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# INTRODUCTION TO THE PURPOSE OF MAN IN THE WORLD

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The Morasha syllabus features a series of classes addressing the purpose of man in the world. These shiurim address fundamental principles of Jewish philosophy including the relationship of the body and the soul, free will, the centrality of *chesed* (loving kindness), *hashgachah pratit* (Divine providence) and striving to emulate God. However, these principles revolve around even more basic issues that need to be explored first: What is the purpose of existence? Is there a purpose of man in this world, and if so, what is it? Why did God place us in a physical, material world? This shiur provides an approach to these questions which then serves as the underpinning for subsequent classes on fundamental Jewish principles.

The evolutionary biologist and atheist Richard Dawkins (in *River out of Eden*) has the following to say about purpose:

*The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference.*

Judaism teaches that purpose is inherent to the world, and inherent to human existence. As the US National Academy of Sciences asserts (*Teaching About Evolution and the Nature of Science*), there is little room for science in this discussion: “Whether there is a purpose to the universe or a purpose for human existence are not questions for science.” In stark contrast to Dawkins, this class presents the Jewish outlook on purpose, and will address the following questions:

- Why did God create the world? Why are we here?
- Was the world created for God’s sake, or for ours?
- What are the “important things in life?”
- Do I have an individual mission in life?

## Class Outline:

Introduction: In Only Nine Million Years We'll Reach Kepler-22B

Section I: Why Did God Create the World?  
Part A. God Created the World for Our Good  
Part B. Free Will to Earn Perfection

Section II: The Nature of This World  
Part A. A Vestibule to the World to Come  
Part B. Everything is a Test

Section III: The Goal of Man  
Part A. Torah and Mitzvot  
Part B. Character Development  
Part C. Partnering with God  
Part D. What Is My Mission?

Appendix. The World was Created for the Glory of God

## INTRODUCTION. IN ONLY NINE MILLION YEARS WE'LL REACH KEPLER-22B

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January 30, 2011

*In a building at NASA's Ames Research Center here, computers are sifting and resifting the light from 156,000 stars, seeking to find in the flickering of distant suns the first hints that humanity is not alone in the universe. The stars are being monitored by a \$600 million satellite observatory named Kepler, whose job is to conduct a kind of Gallup poll of worlds in the cosmos. On Wednesday, Kepler's astronomers are scheduled to unveil a closely kept list of 400 stars that are their brightest and best bets so far for harboring planets, some of which could turn out to be the smallest and most Earth-like worlds discovered out there to date. They represent the first glimpse of riches to come in a quest that is as old as the imagination and as new as the iPad.*

*Over the next two or three years, as Kepler continues to stare and sift, astronomers say, it will be able to detect planets in the "Goldilocks" zones, where it is neither too hot nor too cold for liquid water. "What we want is to find life," said Geoffrey Marcy, an astronomer at the University of California, Berkeley, who is part of the Kepler team.*

*Right now, humans cannot even summon the money or political will to get back to the moon, let alone set sail for another star. It would take 300,000 years for Voyager 1, now on the way out of the solar system at 39,000 miles per hour, to travel the 20 light-years, or 120 trillion miles, to Gliese 581, one of the nearest planetary systems; Kepler's planets are from 500 to 3,000 light-years away.*

*This is more than just an intellectual exercise, scientists say. Traditional religious images of ourselves as God's creatures, or even of God, could be in for a rough time if we ever discover pond scum living by completely alien chemical rules on some moon or planet, let alone the Borg — the alien race ruled by a collective mind on "Star Trek" — inhabiting some distant realm...*

December 11, 2011

NASA's Kepler mission has confirmed its first planet in the "habitable zone," the region where liquid water could exist on a planet's surface. Kepler also has discovered more than 1,000 new planet candidates, nearly doubling its previously known count. Ten of these candidates are near-Earth-size and orbit in the habitable zone of their host star. Candidates require follow-up observations to verify they are actual planets.

The newly confirmed planet, Kepler-22b, is the smallest yet found to orbit in the middle of the habitable zone of a star similar to our sun. The planet is about 2.4 times the radius of Earth. Scientists don't yet know if Kepler-22b has a predominantly rocky, gaseous or liquid composition, but its discovery is a step closer to finding Earth-like planets. Kepler-22b is located 600 light-years away. (Dennis Overbye, *Gazing Afar for Other Earths, and Other Beings*, *Nytimes.com*, January 30, 2011, *NASA.com*, Dec 6, 2011)

That "one day" may seem such a long way off and be so irrelevant, but many people lead their lives on the assumption that "if we ever discover some other form of life" then life is certainly a random phenomenon. In a recent critically acclaimed Hollywood film that wrestles with whether or not our life has meaning, the following conclusion is drawn by the lead character in response to why he invests so much time in studying exotic flowers: "Oh, mystery, beauty, unknowability, I suppose. Besides, I think the real reason is that life has no meaning. I mean, no obvious meaning. You wake up, you go to work, you do stuff. I think everybody's always looking for something a little unusual that can preoccupy them and help pass the time."

Can you imagine living your life, even investing many years in a project, then coming to the realization that it had no purpose?

There was a man who had been sentenced to 25 years of hard labor. His wrists were shackled to the handle of a huge wheel that was set in the wall. He had to turn this massive wheel all his waking hours. He would often wonder what it was that he was doing. Perhaps he was grinding grain into flour or bringing up subterranean water to irrigate fields. After the long sentence was completed and the shackles were removed, he ran to the other side of the wall. Upon seeing that the wheel was not attached to anything, he collapsed. Twenty-five years of backbreaking work, all for nothing! He was able to survive 25 years of bone-crushing labor, but the feeling that it was futile, all for naught, was more than he could bear. (Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, *Simchah: It's Not Just Happiness*, Artscroll/Mesorah Publications)

Judaism, however, teaches that our existence is not pointless, but profoundly meaningful. The key observation of the film's protagonist is, "there is no obvious meaning." Since the world was created by God, then He had a purpose in doing so. To some, the world's purpose is readily apparent. To others it may not be clear; yet it is up to us to make a sincere effort to discover whether we are placed in this world with a purpose (see Morasha classes on Developing and Strengthening Belief in God and Evidence for Torah MiSinai).

As soon as you start studying Torah, right from the first verse: "In the beginning the Almighty created," you become aware that there is a Creator and Ruler of the universe. This first awareness already makes a major change in you for the rest of your life. You realize that there is a reason for everything. The world has meaning and purpose (Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz, *Daat Torah: Bereishit*, p. 3).

It's also not beyond God's skills to create life on other planets – so whether or not there are or aren't other life forms in the universe doesn't change our *modus operandi*. Consequently, what really matters to each of us is living fully in the here and now:

*You are on a mission from your Creator. You are unique. Only you are you, now and always. The situations and occurrences throughout your life are Divinely orchestrated to elevate you and your character. The Torah verse states [Devarim/Deuteronomy 10:12], "And now Israel, what does God ask from you?" Please note the important word, "Now" (Life is Now, Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, ArtScroll Publications, p. 31).*

If life does have meaning, and hence, value, how can we ascertain what that meaning is? This is a question that has gripped humanity throughout the ages. We will now explore the Jewish vision of what brings meaning to this world, to Kepler-22B and beyond!

## SECTION I: WHY DID GOD CREATE THE WORLD?

Without meaning in life, even if you accomplish very much, have health and wealth, fame and fortune, there is a strong feeling that something is missing. It is. Without meaning there is no real enjoyment or satisfaction. Yes, a person can have moments of excitement, joy, and even ecstasy. But they are short-lived. When the high feelings settle down, there is emptiness. Nothing seems to really matter. But as soon as you internalize the awareness that there is a Creator of the universe, you see plan and purpose. There is a drive for spiritual growth. Those who lack this realization see only the external actions and behaviors of those who live with the reality of the Almighty. They are unaware of the rich inner life of such a person. The true believer in the Creator is a fortunate person. He is the only one on the planet one should envy. He sees something larger than life in every flower and tree and in every blade of grass. He sees the design of the Creator in every living creature. He sees something special in every human being. His life, regardless of how it unfolds, is full of purpose and meaning. While he appreciates this world as a gift of the Creator, he looks forward to an eternity of existence. This is the profound message of the first verse of the Torah (Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, *Growth Through Torah*, p. 18).

### PART A. GOD CREATED THE WORLD FOR OUR GOOD

An axiomatic belief about God is that God is perfect. As the Perfect Being, the question arises: why should He create a world? Doesn't the creation of the world indicate the imperfection of the Creator, who "needed" to create a world?

The answer given by Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto) is that the world was created not for the sake of God, but for the benefit of man.

#### 1. **Ramchal, Derech Hashem (The Way of God) 1:2:1 – The purpose of creation.**

The purpose of creation was for God to bestow of His good upon others.

הנה, התכלית בבריאה היה להיטיב מטובו יתברך שמו לזולתו.

