YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**The Philosophy of Prayer**

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**Shiur #29: The Ramchal (2)**

The previous *shiur* dealt with two dimensions of prayer found in the teachings of the Ramchal, and with the relationship between these two dimensions and his general worldview. One dimension is prayer as an expression of man's striving to procure his needs on his own merits, and the second dimension is prayer as an ascent to an encounter with God, as a way of countering one's descent into the affairs of this world. These represent two opposite sides, human effort versus faith in God. Prayer, then, is comprised of two very powerful experiences: each is very different from the other, but they exist in the same prayer.

**The Order of the Prayers**

We noted that the Ramchal adds a concluding comment at the end of Chapter 5 of *Derekh Hashem* IV, leading into to the next chapter, with a third dimension: prayer fills the place of the sacrificial service. One might wonder: If the two previous aspects perfectly complemented each other, what else can be added?

Let us see what can be learned from the Ramchal's brief formulation at the end of chapter 5:

But behold, that which we explained until now about the recitation of *Shema* and about prayer is only according to the function of these commandments in terms of what they are [in themselves]. However, they additionally set up an arrangement of prayer for us that is also fit to substitute for the sacrifices now missing. And that is what is necessary with the arrival of every day according to the axioms of time in all of its parts. But this will be explained below in the next chapter, with God's help. (*Derekh Hashem* IV, Chapter 5, 5)

First, the Ramchal explicitly states that the next dimension is connected to the opinion that the prayers were established to correspond to the sacrifices. He emphasizes that not only is there a correspondence and similarity between the prayers and the sacrifices, but prayer actually completes what is missing from the service of God in the absence of sacrifices. Thus far, we have spoken about the *mitzva* of prayer – which, if we follow the view of the Rambam, was given already in the Torah, but gained a new dimension after the destruction of the Temple. Now, prayer also fills the place left empty by the cessation of the sacrificial service.

What the Ramchal states here is not self-evident. Up until this point, it seemed that prayer comes from man, and begins with his needs; now, it seems there is an obligation to perform a certain service at specified times. In this respect, prayer takes on a more fixed character.

The title of the next chapter, Chapter 6, is "On the Daily Order of Prayer” – but have we not already been discussing the order of the prayers? It stands to reason that until now we have been dealing with the *mitzva* of prayer, and now we will deal with the proper order of the prayers. The order [*seder*]of the prayers, from which the term *siddur* [prayer book] is derived, is the entirety of the system of prayers, each one recited in its own time.

**Prayer as a Repair of the Creation**

At the beginning of Chapter 6, it seems as if the Ramchal is moving to a completely different subject: the forces of impurity that control the night. He first states that there are forces of impurity, and then adds that there is a time during which they rule, i.e., nighttime. He emphasizes that this sphere of control was given to them by God, not a result of their having rebelled on their own, and that the night is their single stronghold. This also flows from the Ramchal's general approach regarding the purpose for which God created the world: God created the world in order to do good; man must have free choice so he can attain his good by his own choice; and in order for there to be choice, there must be good and evil between which one can choose. Evil is therefore part of the Divine plan, and its powers are subject to God's control.

The fact that the forces of impurity rule at night is of course an esoteric, hidden matter, but we try to ground even such matters in reality. At night, man is less in control: he sleeps; he cannot utilize his ability to choose; his mind does not work and its place is taken by the imagination. The soul ascends and leaves the body below. This is the time when positive forces in the world are inactive, and room is given to the negative forces. *Chazal* state that sleep is one sixtieth of death, and that death is the highest level (*avi avot*, "the grandfather") of impurity. The Ramchal notes that the reign of the forces of impurity continues until midnight. We can explain this if we see time not as static, but as dynamic: There is darkness all night long, but the beginning of the night involves movement from sunset to total darkness, while starting at midnight, there is movement towards sunrise. During the second half of the night, it gets lighter and lighter.

In any case, all this is mentioned here to illuminate the order of prayer. At night impurity rules, and in the morning a person has to shake it off; therefore, he must wash his hands. The hands are farthest from the center of life, and they are also "busy" – the most active and most defiled, and the most connected to the practical world. Therefore, impurity applies in particular to them.

And see that the Supreme Wisdom set up for man, that he make efforts in the morning and elevate himself from being in a degraded state at night, to purify himself from having become impure. He [must] bring the whole world back and elevate it from that which it was degraded and bring light to it from the darkness with which it was darkened. And this matter is completely included in the ordinances – of acts and of words – that were ordained for the time of rising up, as we will write with God's help. (*Derekh Hashem* IV, Chapter 6, 3)

The order of the prayers begins with four actions. The aforementioned washing of hands is the first action, followed by the wearing of *tzitzit* and the donning of the *tefillin* of the arm and of the head. After these four actions come four oral recitations – that is, the morning prayer service, which is divided into four parts (as described earlier by the Ari).

The washing of hands is the beginning of the awakening of the whole person to life. In fact, it is not only man who is lifted up by these actions; rather, "he [must] bring the whole world back and elevate it from that which it was degraded." A person's handwashing has an effect upon the entire world. The Ramchal continues:

And behold, once a man is distinguished with *tzitzit* and crowned with *tefillin*, the orders of prayer are set up for him, to refine that which is necessary. And the general intention is to uphold all of creation – all of the worlds – in a proper state that is fit to have the supreme bounty flow upon it; and to bring down the flow from before Him, may He be blessed, according to what is necessary. (Ibid*.* 9)

The dimension of repair is evident in this passage as well. We had been discussing personal prayer, and now it turns out that prayer plays a role in the repair of creation as a whole. This is the meaning of prayer corresponding to the sacrificial service: the daily offering is not a need of a particular Jew, but rather the service of the people of Israel. The sacrificial service concerns the whole of creation.

