YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**THe Purpose of creation and the Mission of man**

**In Jewish thought**

**Rav Uriel Eitam**

**Shiur 18: The Purpose of Creation in the Thought of the Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto) (2)**

When we looked at the position of the Ari, we noted that he goes in two directions with regard to the purpose of creation: the element of revealing the names of God, and the element of benefiting His creatures. In our study of the Ramchal thus far, we saw how he develops the element of benefaction, and now we will see that for him as well, there is more to it.

The second element raised by the Ari appears in concise form at the beginning of the book *Otzarot Chaim*, with the statement that it was God's will to create the world "for the well-known reason to be called merciful and gracious." The Ramchal wrote glosses on the *Otzarot Chaim*, and there he comments:

This is not the first reason but the second, the first one being the matter of benefaction.

The Ramchal here answers the question of the relationship between the two purposes: the main purpose is benefaction; being called merciful and gracious is a component within that framework. This needs some clarification, but somehow, it is part of a framework formed by the broader purpose. Since *Otzarot Chaim* specifies the designations "merciful" and "gracious," rather than a broader set of God's names, we can offer a simple explanation – that within the goal of benefaction is the revelation of those Divine qualities that benefit God’s creatures.

What the Ramchal writes here is similar to what Rabbi Yosef Ergas wrote in his book *Shomer Emunim*, which we already saw in our study of the Ari. It is interesting that both the *Shomer* *Emunim* and the Ramchal belong to the same tradition of Italian kabbalists. (The *Shomer* *Emunim* was among those who had doubts about the Ramchal; he wrote a letter to his teacher to determine whether he should suspect him of Sabbateanism.) Thus, the Ramchal’s view of the relationship between the two purposes mentioned by the Ari is similar to that of the *Shomer Emunim.*

According to this, the main purpose of creation is benefaction – but we will now see what the Ramchal writes in *Da' at Tevunot*, from which a different picture is liable to emerge.

**The Purpose of Creation According to *Da'at Tevunot***

*Da'at Tevunot* is written as a dialogue between the soul and the intellect; the soul asks, and the intellect answers. At the beginning of the book, the soul wants to clarify the central points of Jewish faith – with a focus on the issues of providence and reward, as other principles of the faith are clear to it. The principles of providence and reward are described not only as insufficiently understood, but as appearing to contradict how reality operates. The intellect answers the soul through a long explanation about man's mission in the world, and when the soul asks why that is man's mission, the intellect explains that this destiny derives from the purpose of creation. And what is the purpose of creation? Here, the Ramchal puts forward the position we saw in the previous *shiur*: God created the world in order to bestow good, and the most perfect benefaction is when good comes from within the person himself; therefore, he must attain his good by himself and based on his choices.

At this stage of the book, however, a broader discussion develops, and we need to follow it in order to see the novel approach it introduces regarding the purpose of creation.

The intellect describes the good that man is supposed to receive. The greatest good that is in our power to achieve is devotion to God and comprehension of His glory and perfection. However, owing to our narrow intellect, we cannot truly comprehend Him; the main thing that is within our power to comprehend is God's unity. The intellect explains this through a chain of arguments, and cites, among other things, the verse: "Know this day, and lay it to your heart, that the Lord, He is God in heaven above and upon the earth beneath; there is none else" (*Devarim* 4:10). The Torah teaches that what is in our power to know is that there is none besides Him. This does not mean that the created beings do not exist, but that He holds full control and there is no power separate from Him. (This principle will develop further in later generations and in additional directions within Chasidic thought.)

In the future, God's unity will be revealed. How? Here too, the Ramchal introduces a significant principle. God hides, and, as it were, allows the forces of evil to do whatever they want, so it seems as if the evil forces are independent. At the end of history, it will become apparent not only that God has defeated them, but also that everything the forces of evil did, while they were supposedly acting against Him, actually served His purpose. A clear example of this is found in *Megillat Esther*: Throughout the book, Haman acts on his own behalf and works to destroy and kill all the Jews, but it turns out at the end that with every step that Haman took, he was only digging a deeper hole for himself. His rise to power, the decree against the Jews, the preparation of the gallows for Mordekhai, and so on – everything ultimately served the salvation of Israel. This is an example from one historical event, and in the future, according to the Ramchal, this perspective will be revealed retroactively, clarifying that this is in fact how all of history functioned.

The revelation of God's unity will take place in the future – "On that day shall the Lord be one, and His name one" (*Zekharya* 14:9) – while in the meantime, throughout the entire period of His concealment, this is the time for man's service. It is our spiritual task to believe in God's unity even when it is not apparent. Reciting "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one" (*Devarim* 6:4), which is so fundamental to Jewish life, is part of instilling belief in God's unity within us.