Because God is good, by definition, He wishes to do good for others.

#### 2. **Ramchal, Daat Tevunot (The Knowing Heart), Ch. 18, p. 4 – Doing good to others is the nature of good.**

It is the nature of one who is good to bestow good to others.

מחוק הטוב הוא להיטיב.

In order to bestow His good upon others, God created man and placed him in a world in which he would be able to earn reward.

#### 3. **Ramchal, Mesillat Yesharim (The Path of the Just), Ch.1 – The purpose of life.**

Our Sages, of blessed memory, have taught us that man was created only to delight in God and bask in the glow of His Presence, which is the truest pleasure and greatest delight that could possibly exist. The true place of this delight is in the World to Come, because it was created in preparation for this. But the way to reach this

והנה מה שהורונו חכמינו זכרונם לברכה הוא, שהאדם לא נברא אלא להתענג על ה' ולהנות מזיו שכינתו שזהו התענוג האמיתי והעידון הגדול מכל העידונים שיכולים להמציא. ומקום העידון הזה באמת הוא העולם הבא, כי הוא הנברא בהכנה המצטרפת לדבר הזה. אך הדרך כדי להגיע אל מחוז חפצנו זה, הוא זה העולם. והוא מה שאמרו זכרונם לברכה: (משנה אבות ד טז):

destination is through this world. That is what our Sages of Blessed Memory have taught us (Avot/Ethics of the Fathers 4:16): “This world is like a vestibule before the World to Come.”

The means that prepare a person for this goal are the mitzvot that the Almighty has commanded us. The place where these mitzvot are performed is only in This World. Therefore, man was placed in this world first, so that, through the means that are available to him here, he can reach the place that was prepared for him, i.e., the World to Come, where he can bask in the good that he has earned through the mitzvot. That is what our Sages, of Blessed Memory, meant when they said (Eiruvין 22a), “Today is to do them and tomorrow is to receive the reward.”

“העולם הזה דומה לפרוזדור בפני העולם הבא.”

והאמצעים המגיעים את האדם לתכלית הזו, הם המצוות אשר צונו עליהן האל יתברך שמו. ומקום עשיית המצוות הוא רק העולם הזה. על כן הושם האדם בזה העולם בתחלה כדי שעל ידי האמצעים האלה המזדמנים לו כאן יוכל להגיע אל המקום אשר הוכן לו, שהוא העולם הבא, לרוות שם בטוב אשר קנה לו על ידי אמצעים אלה. והוא מה שאמרו, זכרונם לברכה (ערובין כב, א): “היום לעשותם ומחר לקבל שכרם.”

Based on this analysis, it emerges that the material world in which we live is merely the first of a two-stage process. God created man in order to bestow eternal reward upon him, and man was placed in this world in order to earn that eternal reward.

We will soon explore *how* man goes about earning reward, but first we must answer a basic question. If God’s purpose in creating the world was to bestow good upon His creations, why did He simply not create man already in the World to Come, in a position where he would already be the recipient of Divine goodness? Why was man placed in a physical world and charged with the observance of mitzvot in order to earn reward?

#### 4. **Derech Hashem 1:2:2 – The need to earn God’s goodness.**

God’s wisdom, however, decreed that for such good to be perfect, the one enjoying it must be its master. He must be the one who has earned it for himself, and not someone who was just given it. This arrangement is reminiscent in part to the perfection of God Himself, at least to the degree that this is possible.

ואולם גזרה חכמתו, שלהיות הטוב שלם, ראוי שיהיה הנהגה בו בעל הטוב ההוא. פירוש - מי שיקנה הטוב בעצמו, ולא מי שיתלוה לו הטוב בדרך מקרה. ותראה שזה נקרא קצת התדמות, בשיעור שאפשר, אל שלימותו ית’.

If goodness were to be bestowed upon us without our effort, it would not be considered true goodness. The Talmud (Bava Metzia 38a) teaches that a person prefers one portion of that which is “truly his” (referring to an entity that a person actually earns or creates) over nine portions of that which is not “truly his,” i.e., a “hand-out.” For the purpose of the world to be achieved, a process needed to be established whereby we *earn* our reward, where we actually *create* our reward. In that way the perfection that we eventually achieve is intrinsic to our being and more closely resembles God’s perfection. To be able to accomplish our own achievements, God endowed humanity with free will.

### **PART B. FREE WILL TO EARN PERFECTION**

As we saw above, God created the world in order to bestow goodness upon humanity. However, for this goodness to be in its most perfect form, it must be intrinsic to us, a product of our own efforts and actions as opposed to being handed to us on a silver platter.

As such, having *free will*, the ability to freely choose between good and evil, is a prerequisite for man to be able to earn his perfection. By exercising his free will properly, man is able to choose good and reject evil in accordance with God's will.

**1. Deuteronomy 30:15-19 – The choice between good and evil, life and death.**

See, I set before you today life and goodness, death and evil.

For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.

But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

This day I call heaven and earth as your witnesses that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.

ראה נתתי לפניך היום את החיים ואת הטוב ואת המות ואת הרע:

אשר אנכי מצוך היום לאהבה את ה' אלהיך ולקחת בדרךיו ולשמור מצותיו וחקתיו ומשפטיו וחיית ורבית ובכך ה' אלהיך בארץ אשר אתה בא שמה לרשתה:

ואם יפנה לבבך ולא תשמע ונדחת והשתחית לאלהים אחרים ועבדתם: הגדתי לכם היום כי אבד תאבדון לא תאריכון ימים על האדמה אשר אתה עבר את הירדן לבוא שמה לרשתה:

העדתי לכם היום את השמים ואת הארץ החיים והמות נתתי לפניך הברכה והקללה ובחרת בחיים למען תחיה אתה וזרעך:

Life is goodness. The choice between good and evil is presented by the Torah as a choice between life and death.

Why should a person choose evil and death over goodness and life? The answer is that evil presents itself as being good and beneficial, and a person is lured to it by what is known as his Evil Inclination.

**2. Ramchal, Derech Hashem 1:3:1 – In order for man to have free choice, he was endowed with both a Good Inclination and an Evil Inclination.**

We have already mentioned that man is the creation that was fashioned to cleave to God, and was placed between perfection and deficiency and given the ability to acquire perfection. However, this must be due to his own free choice... that his inclination should be equal regarding either side and not predisposed to one of them, and he should have the ability to choose, willingly and with his own intelligence, whichever he desires, as well as the ability to acquire whichever he desires. Therefore, man was created with a Good Inclination and an Evil Inclination, and he has freedom of choice to direct himself toward whichever side he desires.

כבר זכרנו היות האדם אותה הבריה הנבראת לידבק בו ית', והיא המוטלת בין השלימות והחסרונות, והיכולת בידו לקנות השלימות. ואולם צריך שיהיה זה בבחירתו ורצונו... שתהיה נטיתו שקולה לשני הצדדין ולא מוכרחת לאחד מהם, ויהיה בו כח הבחירה לבחור בדעת ובחפץ באיזה מהם שירצה, והיכולת גם כן בידו לקנות איזה מהם שירצה. על כן נברא האדם ביצ"ט ויצ"ר, והבחירה בידו להטות עצמו לצד שהוא רוצה:

Being a physical being, man is naturally pulled towards pursuit of physical pleasure, and neglect of spiritual duties. His free will is expressed in his ability to pull himself back from his tendency to evil, and to draw the body towards the spiritual elevation of the soul. For this reason, man must be a composite being, including both a physical body and Divine soul. His role is to decide the balance of power between them.

### 3. Rabbi Ezriel Tauber, *The Thirteen Principles of Faith*, p. 26 – *The Lame and the Blind*

The Sages (Sanhedrin 91b) wished to clarify that it is not possible to grant reward and punishment to the body alone, or to the soul alone, for they have no free will. The soul sees the inner content of all things, but it is lame: it does not have any standing on physical soil; it is a spiritual essence, and therefore it is not pulled after the physical. By contrast, the body has physical feet, and it is firmly placed in the physical world, and drawn after the lures of the physical. Yet, it is blind: it does not grasp the inner essence of things, and it is drawn after the physical and the sensual without being aware of any inner, spiritual significance.

Therefore, it is not possible to punish the body, or to grant reward to the soul, because they do no more than follow their basic nature. Rather, reward and punishment are granted based on the interaction between the body and the soul. If the lame soul will properly direct the blind body, and lead it to do goodness, then it will receive its reward together with the body. And if, God forbid, the soul refrains from directing the body on the course of goodness – then the body and soul will together be held accountable, by means of the *ruach* (the essential spirit of man) that is between them.

