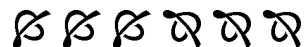


Life Cycle of Human Existence (Part 2)

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LESSON OUTLINE

1. Confusion about the Nature of the Ultimate Reward
2. The Purpose of Creation
3. Achieving Creation's Purpose
4. The Saga of the Body and Soul



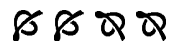
Introduction

In our last lesson, we viewed human existence in this world as a preparatory stage preceding the World to Come and its eternal reward. In this lesson, we explore aspects of the cycle of human existence that enable us to achieve G-d's goal for Creation.

The source for much of the material that relates to man's spiritual nature is found in the Kabbalistic literature, the most esoteric portion of Torah wisdom. Man's "spiritual nature" includes the human soul, man's ability to connect to G-d, life after death, revival of the dead, and the World to Come. Because these topics are so obscure, they will be presented here within a more general overview of the cycle of human existence.

Primary Sources

1. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto (1707-1747, Italy) – *Derech Hashem* (The Way of G-d), *Ma'amar Ha'Ikarim* (An Essay on Fundamentals [of Judaism]) and *Da'at Tevunot* (The Knowing Heart)
Note: For the sake of brevity, we will refer to Rabbi Luzatto by his popular name: "Ramchal," which is acrostic for "Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto"
2. Maimonides (1135-1204, North Africa – Egypt) – Introduction to *Perek Chelek* (10th chapter of Tractate *Sanhedrin*)



Confusion about the Nature of the Ultimate Reward

Maimonides notes the great confusion, experienced equally by learned and unlearned people, that surrounds the concept of the ultimate reward for righteous behavior.

Maimonides

Much confusion and many erroneous assumptions abound regarding the nature of G-d's ultimate rewards and punishments for mankind. People find support for their various mistaken opinions in Biblical verses and midrashic (oral traditions of the Torah) statements. Following are five of the more prevalent *incorrect* opinions of what constitutes ultimate reward and punishment:

1. Physical pleasures in this world: Reward will be a blissful physical existence in the world in which we now live. All of one's physical desires will be easily accessible. Other types of reward in this category are longevity (though not immortality); large families; universal peace and security among nations; and Jewish sovereignty and authority over their enemies. Punishment will consist of a difficult and painful physical existence, and life that progresses in ways that are opposite all the rewards described here – like that which has befallen our people in exile.

2. **Physical pleasures in the Garden of Eden:** Reward will be a blissful, paradisiacal physical existence in the Garden of Eden, where the righteous will enjoy a carefree existence of wonderful food, palatial living quarters with exquisite furnishings, rivers of wine, fragrant oils and other physical pleasures, both imaginable and unimaginable. Punishment will be an experience that is completely opposite this reward – an existence of physical torment and torture.
3. **Eternal Messianic Era:** Reward will be an idyllic, eternal physical existence under the leadership of an immortal (physical) king (the Messiah). In this existence, people will grow to be the size of giants, and will multiply to inhabit the earth. The earth itself will produce ready-made garments, edible bread and other comforts and delights that are currently unattainable. Those who are unworthy will suffer the punishment of being denied this blissful existence.
4. **Eternal Physical Existence after Revival of the Dead:** Reward for righteous individuals will be resurrection within their previous family structures. People who have died will return to the physical nature of life as we know it, eating and engaging in other physical pleasures. Those who are unworthy will be punished by being denied this blissful existence.
5. **Eternal Physical Existence following the Messianic Era and Revival of the Dead:** Reward will consist of the following sequence of events: the Messianic era, followed by the Revival of the Dead and entrance into an eternal, paradisiacal existence in the Garden of Eden. In the Garden, man will continue to nourish himself through the consumption of food, as he does in this world. Those who are unworthy will be denied this blissful existence.

Each of these views is mistaken, although some are closer to the truth than others. Each is based on imagination and conjecture, on Biblical and midrashic sources taken out of context, and/or on unguided or misguided readings of biblical statements, both allegorical and literal. All of these views lack an understanding of the *ultimate* reward and punishment: that of *the World to Come*. In their attempts to define the ultimate reward, people often confuse interim stages of reward with the ultimate reward.