At the beginning of this *shiur,* I asked what else can be added to prayer, seeing as the first two dimensions of prayer already complement each other. It turns out that the two of them make up prayer only on the individual level; there is a whole other plane of service on behalf of the world.

*Mitzvot* such as washing hands, *tzitzit*, and *tefillin* are also part of this repair; they too affect the entire world. The *mitzvot* of *tzitzit* and *tefillin* first repair the person, who dresses himself in the uniform of a servant of God, but these actions bring about a repair of the world as well, for they elevate the whole dimension of clothing. Now garments have a higher meaning. The Ramchal says that *tefillin* brings about more repair than does *tzitzit*. The repair seems to go beyond the garment; the *tefillin* repairs, as it were, the body itself. The *tefillin* that are worn on the head and against the heart become like part of the skin, part of the person's body. When we don them, the Torah is written on us.

We saw in the last passage that prayer draws abundance down from above: "And to bring down the flow from before Him, may He be blessed." This is not prayer that strives, and not prayer that petitions, but prayer that works. Man performs actions with his prayer. This does not mean that prayer does not involve petition, but that petition is only one of its dimensions, alongside the dimension of striving and the dimension of repair.

**The Sacrificial Service**

To complete the discussion, let us examine a passage from a different book authored by the Ramchal, *Da'at Tevunot*:

Indeed the elevation of the glory is achieved by virtue of all beings of all kinds, each one in accordance with a unique action. This was the intention of the priest when performing the sacrificial service, especially the daily offering, about which it is stated: "My food which is presented to Me" (*Bamidbar* 28:2), which is what is offered before Him each and every day for the benefit of all beings. He would direct his thoughts regarding it to raise the glory of God from the assemblage of all types of beings, each according to what concerns him. This was a great wisdom that the priests had to be wise in, to be able to approach God on behalf of all of Israel, so that their service should be truly desirable. Therefore, it is stated: "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth" (*Malakhi* 2:7). They would direct their thoughts to connect all creatures to the Creator, and they knew what was necessary to complete this task, and they would direct their thoughts to all the necessary details, which constitute the order of the service in all matters relating to the offering, like the sprinkling of the blood, and the burning of the incense. All was done toward deep secrets to complete the cleaving of all beings to the Creator… The general intention is to connect all beings, the lower ones and the higher ones above them, to the supernal glory, about which it is stated: "Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the Lord." (*Yirmeyahu* 23:24)…

The righteous have yet another special matter with respect to the service entrusted to them, as we have explained, which is to complete the repair of creation itself, as I have informed you, by undertaking each day a new repair regarding that which concerns them, so that the Lord will bestow an abundance of blessing corresponding to the awakening and undertaking. (*Da'at Tevunot* 160)

The Ramchal here relates to the order of prayer, which substitutes for the sacrificial service, and explains the essence of the sacrificial service itself. He does not deal extensively with the matter, as that is not the subject of the book (which deals primarily with the modes of Divine governance). However, several expressions in this passage teach us about the purpose of the sacrifices: "to raise the glory of God," "to complete the cleaving of all beings to the Creator," and "to connect all beings, the lower ones and the higher ones above them, to the supernal glory."

When the Ramchal says "to raise the glory of God," the goal seems to be for the sake of God, whereas the expression "to complete all beings" relates to the created beings. It should be mentioned that the sacrificial service in the Temple is indeed connected to all beings. It is a broad service that embraces all aspects of reality: animals, plants, inanimate objects, actions, and thoughts. Prayer might be conceived as being more elevated than dealing with the blood and organs of animals, but it is precisely in this respect that the sacrificial service, as opposed to prayer, can elevate all strata of life. The service is meant to raise all creatures, to connect them and cause them to cleave to the Creator.

This service, of elevation and connection to the supernal source, parallels the description appearing in *Derekh Hashem*, based on the Ari, of the elevation of the worlds. According to the Ari, the various parts of prayer correspond to the four dimensions of reality: heaven and earth – this world – the world of Action; above it, the world of Formation; then the world of Creation; and finally the world of Emanation. With each stage of prayer, each world connects itself to the world above it, through the exposure of the connection between it and the higher stratum.

This service, which is now realized through prayer, is necessary in order for creation to continue to exist. Just as physically one must breathe at all times, so too the creation must every day reveal its connection to its source. The constant act of exposing this connection is essential to its existence.

Then the Ramchal seems to mention another service: "The righteous have yet another special matter with respect to the service entrusted to them… which is to complete the repair of creation itself… by preparing each day a new repair regarding that which concerns them." How is the service of the righteous different from the service discussed thus far? This too can be understood according to the teachings of the Ari. We have seen that according to the Ari, there is a fixed service on the one hand, every weekday and every Shabbat, while on the other hand, there is something new in each individual prayer, something that never existed before since the time of creation. We explained that, on the one hand, time is circular – the framework repeats itself – while on the other hand, there is linear movement in the world, because of which there is constant innovation. The sacrificial service is built on a fixed system – the repair of the elevation of the worlds is done every day – but the service of the righteous is a linear process of progressive repair. We did not see this dimension of the Ari’s words, regarding repairing creation, in *Derekh Hashem*; it seems that it appears here as the service of the righteous.

(Translated by David Strauss)