חז"ל (סנהדרין צא, ב) רצו להבהיר כי לא יתכן לתת שכר ועונש לא לגוף לבד ולא לנשמה לבדה, כי לא שייכת בהם בחירה. הנשמה רואה את תוכן הדברים, אבל היא חיוורת: אין לה מעמד וקביעות על הקרקע הגשמית. היא אינה הולכת נעה ונמשכת אחרי החומר הגשמי, כיון שהיא רוחנית. לעומתה, הגוף יש לו רגלים הוא קבוע בעולם הגשמי ונמשך אחרי הדברים החומריים, אך מצד שני הוא סומא: אין לו שום תפיסת מהות, והוא נמשך אחרי המורגש והמוחש בלי אפשרות לצפות ולהבחין במשמעות הדברים הפנימית והרוחנית.

לכן לא שייך לתת עונש לגוף ולא שכר לנשמה כי הם פועלים מכח טבעם, ואין להם בחירה במעשיהם. השכר והעונש מגיעים לבחינת החיבור שלהם יחד. כשהחיר הנשמה ינהיג את הסומא הגוף, ויכוון אותו לטוב, אזי הוא יקבל את שכרו יחד עם הגוף. ואם, חלילה, הנשמה נמנעת מלהנהיג את הגוף לדרך הטובה - אזי הגוף והנשמה מקבלים יחד את עונשם באמצעות הרוח הנמצאת ביניהם.

Man is given a physical body, and he is given a spiritual soul. His task, achieved by means of his free will, is to conduct his “spiritual orchestra” so that the soul raises the body towards spiritual pursuits. By so doing, a person’s free will allows him to “earn” his true reward. (See further the Morasha classes on Caring for the Jewish Soul: Dynamics of the Body and Soul, and Free Will.)

### 4. Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, *Siftei Chaim, Emunah & Bechira*, Vol. II, p. 57 – *Free will allows man to earn his eternal reward.*

We find, therefore, that one of the reasons for free will is in order that a person should accept goodness from God without any feeling of embarrassment. Surely God could have created His world without the necessity for man to exercise free choice or to toil, but then man would feel ashamed that he is receiving a reward as a handout and not because he deserved it.

נמצא אפוא, שאחד מטעמי הבחירה: כדי שהאדם יקבל את ההטבה מהקב"ה בשלימות ללא רגש של בושה. ודאי, הקב"ה היה יכול לברוא עולמו ללא עבודת הבחירה וללא עמל ויגיעה, אבל אז האדם היה מרגיש רגשי בושה שמקבל בחנם ולא בזכות, וע"י הבחירה בין הטוב והרע שיעבוד ויעמול בתורה ומצוות לא יחוש שמקבל מתנת חנם, אלא הרגשה שמגיעה

By choosing between good and evil as well as toiling in Torah and mitzvot, he will not feel that he is receiving a free gift. Rather he is earning the goodness, just as a worker is not embarrassed to accept payment for his work – since he worked at his trade he deserves [compensation]. Similarly, through free choice a person will not be ashamed when accepting his reward.

לו הטבה, כדוגמת בעל המלאכה שאיננו בוש לקבל שכר עבודתו, כיון שהוא טרח במלאכה א"כ מגיע לו, כך האדם ע"י הבחירה לא יהיו לו רגשי בושה בקבלת השכר...  
 ...

There is an additional consequence of properly using our free will – one that reflects upon another major purpose of creation: bringing awareness to humanity of the existence of God, which brings glory to God Himself. God gave the Torah to the Jewish people, and the Seven Noachide commandments to the nations of the world, as the frameworks for Jews and non-Jews, respectively, to reach their potential and build a relationship with Him. When we strive to live according to Divine values, others recognize the existence of God, ultimately bringing glory to the Creator Himself. This principle is discussed more fully in the Appendix: The World was Created for the Glory of God.

#### KEY THEMES OF SECTION I.

- ⌘ God is the Ultimate Good, and the nature of good is to want to bestow good upon others. God created the world in order to have someone to receive His good: Man. However, in order for the good to be truly good, man must earn his reward rather than receiving it for free.
- ⌘ Mankind was created with a physical body and a spiritual soul. The nature of the body is to pull a person downwards, towards earthly and physical matters. The nature of the soul is to raise him upwards, towards the spiritual and the Divine. The unique function of man (which is achieved, in its simplest sense, by human life itself) is to enable the soul to raise the body towards spiritual pursuits.
- ⌘ God created the world to bestow goodness upon humanity. However, for this goodness to be in its most perfect form, it must be intrinsic to us, a product of our own efforts and actions as opposed to being handed to us on a silver platter. As such, having *free will*, the ability to freely choose between good and evil, is a prerequisite for man to be able to earn the good that God desires to bestow on him.
- ⌘ The material world in which we live is merely the first of a two-stage process. God created man in order to bestow eternal reward upon him, and man was placed in this world in order to earn that eternal reward.
- ⌘ There is an additional consequence of properly using our free will – one that reflects upon another major purpose of creation – bringing awareness to humanity of the existence of God, which brings glory to God Himself.



## SECTION II: THE NATURE OF THIS WORLD

### PART A. A VESTIBULE TO THE WORLD TO COME

Understanding the ultimate purpose of this world yields a different perspective on life. Rather than seeing this world as an end unto itself, this world becomes only a means to a higher end.

#### 1. Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 4:16 — This world is a place to prepare for the next world.

Rabbi Yaakov says: This world is like an entrance hall before the world to come. Prepare yourself in the entrance hall so that you will be able to enter the palace.

רבי יעקב אומר, העולם הזה דומה לפרוודור בפני העולם הבא. התקן עצמך בפרוודור, כדי שתכנס לטרקלין.

If the purpose of our creation is for the sake of receiving Divine good, we can understand that the final destination is not within this world, whose goodness is very limited. Rather, as noted above (Section I, Part A, Source 3), the destination is the infinite goodness of the World to Come (to delight in God and bask in the glow of His Presence).

#### 2. Ramchal, Mesilat Yesharim Chapter 1 – This world is not an end in itself.

The rule is that man was not created for his standing in this world, but rather for his position in the World to Come, but his standing in this world is a means to create his position in the World to Come, which is his ultimate purpose.

כללו של דבר, האדם לא נברא בעבור מצבו בעולם הזה אלא בעבור מצבו בעולם הבא, אלא שמצבו בעולם הזה הוא אמצעי למצבו בעולם הבא שהוא תכליתו.

This recognition should affect us constantly, dictating how we spend our time and other resources.

#### 3. Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, *Visions of the Fathers*, p. 250 – This world is “a hard day’s work” while the next world is the place to enjoy the fruits of our labors.

Our lifestyle would be much different if we truly realized that our earthly existence is merely a means to a greater end. We accept the reality that a person may have to put in a hard day’s work, and except for brief interludes during the workday, he cannot relax until he comes home in the evening. Our earthly existence is our “workday,” and except for brief periods of rest and tranquility, we are to engage in our work until we return to our true home in the Eternal World.

### PART B. EVERYTHING IS A TEST

As we have learned, the purpose of man in this world is to exercise his free will and make correct decisions, overcoming challenges and thereby earning eternal reward. We have mentioned the constant tension between the physical body and the spiritual soul, which stands at the center of man’s service of God. The physical world in which we live is thus full of challenges designed to create the circumstances in which our decisions must be made.

## 1. **Ramchal, Mesilat Yesharim, Chapter 1 – Everything in the world is a test for man.**

The Holy One, Blessed be He, has placed man in a place where there are many factors that distance him from God, and these factors are the material temptations that cause man to be distanced from the true good if he is drawn after them. Thus, man is in the center of a fierce struggle, for all the matters of this world, whether good or bad, are tests for man – poverty on the one hand and wealth on the other hand, as Solomon said (Proverbs 30:9), “Lest I be sated and deny and say, ‘Who is God?’ and lest I became impoverished and steal. . .” or tranquility on the one hand and suffering on the other – such that man is embattled from every side. If a person is valiant and is victorious in the war on all sides, he will become the perfect person who is privileged to cleave to his Creator and leave the vestibule to enter the palace and bask in the light of life.

והנה שמו הקדוש ברוך הוא לאדם במקום שרבים בו המרחיקים אותו ממנו יתברך, והם הם התאוות החמריות אשר אם ימשך אחריהן הנה הוא מתרחק והולך מן הטוב האמיתי, ונמצא שהוא מושם באמת בתוך המלחמה החזקה, כי כל עניני העולם בין לטוב בין (למוטב) לרע הנה הם נסיונות לאדם, העוני מצד אחד והעושר מצד אחד כענין שאמר שלמה (משלי ל ט): “פן אשבע וכחשתי ואמרת מי ה', ופן אורש וגנבת וגו'”. השלום מצד אחד והיסורין מצד אחד, עד שנמצאת המלחמה אליו פנים ואחור. ואם יהיה לבן חיל וינצח המלחמה מכל הצדדין, הוא יהיה האדם השלם אשר יזכה לידבק בבוראו ויצא מן הפרוזדור הזה ויכנס בטרקלין לאור באור החיים.