To gain a clearer understanding of the ultimate rewards of human life, we must explore the goals of Creation. Ramchal describes the cycle of human existence in terms of these goals.

The Purpose of Creation

Ramchal:

G-d's Purpose: G-d's purpose in creating the world was to bestow the greatest possible good to His created beings.

Partaking of G-d's Perfection: True perfection can be attributed to G-d alone. Created beings can achieve only relative perfection. The greatest possible good that human beings can experience is an opportunity to partake of G-d's perfection. One can accomplish this only by attaching oneself to G-d. In this way, a created being can achieve an otherwise unattainable level of perfection, through becoming part of G-d's perfection. However, any attachment to G-d is limited, in that no created being can ever truly emulate G-d's Own perfection. Nevertheless, through a strong association with G-d, a created being can derive infinite pleasure from G-d's perfection.

Achieving Maximum Benefit from One's Attachment to G-d: In His infinite wisdom, G-d determined that man would realize the greatest good through *earning* his right to partake of G-d's perfection – rather than through receiving it automatically and without effort on his part. By earning his reward, man can strengthen his attachment to G-d, coming to “resemble” G-d in the sense that the degree of perfection he has achieved is truly his own, through his having earned it. (This is to be distinguished from G-d's perfection, which is intrinsic rather than acquired.)

In addition, by earning his own reward, man is not plagued by the natural embarrassment that comes from receiving a charitable gift. Our sages described the discomfort associated with an unearned gift: “One who eats that which is not his own [i.e., one who accepts charity] is embarrassed to look his

benefactor in the face” (Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate *Orlah*).

Earning Reward is Attachment to G-d: The very act of earning reward brings attachment to G-d. Since true perfection is found only in G-d, any action that leads one to a level of moral perfection, leads to attachment to G-d – the Source of all perfection. [We should not view earned reward as a natural consequence of our actions – like wages that are paid for work, but which are not an integral part of that work. On the contrary, any righteous act creates a bond of attachment to G-d’s perfection. Note, however, that the ultimate reward that results from one’s righteous acts do not follow immediately after the performance of such acts; rather it is delayed until one reaches the World to Come. This is a result of a fundamental change in the world and in human nature that occurred when Adam sinned – see later, “The Saga of the Body and Soul.”]

Creation: The world G-d created is the environment most suitable for man to achieve his perfection. Innumerable opportunities are available for both choosing and rejecting perfection. Man has been provided with ample intellectual powers and all positive human traits through which to perfect himself. He also has negative human traits and a world filled with materialistic elements which, if he pursues them without guidance or spiritual purpose, can lead him to deficiency.

Man is the primary element and his is the principle purpose in creation. G-d created all other creatures because He deemed them a necessary part of a complete universe. Although we do not know the precise purpose for the creation of every creature and object in the world, we are aware that all other creations play secondary roles, aiding the fulfillment of man’s purpose in Creation.

Achieving Creation’s Purpose

Ramchal

Two Phases of Human Existence: To accomplish man’s purpose in creation, G-d divided human existence into two distinct phases: an initial phase during which man exercises his free will to attain a level of perfection, and a final phase during which man receives the reward he earned for the level of perfection he has achieved.

G-d always exerts His attribute of mercy and bestowing good in greater measure than His attribute of meting out strict justice. Therefore, G-d made the phase of man’s earning reward last only a limited period of time, while designating nothing less than eternity as the period of reward for the perfection man has earned.

The Earning Phase: The period during which man is able to attain a level of perfection and earn his reward is called *Olam Hazei* (this world). During this phase, G-d places man in an environment where he faces the maximum challenge for earning perfection and rejecting situations and activities that would lead to spiritual deficiency. In order for man to truly *earn* his reward, in this phase there must be a balance of opportunities to perform both good and evil deeds. There should be no advantage that would lead man to choose perfection over deficiency. Although we might have preferred that G-d provide man with more opportunities to achieve perfection as opposed to deficiency, since G-d’s purpose is for man to *earn* perfection through his own efforts, G-d created equal opportunities for man to achieve either perfection and deficiency.