**The Centrality of the Principle of God’s Unity**

Thus, an approach that begins with the principle of benefaction concludes with setting the revelation of God's unity as the goal. Benefaction is the purpose of creation, and that benefaction is realized through revelation of God's unity, because comprehending that is the most complete pleasure available to man.

After laying out these foundations, the Ramchal summarizes the approach:

The soul said: Let us summarize all that we said until now on this matter, for it is voluminous.

The intellect said: The general principle is short and easy to understand: The heavenly will wanted to reveal and clarify the truth of His unity – for there is no capacity in opposition to His capacity at all – and on this foundation He built His world with all its rules. And the general principle is that He conceals His countenance and gives space for evil to exist, until He will return and reveal His goodness, and evil will no longer exist, and the unity of His rule will be apparent. In the meantime, He gives space for service of man, as long as deficiency is in existence and perfection remains to be revealed; and after it is revealed – this is the time of receipt of the reward for the service that has been done. (*Da'at Tevunot*, 41-42)

This summary changes the tone, setting revelation of God’s unity not merely as a means to achieve benefaction, but as the purpose itself. The soul notices this and brings the two elements into confrontation:

The soul said: I still have a small place for a question. Why do we need to say that everything is dependent on this unity? Is not the first explanation that I heard from you at the beginning of your words better? That the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to bestow complete goodness upon His creations, and He saw that what was needed for this was that they receive it through merit and not as charity, and therefore He placed reward and punishment in the world, in order that they would receive the goodness through their merit, and corresponding to this, He placed free choice in order to give space for reward and punishment.

The intellect said: But it is evident that it is God's unity that remains to be revealed. For we see the promises of the prophets, which we already brought above, where they promise that the Holy One, blessed be He, will redeem Israel in any event, even without merit, and that He will remove the evil inclination from people and will compel them to worship Him; and behold, all of this is contrary to reward and punishment and contrary to free will. If the intent were in truth to maintain the matter of free choice and reward and punishment, meaning that the world would always be built on having free choice, for people to be righteous or evildoers according to their will, and it would always be good for the righteous or bad for the evildoers, it would be required that it be like this always, with no interruption to it. And this would have been – that the Holy One, blessed be He, would want to strengthen the attribute of justice, to maintain all of His creations through it forever. But we know that it is not so, as we proved from the sources, and as explained to us in the words of our Sages, may their memory be blessed, that in the end, free will will be removed from man, and there won't be evil in the world, and they have already said (*Berakhot* 10a): It is written: "Sinners shall cease from the earth." If so, the ultimate intent is not about reward and punishment, but about general repair. Except that the Holy One, blessed be He, combined the two things as one, and this was from the depths of His wisdom, to arrange everything towards the complete repair. And we will discuss this further later, with the help of heaven, when we reach the details of His guidance, for it is a very deep and fundamental matter. (*Da'at Tevunot*, 43-44)

The soul raises an objection: If it is possible to explain the whole purpose of man based on the principle of benefaction, why now add the principle of God's unity? The intellect answers that there are elements that the principle of benefaction cannot explain, and he enumerates some of them.

First: the prophets declared that redemption is not conditional on merit, but will come even if the people of Israel do not improve their ways – while according to the principle of benefaction based on merit, everything should depend on reward and punishment. Second: the sources teach that free choice will be abolished in the future, and that God will "force" man to serve Him – "And I will cause you to walk in My statutes" (*Yechezkel* 36:27) – while according to the principle of benefaction, service of God must be based on man's absolute free choice. Third: in addition to the cancellation of free choice, we have been promised that evil itself will be abolished. This means that the principle of recompense will not continue forever, and that there will be a different kind of governance. Therefore, the principle of benefaction does not suffice to explain the creation of the world according to the Jewish faith. It is important to note, however, that this does not mean the principle of benefaction is not true at all; rather, it is part of a broader purpose.

This is one of the places where the Ramchal adds another element to the purpose of creation, which stands alongside the element of benefaction and is perhaps deeper than it. If previously it seemed that the revelation of God's unity was a sub-clause within benefaction, in *Da'at Tevunot*,it seems that benefaction is a sub-clause within the revelation of God's unity.

From another perspective, it seems that the element of the revelation of God's unity is a completely different element, fundamentally different from benefaction. The element of benefaction is personal; it is connected not to the history of the world but to the biography of the person. The element of the revelation of God's unity, as the Ramchal elaborates later in *Da'at Tevunot*, explains the entire historical axis up to redemption. When the Ramchal speaks of the future changes that we reviewed earlier, he does not present a few specific difficulties, but addresses a broad goal towards which the world is moving.