These words contain a crucial principle for life. It is not surprising that encountering obstacles, challenges, and difficult situations, can be understood as a test and trial. Yet, the Ramchal adds that even ostensibly “good” things such as wealth and tranquility are also tests for man!

If we understand that our purpose in life is to exercise our free will correctly, we will also understand that the circumstances of our lives are geared towards providing the tests that will bring the most out of our free will. Even the more pleasant parts of life are parts of the test. These tests are our *raison d'être*, and it stands to reason that they are both constant and pervasive.

## 2. **Esther Jungreis, Life Is a Test, Artscroll/Mesorah Publications – Tests are the essence of life and pervade all of our experiences, big and small.**

So what is life?

From the Torah we learn that the definitive metaphor for life is a test. It is written that God tested the patriarch Abraham (Genesis 21:22), to which Abraham responded “*Hineni*” (here I am, ready to do Your bidding, to fulfill the purpose for which You created me). On ten different occasions, Abraham was tested and he passed each time. God continues to test each and every one of us. These tests are custom-made, designed with our unique needs in mind, so that we might discover and fulfill the higher purpose for which He created us.

From the moment we are born, to the day that God calls us, we are tested. In essence, everything is a test, and once we absorb this, it will become easier to bear the many challenges and trials of life. These tests come in many shapes and forms the way we relate to God, to our parents, our teachers, our peers, our neighbors, our co-workers, our colleagues, even to a clerk in a store, the waiter in a restaurant, or a fellow driver on the road, are all tests. These tests reflect the genuineness of our commitment, the depth of our faith and the measure of our character, and at the end of the day, we are marked “pass” or “fail.”

In the “University on High,” even little things, things that we would normally consider innocuous and insignificant count, and therefore, are tests. For example, we wake up in the morning and have a mental tug of war over whether we should get up and pray or be kind to ourselves and linger in bed just a little bit longer. After all, we reason, our little prayer won’t make a difference; it won’t really matter to God whether we pray or not. In any event, God would certainly want us to take care of ourselves and protect our health. We need our sleep. But how much sleep do we really need? Six hours? Eight hours? How much?

The recognition that the tests we experience in life are the key to realizing our purpose in this world will give us an entirely different perspective when we encounter challenges or difficulties.

3. **Rabbi Yosef Hurwitz, the Alter of Novardok, Madreigas HaAdam, Ch. 4, “Point of Truth” – Tests and challenges are the very stuff of life itself.**

There is a type of tranquility that comes with tests and challenges... This is when a person feels calm and joyful at a time of challenge and calls it “life,” rather than “a test,” for that is when he actualizes all of his potential abilities and strength and faith in God. This is the purpose of life, and if a person experiences a continual challenge, or another challenge follows on the heels of the first, he should not consider it something wrong or a bad occurrence that he must wait for it to pass. On the contrary, that is when his entire vitality should be awakened, and he should feel that he is living a truly perfect life and be satisfied with the opportunity to wage war against the *yetzer* (evil inclination).

יש מנוחה עם נסיונות... כי הוא מרגיש מנוחת הנפש ושמחה עצומה בעת הנסיון ואינו קורא זה נסיון אלא הוא קורא זה חיים, כי אז מוציא כל כחותיו וגבורתו ובטחונו בד' מכח אל הפועל. וזה תכלית החיים, וכל שיתמיד יותר הנסיון או שבא נסיון אחר ברצוף אינו מרגיש זה לעול, ולמקרה רעה שידחוק את השעה מתי תעבור, אלא אדרבה אז יתעורר כל הרוח חיים שלו ואז הוא מרגיש כי הוא חי לפי דרך השלמות והוא שבע רצון ללחום אז מלחמת היצר.

Not only is every human being subject to tests throughout the course of his life, but Divine Providence tailors every individual’s life circumstances to produce the specific tests and challenges that are appropriate for him or her. (For a more detailed treatment of this subject, see the Morasha classes on *Hashgachah Pratit*.)

4. **Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Handbook of Jewish Thought, Vol. 2, 19:21 – God’s providence ensures that every person is in their correct life situation from which to choose good over evil.**

The main task of Divine providence in this world is therefore to set each person in his station in life in order that he may serve God according to his destiny. All things that God does in this world are directed toward this purpose [Derech Hashem 2:3:2, 3] ...

One might ask, though, why God should need to test us. After all, He is omniscient and knows all of our abilities. He does not need to test us in order to discern how we would respond. The answer is that He tests us for *our* benefit.

5. **Ramban (Nachmanides), Bereishit 22:1—The purpose of a test is to benefit the person being challenged.**

The function of a test, in my opinion, is: Since a person has complete autonomy in his actions and

ענין הנסיון הוא לדעתי בעבור היות מעשה האדם רשות מוחלטת בידו אם ירצה יעשה ואם לא ירצה לא

can choose whether or not to do something, it is considered a “test” from the vantage point of the one being tested. The Tester, however, gives the command in order to draw out his response from the potential to the actual, so that he can receive reward for good deeds and not merely for having a good heart. You should know that God challenges the righteous (Tehillim/Psalms 11:5) when He knows that the righteous man will do His will and He wishes to give him merits; then He commands him to undergo a test. He does not challenge the wicked, who will not listen. All the trials in the Torah were for the benefit of the one who was tested.

יעשה יקרא “נסיון” מצד המנוסה אבל המנוסה יתברך  
 יצוה בו להוציא הדבר מן הכח אל הפועל להיות לו  
 שכר מעשה טוב לא שכר לב טוב בלבד דע כי השם  
 צדיק יבחן (תהלים יא ה) כשהוא יודע בצדיק שיעשה  
 רצונו וחפץ להצדיקו יצוה אותו בנסיון ולא יבחן את  
 הרשעים אשר לא ישמעו והנה כל הנסיונות שבתורה  
 לטובת המנוסה.

If we cultivate a recognition that the events in our lives are meant to test us, it can have an untold impact on our behavior. Rather than reacting instinctively – and often wrongly – in difficult and demanding situations, we will ask ourselves what the proper response is (maximizing the use of our free will) and what God wants from us. Focusing on this perspective can help us reach levels of greatness we might never have dreamed possible. Consider the following incident.

*This was the delicious part of the morning. The house was still quiet as Morris returned home from shul (synagogue). The aroma of fresh-brewed coffee filled the air, and Morris’ daily newspaper waited, crisply folded inside the delivery bag.*

*He sat down with his coffee and slid the newspaper out of its plastic sleeve. As he opened it, though, he saw that something was wrong. It wasn’t tightly compressed, straight off the press, as it was every morning. It was creased in a few stray places, as if someone else had already opened it. Could it be? Morris felt anger rising inside him at the thought of someone invading his private space in so blatant a way.*

*“But let’s not get carried away,” he warned himself. “Maybe it’s just some fluke.”*

*The next morning, however, the idea of a fluke was soundly defeated. The newspaper was not only refolded, but it also bore a coffee stain on the front page. Now Morris was ready to do battle.*

*The next morning, he arose at 5 a.m. and watched as the delivery boy flew by on his bike and tossed the newspaper onto his front porch. Peeking through a slit in the window shade, Morris maintained his vigil to see what would happen next. He watched in disbelief as David, his neighbor across the street, emerged from his house, gently lifted the paper off Morris’ porch and returned home, presumably to enjoy Morris’ freshly folded paper with his coffee.*

*Morris imagined himself bursting through the front door and catching David red-handed. But in his visualization of sweet revenge, he could not see what would happen next. Would there be an argument? A fight? Would David be remorseful or defensive? Better to hold off on any action, Morris decided. First, he would discuss the situation with his rabbi and get an objective, informed opinion on how to handle it.*

*Morris went to his rabbi and told his tale of pilfering, creased newspapers, and coffee stains. The rabbi shook his head in amazement at the neighbor’s audacity.*

*“Morris, you have every right to confront your neighbor and ask him to stop doing this unjustifiable act each morning,” the rabbi told him. “But I want you to know that if you do that, then you will be losing a friend and a neighbor forever.”*

*“I would like to suggest another option. Forget about your neighbor’s actions. Instead of confronting him, buy him a one-year subscription to the newspaper as a gift from you to him. That way, instead of building up a fight, you will be paving a pathway of peace. Choose peace, Morris. You deserve it.” (Binyomin Pruzansky, Stories for the Jewish Heart—Volume II, Artscroll/Mesorah Publications)*

It would be understandable, for someone in Morris’s position, to react with anger. However, if someone recognizes that such difficulties are a test from God, it can enable him to transcend instinctive reactions and strive towards higher ideals. (See also the Morasha class on Controlling Anger.)