The Reward Phase: The period during which man receives his reward is called *Olam Habah* (the World to Come). During this final phase, there exist no opportunities for deficiency. In receiving his reward, man will attach himself to G-d and achieve everlasting levels of ever-greater perfection.

Man’s Dual Nature: In order for man to achieve G-d’s purpose, G-d made man of two opposite elements: a pure spiritual soul and a physical body that is drawn toward materialistic pleasures.

The Soul: Man’s “soul” is actually a combination of two distinct types of life forces, which bond man to the highest spiritual forces – including G-d – as well as to the body and the physical world.

Animal Soul: The lower type of soul is called the “animal soul,” a soul that man shares with other living creatures. This soul is responsible for emotions and intelligence, and becomes a genetically transmitted part of the organism at conception. Through this soul the body is built and the level of intelligence is provided for each species. The “animal soul” is bound to the body through the flow of blood.

Although man’s “animal soul” is similar in some ways to that of animals, man’s is vastly superior to the souls of other living beings in its level of intelligence, imagination, memory, and will.

Divine Soul: The higher, spiritual type of soul is called man’s “divine soul,” and is unique to the human race. It connects man to the highest spiritual forces, allowing him to influence the spiritual forces through his deeds. At the same time, the “divine soul” allows spiritual forces to exert their influence on man. The “divine soul” also controls man’s “animal soul,” by shaping its mental images and by initiating thoughts and desires.

In addition, the Divine soul has the capacity to purify the physical aspects of the body, to the point that the body can derive eternal pleasure, along with the soul, from spiritual perfection. This capacity is dormant in man’s state of existence in this world, and will remain so until the time when the body is resurrected.

The Body: The body is the source of man’s physical desires, which are intrinsically neither good nor bad, but which can be directed to good or to bad ends.

The Earning Phase – Means of Earning Reward: G-d established limits and directives to guide man in using the world in accordance with the purposes for which G-d intended it. When man abides by these limits and directives, he can elevate even his most mundane activities, making them into acts of perfection, and through these acts he can draw closer to G-d. G-d gave man these directives taking into account man’s true nature and all his tendencies and needs, so that he can best become worthy of being drawn close to G-d and enjoying G-d’s goodness.

These limits and directives are G-d’s mitzvot, which include both positive commands and prohibitions. Positive commands are those we must actively perform, and prohibitions are those activities from which we must abstain. Each mitzvah serves either to instill within the person a particular level of moral perfection, or to remove or lessen some specific human deficiency. The Torah speaks of the beneficial results of performing mitzvot: “*G-d commanded us to follow all these rules... that He may grant us good...*” (Deuteronomy 6:24).

Man’s Inclinations for Good & Bad: G-d created man with drives both for good (*yetzer tov*) and for bad (*yetzer harah*). Man’s good inclination directs his natural tendencies to perform G-d’s Will and to draw closer to G-d, while his bad inclination directs man to violate G-d’s Will and to distance himself from G-d. In the earning phase of his existence, man is confronted regularly with tests in which he must choose between following his good or his evil inclination.

The Saga of the Body and Soul

A profound change occurred in the world at large and in human nature specifically, as a result of Adam’s sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge.

Pre-Sin Equilibrium: G-d created the First Man with his opposing inclinations equally balanced. G-d placed just enough conflict within man to allow him to choose good and thereby to achieve perfection and earn his reward through his own efforts. Had Adam chosen good on the first day of his creation, his soul would have dominated his body and purified it to a level at which both body and soul could have experienced eternal bliss in the Garden of Eden.

Post-Sin Non-Equilibrium: When Adam sinned, man’s existence on earth changed entirely, for his act led to increased evil in the world and in his nature. Although we today are not being “punished” for Adam’s sin, it still affects our lives, for the nature of the world has been greatly

altered by the sin, and the challenges we face are altogether different from those we would have faced had Adam not sinned. After the sin, man could no longer achieve perfection in this world. The sin resulted in the need for man to undergo a period of separation of his body and soul, which happens when he dies. Body and soul will reunite to achieve perfection jointly at the time of the revival of the dead.

