

THE GYM AND THE SPA

by Rabbi Ben Tzion Shafier

Imagine that you are invited to an exclusive health club. You've never been there, but you know the layout. On the right side is the gym; on the left is the spa. The gym is the area where people work out. It has all of the exercise equipment: the elliptical machines, the weights, the treadmills. The spa is the place to relax. It has the sauna, the steam room, and the massage tables.

You decide it's been a stressful week, so you head straight for the spa. But by mistake, instead of turning left, you turn right and find yourself in the gym. You look around and see red-faced men everywhere, grunting and sweating. You let out a cry, "Who needs all this equipment? What's all this running, pumping and pushing about? Whoever designed this spa did a lousy job!"

This is an apt parable for Creation. When Hashem made man, He created two worlds: This World and The World to Come. This World is the gym. This is where we work out, where we grow and become bigger and better people. The World to Come is the spa. That is where we enjoy the results of our work. Each world has its place, each world has its purpose. We were put in this world for a few short years to accomplish our mission. Then we leave it and enjoy our accomplishments in the World to Come.

This parable is so fundamental to understanding life that without it, nothing under the sun makes much sense. If a person attempts to make sense out of life without realizing that we were put on this earth to grow and then to enjoy our accomplishments in the World to Come, then he will find many, many questions that have no answers. Not questions that he doesn't know the answers to — questions that have no answers.

The Answer — Why Hashem Created the World

The Mesillas Yescharim explains that Hashem created man to give to him. However, it must be something that he worked for — not something that was given to him. To enable man to earn his reward, Hashem created two worlds: this world and the World to Come. This world was designed with the challenges, trials and situations that allow man to perfect himself. The World to Come was designed to allow man to enjoy the reward of his labors. In accordance to the level of perfection that man reaches here in this world, he is able to enjoy the presence of Hashem in the World to Come. This world is the corridor to the World to Come — which is the purpose of Creation.

Two worlds — each with its role, each with its purpose. The key point is that the World to Come isn't an addendum to life. It isn't an afterthought. It's the reason that Hashem created the moon, the sun,

the heavens and all that it contains. It's the reason that He made man. It's the reason for life. If a person doesn't understand this he has little chance of understanding anything that goes on in this world. Because he hasn't stopped to ask that critical question: what did the Manufacturer intend it to be used for?

Is it any wonder that people have questions about life? They are looking at only half of the picture. The purpose of it all, the reason for it all, isn't in their vision. So, of course, the whole thing makes no sense. And they have many, many questions. Questions on God. Questions on the system. Questions on the justice of it all. Why is life so hard? Why is there so much suffering in the world? Why do bad things happen to good people? Many, many questions — and no answers.


All of these questions are built on one premise: life ends in the grave. When we die, it's game over. We're dead and no more. If that were correct, then their questions are valid. Life makes no sense. It truly isn't fair. However, once a person understands the reason for life, then all of these quandaries vanish like smoke.

A Perfectly Imperfect World

Why it is that man suffers so? Why did Hashem design a custom-made world with such care and concern, yet purposely make it so hard for man to enjoy those features? Granted Hashem made the orange, the pear, and the grape, but He also made man in a manner that it is very hard for him to enjoy these things. Why do it?

When we come to the core realization of why Hashem put us here, we view life very differently. Our station here isn't significant; it is a vehicle, and in that context it makes sense. We begin to see the form and the flow of this world. While we may not know the answer to every question posed by man, we have a framework to base our answers upon. The patterns of our experiences weave a tapestry of meaning and beauty. All of the questions melt away as reason and perception set in. The more time we spend on this journey of understanding, the more the pieces fit together. Once we get it, life itself makes sense.

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 This is an excerpt from the new Shmuz on Life book: [Stop Surviving, Start Living](#). It is powerful, thought provoking, and life changing. The book is available for purchase at Judaica stores, Feldheim.com and [TheShmuz.com](#).