## KEY THEMES OF SECTION II.

- ⇒ The material world is the place where man works to earn the reward that he will subsequently enjoy in the World to Come. The verse states that “man was born to toil” (Job 5:7), and this “toil” – the labor towards achieving the purpose for which we are created – should be the focus of our lives. It is unwise to make the betterment of one’s material life the focus of one’s existence, for life in this world is fleeting and is only meant as a means to achieve true life in the World to Come.
- ⇒ Everything we experience in this world, including even the small details in our lives, is a test to determine whether we will choose right or wrong, good or evil. Even matters that we consider positive, such as wealth and tranquility, are actually tests.
- ⇒ The tests and trials we encounter are individually crafted for each of us. If we keep this principle in mind even in trying situations, we can find within ourselves the ability to pass each test, drawing from the great spiritual source of our own souls, to achieve the greatness for which we are destined.

## SECTION III: THE GOAL OF MAN

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We have already learned that man was placed in this world in order to exercise his free will and earn reward by choosing good over evil. We have also mentioned the constant tension between the conflicting drives of the physical body and the spiritual soul, and discussed the centrality of the tests and trials that God sends throughout our lives.

In this section we will address specific goals that a person should strive for – what, in terms of everyday behavior and deeds, is the arena for exercising our free will.

### PART A. TORAH AND MITZVOT

We have already seen that the means we use in this world to achieve the ultimate purpose of our existence are the mitzvot that God commands (see above, Section I, Part A, Source 3). By devoting ourselves to performing mitzvot, we dedicate our lives to our own spiritual perfection (achieved by following the Divinely ordained path) and to bringing glory to God (the underlying purpose of the mitzvot – see the Appendix).

The Torah, however, contains 613 mitzvot, and although not all are applicable to every individual, many are! Is there any way of prioritizing the mitzvot and determining which are more valuable or crucial toward achieving our goal? The answer is: no. We should invest equal effort in all of them.

### 1. Pirkei Avot 2:1 – Attaching equal importance to every mitzvah.

Be as careful to observe a “minor” mitzvah as in a “major” one, for you do not know the reward of any of the mitzvot.

והוי זהיר במצוה קלה כבחמורה, שאין אתה יודע מתן שכרן של מצוות.

Yet, a person should not feel that the abundance of mitzvot in the Torah represents an impossibly weighty responsibility. On the contrary, the Torah is termed “the Torah of mankind” (see for instance Maharal, *Tiferet Yisrael*, Chap. 12), for its mitzvot are tailor-made for us, providing an opportunity to make the very maximum of our human existence.

### 2. Mishnah, Makkot 3:16 – God gave the Jewish people many mitzvot to increase their merits.

Rabbi Chanania ben Akashya taught: The Holy One, Blessed be He, wanted to give merit to Israel. Therefore, He increased their Torah and mitzvot, as the verse states (*Yeshayah/Isaiah 42:21*), “God desired for the sake of His righteousness; He enlarged the Torah and expanded it.”

רבי חנניא בן עקשיא אומר, רצה הקדוש ברוך הוא לזכות את ישראל, לפיכך הרבה להם תורה ומצוות, שנאמר (ישעיה מ"ב, כ"א) "י חפץ למען צדקו יגדיל תורה ויאדיר"

The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah 44:1*) goes so far as to state that the mitzvot were only given for the purpose of refining humanity.

It is important to note that personal growth through Torah study and performance is not limited to a spiritual, transcendent refinement. In a very simple sense, the mitzvot of the Torah give our lives meaning and fulfillment. By means of mitzvah performance a person learns to “live with God” (the mitzvot draw God into all facets of our lives), bringing us a life of contentment and joy (see also the Morasha series on Personal Growth and Development).

### 3. Rabbi Aharon Lopiansky, *Why a Joy-filled Sukkot?* – The Joy of Divine Awareness.

The source of the happiness described as *simchah* lies in enhancing one’s awareness of God and His providence, for with this awareness, one feels more complete. A person is beset with shortcomings and frustrations only because he considers himself a separate entity, unattached to God. Then his shortcomings are indeed shortcomings, and feeling that he is missing something is a true indication that he is genuinely lacking in an essential aspect of his life. Thus, *atzav* – “despair” – is a synonym for idolatry (*Psalms 115:4*), for its source is alienation from God.

Not so the person whose life is infused with faith and a keen awareness of God. Someone who recognizes that whatever travails and problems he encounters do not occur by chance but are part of a Divine plan designed for his benefit – such a person is *sameyach bechelko*, “content with his lot.” This does not imply the passive resignation of the simple-minded, but the joy-filled end-product of one’s recognition of God and His profound ways! ...

In a similar vein, it is important to recall the relationship of a person with his own body. Although we have described a certain tension between the body and the soul, the Ba’al Shem Tov taught that this should not be understood as an imperative to shun bodily pleasures and renounce all involvement in worldly matters. The body is not the “enemy” of the soul, but rather its partner (as the instrument by which a person functions in the world) in service of God.

The body must therefore be given due respect.

4. **Teaching of Ba'al Shem Tov (cited on [www.chabad.org](http://www.chabad.org): Thirty-Six Aphorisms of the Baal Shem Tov) – Help the “Donkey” (the body).**

It is written: “When you will see the donkey of your enemy collapsing under its burden, and you are inclined to refrain from aiding him, you shall nevertheless aid him” (Exodus 23:5). The Baal Shem Tov applied this instruction to the body and the material self (*chamor*, “donkey,” also means “materiality”). Initially, the Torah is saying, you may see your body as your enemy, resisting your soul’s objectives, collapsing under the “burden” of the mitzvot. You may therefore be inclined to fight the body by denying its needs and mortifying it. Says the Torah: You must aid your soul’s “enemy.” Purify the body, and refine it, but do not break it.

In the context of mitzvah performance, it bears mentioning that the mitzvah of Torah study is of primary importance, and is considered the foremost means of achieving closeness to God.

5. **Ramchal, Derech Hashem 1:4:9 (Translation by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan) – Torah study has a unique ability to bring man to a level of perfection.**

God granted us one particular means which can bring man close to God more than anything else. This is the study of His revealed Torah.

Such study accomplishes this in two ways: first through the reading of the Torah, and secondly through its comprehension.

In His love, God composed a volume of words decreed by His wisdom, and bestowed it upon us. This is the Torah and later works of the prophets, making up the Bible as we know it.

These words have the unique property of causing one who reads them to incorporate in himself the highest excellence and greatest perfection. [The only condition is that these words be read] with holiness and purity, with the proper intent of fulfilling God’s Will.

Similarly, when one strives to understand these works, either through his own intellect or through the explanations provided in their commentaries, he can earn even greater perfection, according to his effort. This is even more so when one attains a grasp of the secrets and mysteries contained in these works, since each of these concepts that one understands fixes and integrates a certain degree of the highest levels of excellence and perfection in his soul.

Through all these acts, man not only earns excellence and perfection for himself, but he also elevates and perfects the entire fabric of creation. This is particularly true in the case of the Torah.

ואמנם אמצעי אחד נתן לנו האל ית', שמדריגתו למעלה מכל שאר האמצעים המקרבים האדם אליו, והוא תלמוד התורה. והוא בשתי בחינות, הא' - בבחינת ההגיון והלימוד, והב' - בבחינת ההשכלה. כי הנה רצה בחסדו ית' וחיבר לנו חיבור דברים כמו שגזרה חכמתו, ומסרם לנו, והיינו כלל ספר התורה, ואחריו ספרי הנביאים, שבסגולת הדברים ההם יהיה, שמי שיהגה בהם בקדושה ובטהרה, על הכונה הנכונה שהיא עשית חפצו ית', יתעצם בו על ידם מעלה עליונה ושלימות גדול עד מאד.

וכן מי שישתדל בהבנתם ובידיעת מה שמסר לנו מפירושיהם, יקנה כפי השתדלותו שלימות על שלימות. כל שכן אם יגיע אל השכלת סתריהם ורזיהם, שכל ענין מהם שישכיל יוקבע ויתעצם בנשמתו מדריגה מן המדריגות היותר רמות שבמעלה והשלימות האמיתית.

ובכל אלה הענינים לא די מה שקונה האדם בעצמו מעלה ושלימות, אלא שמציאות הבריאה כולה בכללה ובפרטה מתעלה ומשתלם, ובפרט על ידי התורה.

(See further the Morasha class Torah Study: The Foundation of Jewish Life.)

## PART B. CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

A significant part of our mission in the world is to exercise free will to perfect our character and refine our behavior.

### 1. Vilna Gaon, Even Shleimah 2 – What is life for, if not for character refinement?

The prime purpose of man's life is to constantly strive to break his bad traits. Otherwise, what is life for?

עיקר חיות האדם היא להתחזק תמיד בשבירת המדות, ואם לא – למה לו חיים?

The Ramchal goes so far as to express our reward for the World to Come in terms of the human refinement that we achieve in this world.

### 2. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, Da'at Tevunot, No. 14 – The perfection man achieves is itself his reward.

The first principle... is that God desired that man should perfect himself and all that was created for him, and this itself will be his merit and his reward... His reward – that he will indeed be perfected, and will take pleasure in goodness for eternity.