**The Connection Between Benefaction and Unity – *Kelach Pitchei Chokhma***

We have seen two elements in the writings of the Ramchal concerning the purpose of creation – benefaction and the revelation of God's unity. The Ramchal could have taken the element of benefaction from the thinkers who preceded him, such as Rabbi Saadya Gaon and Rabbi Chasdai Crescas, but we do not find revelation of the unity of God explicitly mentioned in the writings of his predecessors as an explanation for the purpose of creation. The only thinker who may have preceded the Ramchal in this is Rabbeinu Bachya, whose seminal work, *Chovot Ha-Levavot*, *Duties of the Heart*, opens with the issue of God's unity. The first section of that book is titled *Ha-Yichud ve-ha-Emuna*, "Unity and Belief," and it can be understood from the beginning that Rabbeninu Bachya sets revelation of God’s unity as the central goal of creation (though later in the book he deals extensively with the element of God's benefaction to man), but he does not develop this later. It is interesting that there are many connections between the Ramchal and *Chovot Ha-Levavot*; among other similarities, the structure of *Mesilat Yesharim* is reminiscent of the structure of *Chovot Ha-Levavot*, and the introductions of both works address the problem of neglecting the study of ethical behavior in favor of theoretical halakhic analyses. In any case, nowhere does Rabbeinu Bachya explicitly say that the world was created in order to reveal thereby the unity of God. The element of God’s unity is indeed the basis of the book, but Rabbeinu Bachya does not explicitly relate to it as the purpose of creation.

In the end, what is the relationship between benefaction and the revelation of the unity of God: Do they stand side by side? Is one of them primary and the other secondary to it? This question relates to other works of the Ramchal as well. In his early compositions, we find only the element of benefaction, whereas his later compositions also relate to the revelation of God’s unity. There are works of the Ramchal in which only the element of benefaction appears, and others – specifically among his later works, such as *Da'at Tevunot* and *Kelach Pitchei Chokhma* – that mention only the element of revealing God's unity. At this point, we are faced with two possibilities, the first being that indeed, the element of the revelation of the unity of God is the primary element, replacing the element of benefaction, which appeared at first to be the purpose of creation. We see the second possibility in the opening passage of the Ramchal's *Kelach Pitchei Chokhma*.

The unity of the *Ein Sof*, the Infinite, blessed be He, lies in the fact that only His will exists, and no other will exists except through Him. Therefore, He alone is in control, and not any other will. The entire structure is built on this foundation. (*Klach Pitchei Chokhma*, 1)

In chapter one, the Ramchal sets the element of revealing the unity of God as the foundation of the entire structure. In chapter 3, he writes:

The purpose of the creation of the world was for God to bestow, in accordance with His good desire, the ultimate good.

Having explained our faith in God, we will now discuss His works:

a. **The purpose of the creation of the world** – for clearly, every actor acts for a purpose;

b. **was for God to bestow** – not for His own need, since He has no need for His creatures, but in order to benefit His creatures;

c. **in accordance with His good desire** – If you ask: Where did this purpose originate? The answer is clear: That which is good desires to bestow good. The Supreme Will is the ultimate good, thus, His desire is to bestow good.

d. **the ultimate good** – because He is the ultimate good, and therefore His desire is to bestow the ultimate good. This is why He made the world in this way, with free will, reward, and punishment. For this is the means to bring His creatures to the ultimate good, as will be explained in the next chapter. (Ibid., 3)

What is the relationship between these two seemingly contradictory chapters? Chapter 1 deals with God, placing the revelation of His unity at the center, whereas chapter 3 moves on to the question of why He created the world, and puts benefaction at the center. The Ramchal continues in chapter 4:

The *Ein Sof*, blessed be He, wanted to bestow perfect good, so that its recipients will not even be ashamed. He calculated how to reveal His perfect unity in actuality, for there are no barriers before Him, nor any deficiencies. Accordingly, He established the system of governance that He follows, in which there will be an actual return of evil to good. That is, initially, He made space for evil to do as it does, but at the end of everything, all the damage is repaired and all evil turns back into actual good. And thus His unity is revealed, and this itself is the delight of the souls. (Ibid., 4)

Here the Ramchal sums up definitively the relationship between benefaction and the revelation of God's unity: the main element is benefaction, and the way to realize this benefaction is through revelation of God's unity, which is "the delight of the souls." We still have to clarify whether this summary contradicts what the Ramchal wrote in *Da'at Tevunot*, or whether there too, he maintains that the revelation of God's unity is a component of God's benefaction. We will engage in this clarification in the next *shiur*.

(Translated by David Strauss)