

Rebbetzin Heller notes December 31 2006 Maharal Sefer Netivos Olam

We are going to discuss a different take on the matter. Today we will do Derech Hashem the fourth perek, where the Ramchal talks about what it is like to be in this world. He is going to tell us in a particular way, not in a general way (that it is a choice between good and bad), but what our lives unfold as being in the course of this battle.

The situation of a person in this world can be observed in two ways, the character and everything that makes it up and the environment, where that person is put. A person is made up of all sorts of character traits that can be used for good or bad and a person will be put in an environment that could potentially trigger either overcoming the bad in their character or expressing the good in their character rather than suppressing the good.

We spoke earlier in the perek about physicality and spirituality that a human has two opposites inside, the soul and the body. We see with our eyes that the material side is the primary part and the earliest part to emerge... a baby is conscious of who he is physically. The Gra points out that this basic physical identity grabs our identity to the point that it takes years until the spiritual and physical sides speak with voices that are equally loud. What comes forth from the material self is very strong. As soon as he is born he is almost completely physical and his intelligence is only activated a bit, meaning the potential is there at birth but the unfolding doesn't yet take place. By the way it has now been discovered that intellectual potential is there on day one, no new brain cells get there. Education helps develop, but the intelligence is there. As a person grows, according to their lives, but the material side still rules him and inclines him as he does whatever he has to do, whatever matters he is involved in. The material side is always going to be a voice.

The exception being is if the person grows in wisdom and strengthens himself in its ways, then he can struggle and conquer his nature so that he can let go his taivas and he can be powerful as he goes in the way his mind directs. It is not a matter of just chisaron and shelamos, but also chumrios and ruchnios. The Maharal says the root of all evil is lack. He is saying the root of all evil is materialism. The relationship is that all material things are death-bound. They have only brief endurance and can satisfy only for moments until you desire something else. The more material you are, not only don't you hear the voice of their own spirit (Ramchal) but also the possibility of experiencing chisaron becomes more real.

As we see in reality that material things in life are cloudy and dark and don't reveal spirituality, and it is almost opposite of what we need to attach to for holiness. The material can be used to give your spiritual side hands and feet, but it is conditional on not giving them equal time. As soon as you give the material side any form of conquest, then you doom your spiritual side because it becomes harder to access.

Picture this. You are waiting for Reb Sheinberg for a bracha. The man in front of you wants a bracha for a business deal that is important. What are you watching? The person sees something material as being his make it or break it. If he said, I need to make this

money so I can keep my kids in school, a means for an end, but it is a difference in how he would receive the bracha. In one case, it may not expand him or make him more of a person. Having what you want materially doesn't always make you more of a person. But if you are really sure about where your material blessings are to take you, then the blessing is blessing, it makes you more. We have to be careful.

Even though the soul by its nature is pure, when it enters the body it becomes confused because the soul is expelled from closeness to Hashem and is involved with everything that is opposite to its nature and it is conquered by it and can't get out without struggling with great force against the body. The enemy is physical consciousness, not the body. The body taking over the soul – its emotions and consciousness is the enemy. Material things can be used for good or bad, but emotional involvement with material things is the enemy – it dooms you.

For example, a car is good for getting you from here to there. But can you have an emotional involvement with a car? Advertisement sells you status, prestige, control along with the car. This is the danger.

Another example, an aesthetic home is very good for harmony. But the magazines sell you aesthetic at best and status at worse and to measure your value by your home -that it reflects YOU. Don't buy into that.

Since the Master decided this combining body and soul will never tear asunder, even if you say at death you are separated from your body (ordinary people when they die, they want out, the body has been the scene of their defeat too many times, there is no sentimental attachment to it. After the first year when the body disintegrates, the soul flies to where it wants to be, not here in this plane. But with real tzadikkim, because the body was the way the soul expressed itself, there is always some spiritual attachment to the body and the body does not disintegrate). But the body, even if it disintegrates, this marriage is only temporarily dissolved until tehillas hamaisim, when the soul comes back to the body, and they will survive together forever.

The soul is going to try to weaken the hold of the body on the self because that is where the darkness of materialism comes from. If the darkness could be removed, the body could rise up with the soul instead of the soul descending with the body. When in this world the material side is strong, our lives are very dark, very far from what they should be. One of the most apparent realities is that most people are not that happy. This is because we are very materially self aware and the more a person's consciousness is that way, the unhappier we are because pursuing material things falls prey to lack. I'm tired, hot, cold, bored. We distract ourselves with ads and other things that take us further into pursuing material things to fill the lack. It is not true. Much of what we read takes us to a place where there is no such thing as Hashem or spirit. Innocent or not, the things we read have no G-d in them. The more we distract ourselves, we are conquered by materialistic passions, escape. The only way out is to be more spiritually aware, to have Hashem's presence within you, where are you going, why do you want to be there,

incredible nature of travel, is there good around you..distract yourself with things that have meaning.