היסוד הראשון... הוא שרצה הרצון העליון שיהיה האדם משלים את עצמו ואת כל הנברא בשבילו, וזה עצמו יהיה זכותו ושכרו... שכרו - שהרי סוף סוף הוא יהיה המושלם, ויהיה מתענג בטובה לנצח נצחים.

Human refinement of course includes character refinement. Yet, the concept of human perfection runs far deeper than the simple idea of refined character traits. In the Torah, the obligation to refine our character is expressed as an imperative to emulate God, seeking to adopt the same attributes He displays. In its deeper sense, self-perfection is therefore a means of drawing God into the world.

### 3. Rambam (Maimonides), Sefer HaMitzvot, Positive Commandment 8 – The Torah commands us to emulate God.

The precept in which we were commanded to emulate God as much as we can is stated by the verse: "You shall follow in His ways" (Devarim/Deuteronomy 28:9). This commandment is repeated when the Torah says: "...to go in all of His ways" (ibid. 11:22). The mitzvah is explained as follows: "Just as God is called merciful, you should be merciful. Just as God is called kind, you shall be kind. Just as God is called righteous, you shall be righteous. Just as God is called saintly, you shall be saintly." These are the words of Sifri.

The commandment is repeated in different terms, where the verse states: "You shall follow God, your Lord" (ibid. 13:5). There, too, it is

הציווי שנצטוונו להדמות לו ית' כפי יכלתנו, והוא אמרו: "והלכת בדרכיו" (דברים כח, ט). וכבר כפל ציווי זה ואמר: "ללכת בכל-דרכיו" (שם יא, כב), ובא בפירוש ענין זה: "מה הקב"ה נקרא רחום - אף אתה היה רחום; הקב"ה נקרא חנון - אף אתה היה חנון; הקב"ה נקרא צדיק - אף אתה היה צדיק; הקב"ה נקרא חסיד - אף אתה היה חסיד" - זהו לשון ספרי.

וכבר כפל צווי זה בלשון אחר ואמר: "אחרי ה' אלקיכם תלכו" (שם יג, ה), וגם בפירושו בא, שענינו להתדמות



explained to mean that one should emulate the good deeds and noble attributes which describe God through analogies, and then one will achieve great heights.

למעשים הטובים ולמידות הנכבדות שבהם מתואר  
יתעלה על דרך המשל - יתעלה על הכל עליו רב.

On a related note, the Torah attaches tremendous importance to one's relations with other people. In acting with others according to the dictates of the Torah, we emulate God in our interpersonal interactions.

#### 4. **Vayikra (Leviticus), 19:18 – The Torah commands us to love others as we love ourselves.**

You shall love your fellow as you love yourself.

ואהבת לרעך כמוך.

#### 5. **Rashi, ibid. – The centrality of this principle.**

Rabbi Akiva taught that this is a pivotal rule in the Torah.

אמר ר' עקיבא זה כלל גדול בתורה.

The mitzvot of the Torah are generally divided into two categories: those that apply between man and God, and those that apply between man and his fellow man. The mitzvot that regulate behavior between man and his neighbor include prohibitions of not wronging others in any way, and obligations in performing different acts of kindness.

Kindness is considered one of the pillars that uphold the world.

#### 6. **Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers), 1:2—The three pillars that uphold the world.**

Shimon the Righteous was among the last members of the Great Assembly. He taught that the world stands on three things: Torah, service [of God], and acts of kindness.

שמעון הצדיק היה משירי כנסת הגדולה. הוא היה  
אומר, על שלשה דברים העולם עומד, על התורה ועל  
העבודה ועל גמילות חסדים.

The Jewish approach to interpersonal relations is discussed at length in the Morasha series on *Bein Adam L'Chaveiro*.

### PART C. PARTNERING WITH GOD

It is important to note that the effects of our choices are not limited to the effect (worldly and spiritual) on the individual. By observing mitzvot and exercising our free will properly, we become, in essence, partners with God in the creation and upkeep of the world.

This concept is closely related to the general purpose of the world: bringing glory to God. By perfecting the world through his deeds, man makes the world into an abode in which God's Presence can dwell.

#### 1. **Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner, Nefesh HaChaim, Gate I, Chapter 3 – By making correct choices and performing good deeds, man brings tremendous spiritual benefit to the universe.**

In this manner, as it were, God created man and gave him power over myriads upon myriads of

כן בדמיון זה כביכול ברא הוא יתברך את האדם  
והשליטו על רבי רבון כחות ועולמות אין מספר,

forces and countless worlds. He placed them in the hands of man so that man could control and affect them with every detail of his actions, deeds, words, and thoughts and with all manner of conduct, for good or for bad, Heaven forbid. For with his positive actions, words, and thoughts, man preserves and gives strength to many spiritual forces and worlds and adds sanctity and light to them, as the verse states (Isaiah 51:16), “I placed My words in your mouth . . . to plant the heavens and found the earth.” Similarly, our Sages state (Berachos 54a): “Do not read [the reference to Torah Sages as] ‘your sons’ but rather ‘your builders.’” For it is they who arrange the upper worlds, as a builder arranges his building, and they endow them with strength. The converse is also true, Heaven forbid, that a man’s improper deeds, words, or thoughts destroy many forces and sacred spiritual worlds beyond count or measure. As the verse states (ibid. 49:17) “Your demolishers and your destroyers...” Alternatively, man’s improper deeds can darken or diminish their light and sanctity, Heaven forbid...

This is the meaning of the verse “God created man in His image, in the image of Elokim” and “for in the image of Elokim He made man.” Just as God is Elokim, i.e., the master of all powers that exist in all the worlds, and He arranges them and controls them at every moment in accordance with His will; so too He appointed man as the one who opens and closes myriads of forces and worlds based on all the details of his conduct in all of his matters, literally at every time and moment, in accordance with the spiritual root of his actions, words, and thoughts, as if he were also the master of their powers, as it were.

ומסרם בידו שיהא הוא המדבר והמנהיג אותם עפ"י כל פרטי תנועות מעשיו ודבוריו ומחשבותיו וכל סדרי הנהגותיו הן לטוב או להיפך ח"ו, כי במעשיו ודבוריו ומחשבותיו הטובים הוא מקיים ונותן כח בכמה כחות ועולמות עליונים הקדושים, ומוסיף בהם קדושה ואור כמ"ש (ישעיה נא, טז): "וְאֵשׁ דְּבָרֵי בְּפִיךָ גו' לְנִטֵּעַ שָׁמַיִם וְלִיסֹד אֲרֶץ". וכמאמרם ז"ל (ברכות סד, א) "אל תקרא בניך אלא בוניך". כי המה המסדרים עולמות העליונים כבונה המסדר בנינו ונותנים בהם רב כח, ובהיפוך ח"ו ע"י מעשיו או דבוריו ומחשבותיו אשר לא טובים, הוא מהרס ר"ל כמה כחות ועולמות עליונים הקדושים לאין ערך ושיעור. כמו שכתוב (שם מט, יז) "מהרסוך ומחריבך וגו'". או מחשיך או מקטין אורם וקדושתם ח"ו...

זהו "ויברא אלקים את האדם בצלמו בצלם אלקים וגו'". "כי בצלם אלקים עשה וגו'". שכמו שהוא ית' שמו הוא האלקים בעל הכחות הנמצאים בכל העולמות כולם, ומסדרם ומנהיגם כל רגע כרצונו, כן השליט רצונו יתברך את האדם שיהא הוא הפותח והסוגר של כמה אלפי רבואות כחות ועולמות על פי כל פרטי סדרי הנהגותיו בכל עניניו בכל עת ורגע ממש כפי שרשו העליון של מעשיו ודבוריו ומחשבותיו, כאילו הוא גם כן הבעל כח שלהם כביכול.

#### PART D. WHAT IS MY MISSION?

It is important to note that every human being is created with his own individualized set of strengths and weaknesses, and is placed in custom-tailored circumstances that will create his own unique tests and trials throughout his life.

Thus, while the general description of mankind’s mission is the same, each person has his or her own particular, unique mission in the world.

## 1. Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Alei Shur, Vol. I, p. 168 – The profound importance of each individual, and his purpose in life.

The Talmud states, “Each and every person must declare, ‘The world was created for me’ (Sanhedrin 37a). Rashi explains that this means that I am considered as important as the entire world ...

“Like the entire world” – This is the one-time life experience of each person – there was never a person like him; nor will there ever be a person like him throughout history. I, with my special character strengths, the child of my particular parents, born in a specific time period, and in a particular environment – certainly there is a unique challenge that is placed upon me. I have a special share in the Torah, and the entire world is waiting for me to complete my challenge. For my mission cannot be exchanged with anyone else in the world!

