we have it within us to do wonderful, vital, and heroic things in this world -- or the opposite. And we're each judged accordingly, given that everything we do touches on our relationship with G-d and either nudges the great and holy future along or forestalls it (G-d forbid).

Hearkening back to what we said at the beginning of this chapter, though, as we'll see, while this system is the one that lies deep in the functions of this world, there's another system that factors irrespective of this which we'd cited earlier but which will delve into most especially in the next section.

Notes:

[1] For Kabbalistic references in this chapter see Klallim Rishonim 32, R' Friedlander's notes 447-450 and his Iyyun 55-56, R' Goldblatt's note 6, and R' Shriki's notes 145, 147.

[2] See 5:2:1, 3, 5:3:2 and 5:8:2 for this.

[3] See 5:7.

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.