By trying to put one's effort to strengthen the soul against the material side, a person betters their situation and gets to a place where they deserve to be. Until then we spoke about the person as if we are alone here. But all of us are in an environment, we are not alone. The environment, the world is also dark in the sense of being material. Before we talk about the environment, I will pause here for questions on the darkness within ourselves, the way our bodies and our souls do battle for our identities and the nature of lack.

In the world, everything is material. All of the occupations that we busy ourselves with are material because everything is material and physical. If you are programmer or a banker or a lawyer, you are dealing with material acquisitions. Even if you are a teacher, you are dealing with interpretations of material reality. It is very hard to escape. Our bodies demand that these be our occupations so that we can live, we need all of it. We can't exist without all the things that our nature demands. And you can't get these things without money and a marketplace to get them. We have awareness of our material desires and the world is the marketplace. When you are looking at a person's nature or occupation or what they busy themselves with, they are involved with chumrios.

Q: Why do we get reunited – why does the soul want the body

A: Our bodies then will not be like our bodies now. There is a process. Olam haba is a totally ruchni place. We go through a process, go through the tunnel, account for our lives, but they are not the end of the story. There is a great day of judgment and people will be judged on the effect they had on the world generationally as well as on themselves. Oftentimes a person can do something and can have an impact far greater than they anticipated. For example, in the Yosef story, where was he for 22 years? Why didn't he get word to his father? The answer is that if he had sent word to his father it would have exposed what his brothers did and that could have led to terrible consequences for what his brothers were to be part of establishing. Tragedy would have occurred. The brothers would have been humiliated or the father would have expelled them but everything his brothers dreaded would have happened. So Yosef is responsible for Am Yisroel as a klal...one choice, I am not going to write..had that effect.

Look at Shabtai Tzvi, at some point from his own perspective, he probably knew he wasn't going where he thought he was going, he no longer thought he was Moshiach. At that point, when he kept on talking, he sowed heresy which led to mistrust of kabbalah since he was a kabbalist and spoke out kabbalistic ideas, which led to suppression of peninias HaTorah which arguably is one of the forces that has led people to practicing religion by rote. Did he see that? No. So the great day of judgment we have to see the whole picture.

After that, the rishoim, the unspeakable rishoim perish and everyone else will come back to their rectified purified bodies that will now serve their soul. From that perspective what they are experiencing now is a continuum forever of the joy of having done

something, the feeling of achievement. It is hard to relate to because in this world, we forget everything as soon as it happens because we are stuck in time. At that point, the joy of continued achievement will affect both the soul and body continually at the same time which is what the techiim hamaisim is about.

Q: Is being at home a good occupation?

A: For a man or a woman, the issues of what you are and what you do is real. The ikur is who you are. Rambam talks about occupations, choosing one that takes you further from pure chumrios. He talks about becoming the person you could be. Hashem made people to have to work is for them to pass the nisayon of discovering Hashem in the midst of their own efforts and to strengthen their ruchnios and their contributions to the environment. Becoming and being is the purpose. Doing is the means. Now lets look at women. It is very hard to make the case that a woman's becoming will be more actualized by any job than she can become in any job other than enabling people. In Halacha, it is very high on the scale of things, because human life is enormously significant. When the woman makes the home and raises children properly, it is hard to make the case that she would evolve doing other things. For a whole slew of reasons, women who don't work at a profession are not dedicated to being and becoming and fall to other forms of chumrios. The choices are where do you develop more ruchios in yourself and in the world. When you decide which mitzvah to do, choose the one that you can do and no one else can do. No one else will be your child's mother or your husband's wife. You have to question whether entrusting the child to the care of someone whose values you don't respect even if they are a good person - where does that take you? Today some women affirm their being and becoming, by supporting Torah by bringing in parnassa. At what point is that a means toward an end and at what point is that an end in itself? Women assume the nisayon of men. There are more and more women who absorb the nisayon that their parnaso is their identity, we have another identity and that is ruchani. When choosing an occupation, choose what gives you satisfaction, but where does it fit in with the scheme of things? Don't let it grab your identity.