“כל אחד ואחד חייב לומר: בשבילי נברא העולם” – רש"י: “כלומר: חשוב אני כעולם מלא, לא אטרד את עצמי מן העולם בעבירה אחת”. (סנהדרין לו, א)

“כעולם מלא” – זוהי חזית חד-פעמיותו של האדם, שלא היה עוד כמותו ולא יהיה כמותו עד סוף כל הדורות. אני עם המיזוג המיוחד של כוחותי, בן לאותם אבות, נולד בתוך אותה תקופה ובאותה סביבה – בודאי עבודה מיוחדת מוטלת עלי, חלק מיוחד לי בתורה, וכל הבריאה מחכה לי שאתקן את המוטל עלי, כי את עבודתי לא אוכל להחליף עם שום אדם אחר בעולם!

Every individual is charged with perfecting himself and overcoming his own unique set of challenges. One need not be concerned that he has not reached the level achieved by anyone else, for God judges him based on his own individual abilities and circumstances.

## 2. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, Derash Moshe, Parshas Va'eira – Each individual has his own unique mission.

Rashi explains that in some places the Torah mentions Aharon before Moshe and in other places it mentions Moshe before Aharon, to teach that they were equal. This is puzzling, since Moshe was the master of all prophets and the teacher of the world, and the Torah was given through him; how can it be said that Aharon was equal to him?

We can explain . . . that since throughout his life, Aharon fulfilled God's will perfectly, it is possible to say that he was equal to Moshe, even though Moshe was greater because he had more missions. Nevertheless, since they both did as they were commanded in accordance with their abilities, they were on an equal level.

This is how I explained the Talmud in Bava Basra 10b, where it states that Yosef, the son of Rabbi Yehoshua, became ill and lost consciousness. [When he revived,] his father asked him what he had seen and he replied, “I saw an upside-down world. The people who were on a higher level

פירש"י יש מקומות שמקדים אהרן למשה ויש מקומות שמקדים משה לאהרן לומר ששקולים כאחד. והוא דבר תמוה שמשה היה אדון הנביאים ורבן של כל העולם ועל ידו ניתנה התורה ואיך אמר שאהרן שקול?

ויש לפרש... דכיון דאהרן עשה כל ימיו בשלימות כל רצון השי"ת שהיה אפשר לו לעשות הוא שקול כמשה, אף שמשה היה גדול דלכן היה עליו יותר דברים, מ"מ כיון ששניהם עשו מה שנצטוו ונשלחו כפי יכלתם הגדול הן שוין במעלה.

ובארתי הא דב"ב דף י' ע"ב דיוסף בריה דר' יהושע חלש אינגיד א"ל אבוא מאי חזית א"ל עולם הפוך ראיתי עליונים למטה ותחתונים למעלה א"ל עולם ברור ראיתי, שתמוה מאד איך אמר שהוא עולם הפוך,

were below, and those on a lower level were above.” His father said, “You saw the world clearly.” But this is very puzzling: how could he have said it was an upside-down world? Certainly in this world a person sees only with his eyes, whereas that [Next World] is the world of truth.

It must be that he saw that even in the world of truth, the people who were considered superior here were also superior there, and the inferior people were still inferior there, but the superior people there were nevertheless in a lower position than those who were inferior to them, and that is why he called it an upside-down world. His father replied that the world was seen clearly because God does not demand of a person more than he is capable of achieving. Therefore, those who had limited abilities and the like but still accomplished in accordance with their abilities, fulfilled their mission in this world and therefore they earned a higher position [in the Next World]. The superior ones, however, even though they were greater and had performed more virtuous deeds, still were capable of achieving even more Torah and good deeds in accordance with their abilities, but they were slightly negligent in accomplishing this and therefore earned a lower stature. Thus, it emerges that when two people act in accordance with their abilities, they are considered on an equal level.

הא ודאי בעוה"ז האדם רואה רק לעינים והתם הוא עולם האמת.

אבל צריך לומר דראה שגם בעולם האמת אומרים שהם עליונים אלו שהיו ידועים בכאן עליונים, ועל התחתונים שהם תחתונים, ומ"מ היו העליונים למטה והתחתונים למעלה, ולכן אמר שהוא עולם הפוך. והשיב לו אביו שהוא עולם ברור משום שהקב"ה אינו בא בטרוניא ותובע מכל אחד רק כפי כחו, ולכן אלו שכחם קטן בכשרונותיהם וכדומה אבל עשו כפי כחם קיימו שליחותם בעוה"ז ולכן הם למעלה, והעליונים אף שהם יותר גדולים ועשו יותר מעשים טובים מהתחתונים אבל היו יכולים לעשות יותר תורה ומעשים לפי כשרונותיהם וכחותיהם ונתרשלו קצת לכן הם למטה, וא"כ נמצא שבעשו שניהם כפי כחם הם שקולים במדרגה.

By the same token, as the following story illustrates, one need not envy another person's natural abilities, for God expects every individual to perfect himself in accordance with the individualized set of abilities with which he was endowed.

*Rabbi Naftali Amsterdam once lamented to the towering ethical giant, Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, "If only I had the mind of the author of the Responsa Sha'agas Aryeh, the dedicated heart of the author of 'Foundation and Source of Divine Service,' and the ethical character traits of you, my master!"*

*Rabbi Salanter was not impressed.*

*"Naftali!" Rabbi Yisrael sharply retorted to his disciple. "No! No! You are to serve God with your own mind, with your own heart, and with your own exemplary character traits" (cited by Osher Chaim Levene, "Who Am I?" Aish.com).*

### KEY THEMES OF SECTION III.

∞ The Torah contains 613 mitzvot (many of which are relevant to each of us), and all are vital for the fulfillment of our purpose in this world. One cannot assign greater importance to some mitzvot, and neglect others; performing the will of God implies performing all of them.

- ⇒ At the same time, the mitzvot are all *opportunities*. They are the means by which we achieve personal perfection, by which we rectify the world in which we are placed, and the means by which we forge a close relationship with God – which is itself our “reward” in the World to Come.
- ⇒ The Torah places particular emphasis on character development and man’s relationship with his fellow men. In this sense, it can be said that the purpose of our existence is to refine our personalities, including the display of kindness to others. By refining our characters, we emulate the ways of God, as befitting man, who was created in the Divine Image. As it were, we thus draw God into the world by means of our own deeds.
- ⇒ God created the universe in such a way that man’s actions have an impact, either positive or negative, on all the spiritual realms.
- ⇒ Every individual has his own unique mission in this world and is charged with using his own particular set of strengths, overcoming his own particular weaknesses, and dealing with his own particular life circumstances in such a way that he will serve God to the fullest.

## APPENDIX. THE WORLD WAS CREATED FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

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We learned in Section I that the world was created for the sake of man; God wished to give humanity a share of Divine goodness and bounty. Other sources, however, indicate an additional purpose for the creation of the world – for the sake of God’s glory.

### 1. Mishnah, Avot 6:11 – Everything was created for the glory of God.

All that the Holy One, Blessed be He, created in His world, He created only for His glory, as it is said (Isaiah 43:7): “Everything that is called by My Name, and which I have created for My glory, I have formed it, even I have made it.”

כל מה שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא בעולמו לא בראו  
אלא לכבודו, שנאמר (ישעיה מו:ז), כל הנקרא בשמי  
ולכבודי בראתיו אף עשיתיו.

A similar statement is made by the Prophets concerning the purpose of creating the nation of Israel.

### 2. Isaiah 43:21 – The Purpose of the Nation of Israel.

This nation I have created for Myself, in order that they should tell My glory.

עם זו יצרת לי תהילתי יספרו.

As noted above, Judaism maintains that God is intrinsically perfect. He has no lack that needs to be filled. Therefore, saying that Creation is “for the sake of God” makes no theological sense because it implies that somehow God needs the world for His own purposes. What then is this supposed to mean?

Furthermore, we learned that God created the world for the good of man, in order to bestow His infinite goodness upon us. The sources above, however, state that God created the world for the purpose of His own glory. How can we reconcile that the world was created for God with the teaching that God created the world for *our* sake?

It must be that what is meant by saying that God created the world for His own glory does not mean that He created it for Himself. Somehow – and we will have to understand how – the greatest good that God could give is achieved when we, His creation, recognize His glory.

**3. Irving M. Bunim, Ethics from Sinai, pg. 401 – We achieve our own ultimate development when we recognize God’s universal presence in the world.**

If a mortal king of flesh-and-blood so ordered and ruled his realm so that everything and everyone in it must enhance his honor, we would consider him vain and self-centered. But perish such a thought about the Supreme Ruler. The living universe is a rhapsody to His glory because the cosmos benefits constantly from His sustaining omnipresence. And man was created ultimately to acknowledge and exalt His glory, because in that way lies man’s ultimate development.

When we talk about the revelation of God’s glory, what we are referring to is mankind’s recognition of God as the source of all existence. This awareness is by definition incomplete in the physical world in which we live, as God has designed this world to hide His presence. In fact, the Hebrew word for world, *Olam*, stems from the same etymological root as the word *he’elam*, meaning hidden: the world hides God’s presence. The ultimate revelation of God’s glory will only truly be realized in the world to come, the same stage of existence in which we reap the rewards of our actions in this world.