Interim Period: During the time when the body and soul are separated from one another, each component goes to a different, Divinely-ordained place. The body returns to its original elements, as G-d pronounced to Adam after Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge – “*You are dust, and to dust you must return*” (Genesis 3:19). For the soul, G-d created certain spiritual places for it to reside. Depending upon how well the person conducted himself morally during his lifetime, his soul enters either a “Soul World” or Gehenna, where it will await the future resurrection and reunification of body and soul.

The Soul World / (Spiritual) Garden of Eden: The soul of a righteous person experiences a spiritual pleasure similar to the ultimate reward that both body and soul will experience in the World to Come. The degree of this blissful experience will be commensurate with the level of the person’s righteousness during his/her life on earth.

Gehenna: The souls of sinners undergo a number of spiritual punishments and forms of suffering, the most common one being Gehenna. Punishment is meted out according to a person’s degree of sinfulness during his lifetime in this world. These punishments are designed to penalize the soul for its sins so that it can become free of any liability for evil that it had committed, and thereafter receive its eternal reward for its good deeds. The duration of a soul’s stay in Gehenna depends upon the extent of punishment necessary to atone for its sins.

The Messianic Era: Besides the soul’s eternal reward that it will receive in the World to Come, Creation must reach a state of perfection in this world. The world cannot advance to this perfected state until the Jewish people as a nation achieve optimum spiritual fulfillment in this world. G-d’s goal for the Jewish people is that they achieve the highest level of holiness and attachment to G-d’s Presence (*Shechina*) that is possible in this world. Only after this state of national moral perfection has been achieved can the world progress to its ideal state so that individuals can receive their deserved reward in the World to Come.

The Patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – initiated the process of bringing the world to its perfected state, and it has been the task of the Jewish people to continue their work until it will have been completed. However, because of various sins the Jewish people have committed throughout history, the process has never yet been properly completed. G-d decreed a *maximum* historical period of 6000 years from Creation (Creation took place 5760 years ago) for the completion of this process, before the world can pass on to its eternal state of perfection.

The individual who will lead the Jewish people to a final state of moral perfection will be a descendant of King David, who will be chosen especially by G-d to inaugurate this era. This individual will be the Messiah (*Mashiach*). The Messiah’s reign will be marked by an increased manifestation of G-d’s Presence among mankind, and goodness in every form. At the same time, it will be marked by the elimination of every form of evil. Mankind will be strengthened spiritually, and prosperity and tranquility will increase, while destruction and injury will cease to exist. There will be such a proliferation of wisdom that Divine Inspiration will be attainable without any difficulty (“*I will pour out My spirit [of Divine Inspiration] over mankind*” [Joel 3:1].)

People will rejoice in this great good and will be closely attached to G-d, serving Him alone. They will continually elevate themselves until they attain a level of spiritual perfection that will enable them to advance to a state of permanent human existence in the World to Come.

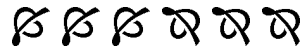
All those who are alive during the Messianic era will then die before they come to life again with the revival of the dead.

Revival of the Dead: At the time of resurrection, all people – righteous and wicked alike – will be

brought back to life for G-d's great Day of Judgment, when G-d will judge all of mankind. G-d will determine who is worthy of being rewarded with eternal existence and who has not yet been adequately punished for his sins. Those who are found to require more punishment will then receive their appropriate punishment.

The body and soul are united to partake jointly of their eternal reward because both components of man participated actively in achieving perfection. It is fitting that the body that toiled in this world to achieve perfection should benefit from G-d's ultimate reward.

The Reward Period – Harmony: In the World to Come, the soul will dominate the body completely, elevating both itself and the body to higher levels of perfection in their attachment to G-d. These levels will be commensurate with the level of one's righteousness during one's life in this world.



Questions

Address your correspondence to: foundations@jewishstudies.org

1. Describe Creation's purpose?
2. Why must the ultimate reward include both the body and soul?
3. Your questions and comments: _____