So now he is telling us the happy ending, the resolution. The depth of Hashem's wisdom is such that He arranged things so potentially (notice potentially) that a person can be totally involved into material activity but can turn the material over into spiritual consciousness. That means that a person can be doing something material but rather than being lowered to that material level, he is uplifting that material with them so the lower he goes, the higher he goes because the more effort is involved.

An example is a Shochet. With a shochet, with the knife and with blood and with killing, he says the bracha and through that he elevates himself, the animal and the person eating of that animal. This is why there are 12 sorts of bedika that have to be done on the shochets knife to parallel the 12 tribes. The idea being that the 12 tribes, the gates of Yerushalayim, all of which are interconnected, all are elevated by taking that which is animalistic and bringing it into a higher form.

And this can happen through Hashem who wants that to happen, having made limitations and order and having given us man. Let's make this clearer. We people like order. In the name of chaos, in an intellectual and spiritual frame, is freedom. We don't like freedom, so we create structure. The structure that humans create because we don't see clearly where our direction could/should be, so we create structure to make the material side of life more convenient or more aesthetic, which gets us nowhere in terms of the bigger picture. So Hashem did is give us structures to get us somewhere, by determining what use we should make of the world and its creation and the intent that a person should have when involved with them. So the intent – there is a maklokis if a mitzvah requires intent or not, but they do. Let's say you have an uncle who is 119 and who is immobile all Shabbos. You can't say he is now Shomer Shabbos even if he doesn't break shabbos because there is no intent, no consciousness of keeping Shabbos. Mitzvoths require consciousness. Without consciousness they are refining physical activity. This is what we find in non-Jewish literature. Do what is right because what goes around comes around. This is self-serving and materialistic. Doesn't get you very far. Better is do it because it is fulfilling. This protects that part of you that is transcendent, but it is still very much in the trap of ego and self.

Hashem gave us borders and limitations through the mitzvohs, and if we use them as borders and order, with the intent Hashem commanded, at that point, the action that the person is doing physically or materially will have perfection in part of it – it is being used perfectly as the wagon that carries the merchandise, and through this the person will become empowered to become more than self as they develop a greater advantage over who they were initially before they even encountered the nisayon of chumrios.

They rise from the low position and become higher. Hashem with His superior wisdom saw all the different forms of lack that are inherent in a person, He saw the great advantage of inner honor and pride a person needs to develop if they are going to attach to Hashem and have profit from His goodness, so if he does this, then he is going to have all the wholeness of the virtue we mentioned before, and he will deny anything that moves him away from attachment to Hashem. This is what is meant if you want to understand where Hashem is coming from in this equation. In Shiur HaShiurim, it talks about the kiss of Hashem, He kisses me with the kiss of His mouth. A kiss only gives delight because gives a feeling of closeness and attachment. There is nothing inherently pleasurable in the physical kiss. This is why people don't buy plungers to give themselves artificial kisses. There is the kiss of connection – I want you, and the kiss of exclusivity is I don't want anything to destroy our relationship. There are two kinds of mitzvahs, aseï and lo aseï. Aseï tells us "Here is how to connect"- how to connect that moves us toward shelamos and fills up the empty space. Lo aseï tells us how not to self-destruct. Don't go here...this will give you greater chisaron, it will attach you to the physical world, more chumrios – don't go there because you want only real connection. So what comes forth from this is the mitzvohs lo aseï, we often misunderstand and think they are there for the sake of others or the world, but (and the Gra says this), the reason we don't murder or steal (Hashem could have made these averahs impossible) is so we can make the choice so we don't go there and see life as sacred and possessions as a

consequence of Hashem's hashgacha. So the more we do mitzvahs, the more we have shemos, the more we have shemos the more we don't have chisaron, the more we are not defined through gashmius, and the more we do this with exactitude, the more removed we are from Koach HaYetzer which we learned last time.

To sum up, as we said last time, Koach Hayetzer comes from lack. We spoke about the avos being shaleim, kol. We said that we don't have that wholeness but we yearn for it. And our yearning makes us acutely aware of our imperfection, which in turn destroys us, with the feeling of not being shaleim, we look for wholeness in other directions. We learned today in the Ramchal that when we try to find fulfillment and identity through the gashmius world, what we are doing is giving ourselves a death sentence. The animal side of ourselves and the physical side of ourselves will claim all of us and we will have nothing left in the end since everything it has to offer is transient and sharpens our sense of chisaron. What we came to is rather than be defined by gashmius we can define it by where we want to go and who we want to be. The guide we have to do this are the mitzvahs aseï and lo aseï, which provide us with the feeling of shemos that will make the feeling of chisaron non-existent and keep us on the path that we want to be.