Why did God create a world within which He hides? Why not create a world of revelation? Indeed, this is the same question we asked above regarding why God did not just create us in a state of perfection – and the answer to both questions is the same. Because the world as God created it allows us the leeway of having free will and affords us the opportunity to choose to see God, become aware of His kindness, to build a relationship with Him, and to reveal His glory through our actions. In doing so, we earn the goodness that God ultimately wants to give us – attachment to the Infinite.

**4. Rabbi Shlomo Elyashiv (Leshem), Sefer Ha-De’ah, Vol. 2, Derush 4, Anaf 11, Sec. 1 –The revelation of God’s glory, and the goodness bestowed on us: They are one and the same.**

This is what the Sages stated, that all was created for His glory, meaning for the revelation of the light of His Holiness, by which His Kingdom will be revealed in the entire universe, and the glory of God will be revealed to all humanity. This is the greatest of all pleasures, and there is no pleasure beyond it. All the goodness in the world will only be details in the context of the greatness of the future revelation of God’s glory.

This is the explanation of the statement in several Torah writings that God’s intention for creation of the world is to do good with its creatures. Although the verse states that “all that God did is for His sake” (Proverbs 16:4)... the truth is that this is all one matter, for the revelation of Divine glory is itself the greatest pleasure, and this is the wonderful goodness mentioned by the Prophets and by the Sages as the destiny of the world – all of them derive from the Divine revelations, and they are all one matter.

וזהו מה שיסדו שהכל ברא לכבודו שהוא לגילוי אור קדושתו ית"ש שיתגלה כבודו ומלכותו בכל המציאות כולו ויהיה נגלה כבוד ה' לכל בשר והוא העונג דכל העינוגים והעדן דכל העידונים שאין למעלה מזה וכל היעודים כולם הם רק פרטיו...

וזהו מה שנמצא בכמה ספרי קדושי עליון שאמרו שכוונת כל הבריאה הנגה היה כדי להיטיב לבריותיו הגם שהכתוב אומר (משלי ט"ז ד) 'כל פעל ה' למענהו... אך האמת הוא שהוא הכל דבר אחד כי גילוי כבודו ית"ש הוא גופא עונג כל העינוגים ותכלית כל הטובות וכל היעודים כולם הנאמרים בדברי הנביאים ובדברי רז"ל בטוב העתיד הם כולם המציאויות שבהעולם אשר ייצאו ויתהוו מפרטי גילוייו והם הכל דבר אחד.

The infinite goodness that God performed with humanity is manifest in giving human beings the opportunity to bring glory to His Name by recognizing Him as the source of all. In that way we are able to earn the true and absolute goodness. So the two ideas – kindness and glory – merge into one: God created the world in order that man will receive Divine goodness and He also created a mechanism by which we are able to earn our goodness, by revealing the glory of God.

5. **Ramchal, 138 Principles of Wisdom #4 – The revelation of God's glory that comes about when evil gives way to good is the greatest pleasure for the soul.**

The Infinite Light, Blessed be He, wanted to give the ultimate good, one in which there would be not a trace of embarrassment on the side of the recipient. Therefore, in actuality He withheld the revelation of His complete unity, though there is nothing which He cannot do and He has no lack. But He chose to direct things in such a way that there would be a process by which evil will be transformed to good. That is, by giving room at the beginning for evil to do what it will, but in the end every defect will be fixed as all evil will become truly good. In that way the unity will be revealed, and this is the greatest pleasure for the souls.

רצה הא"ס ב"ה להיות מיטיב הטבה שלמה, שלא יהיה אפילו בושות למקבלים אותו. ושיער לגלות בפועל יחודו השלם - שאין שום מניעה נמצאת לפניו, ולא שום חסרון. לכן שם ההנהגה הזאת שהוא מנהג, שבה יהיה בפועל החזרת הרע לטוב, דהיינו במה שנתן בתחילה מקום לרע לעשות את שלו, ובסוף הכל כבר כל קלקול נתקן, וכל רעה חוזרת לטובה ממש. והרי היחוד מתגלה, שהוא עצמו תענוג של נשמות:

The process of transforming evil to good is synonymous with the process of the revelation of God's unity or glory. This process is the means through which we earn our perfection and attachment to God, to be experienced for eternity in the world to come.

6. **Rabbi Chaim Freidlander, Commentary to Da'at Tevunot, pg. 18 – Bestowing kindness is the goal of creation; revealing God's glory is the manner in which it is received.**

These two concepts – the revelation of God's unity and creation for the sake of bestowing kindness – stem from the same root: the purpose of creation was in order to bestow kindness to the creation, while the method of the kindness is the revelation of God's glory, for that alone created the possibility for kindness – so that the way the kindness is received is by way of earning it through our own effort, and not as a free handout.

As such, the concept of revealing God's unity explains three basic steps: 1) the need for imperfection in creation, 2) the possibility for man's contribution by way of perfecting himself and revealing God's unity, and 3) receiving reward, which is also a function of the revelation of God's unity since in proportion to one's attachment to God one will delight in His revelation ever more deeply until the eternal heights of the World to Come.

שתי מגמות אלה – גילוי יחודו ובריאת העולם למען קבלת חסדו – עולות בקנה אחד: כוונת הבריאה היא למען התחסד עם הבריות, אופן החסד הוא גילוי יחודו יתברך, כי רק הוא נותן אפשרות לשלימות החסד – שנקבל את החסד בזכות על ידי עבודתנו, ולא במתנת חנם.

לכן מענין היחוד נמשכו כל שלושת השלבים: (1) צורך בחסרונות, (2) אפשרות עבודת האדם – שהוא ישלים את עצמו ויגלה את יחודו יתברך, (3) קבלת שכרו, שגם הוא מענין גילוי היחוד. כי לפי מידת דביקותם בה' יהנו מגילוי יחודו, ועל ידי השגת גילוי יחודו יותר ויותר עמוקה עד אין קץ תהיה העליה האין-סופית בעולם הבא.

While the ultimate revelation of God's glory and the ultimate reward for our actions is only truly realized in the World to Come, nevertheless we do enjoy a certain level of pleasure (albeit a fraction!) even in this world. The pleasure referred to in all these sources comes from an awareness of being attached to the Infinite, a spiritual pleasure we experience when we glimpse the glory of God.

Practically speaking we can feel this pleasure when we attach to God through learning His Torah or performing His mitzvot (the word *mitzvah* itself actually means attachment, from the root *tzevet*). So, too, when we perform acts and develop positive character traits that resemble God's acts and traits, we are attaching ourselves to Infinity. Additionally, although in a much more subtle and perhaps more superficial way, we feel this sense of attachment to "something beyond" when we appreciate the wisdom and grandeur of God's creation.

7. **Irving M. Bunim, Ethics from Sinai, pg. 403 – There are many ways to experience the pleasure of attaching to the Infinite.**

With the Torah, Jewry can realize that the world as a whole is an affirmation and exaltation of His majesty. So Jewry accepts the Torah as a life-plan, to live in harmony with His world and to enhance His honor.

But even if a human being has never learned the Torah, in a moment of poetic vision he may see in the natural world about him the utter truth of this last teaching of Pirkei Avot (that the world was created for God's glory). A great expanse of rippling water reflecting sunlight, a bird or gazelle in sudden flight, a flower opening in bloom, may all bring a new sense of wonder. A mighty burst of jagged lightning and rolling thunder can bring a new sense of awe. The scientist peering through a microscope at the bewildering variety of minute forms of life or the amazing actions of living cells; the astronomer gazing through his telescope night after night at distant pinpoints of light and marking his calculations – these and their kind can be seized with sudden fear, a great trembling at the vast mysterious forces they sense beyond their understanding.



## CLASS SUMMARY:

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### WHY DID GOD CREATE THE WORLD? WHY ARE WE HERE?

God is the Ultimate Good, and the nature of good is to want to bestow good upon others. God created the world so that He would have someone (namely, man) upon whom to bestow His goodness. But since a person feels ashamed to receive something without earning it, God placed man in a physical world in which he would be able to exercise free choice to act in accordance with God's will, or the opposite, and in such a way earning his eternal reward, thus making the good that God would bestow upon him complete.

In this sense, God placed His own glory in the hands of man: If we fulfill our purpose in bringing glory to God, we earn the good that He wishes to bestow upon us. The task of man is to overcome the wiles and temptations of the yetzer hara, and to use the power of free will to choose good, meaning following God's will, over evil. To this end, man must pass numerous and constant trials and tests, which, if he passes, sustains him in the World to Come.

### WHAT ARE THE "IMPORTANT THINGS IN LIFE"?

This world is a place to prepare for the World to Come; it is not an end in itself. Consequently, the things that are important in life are those that aid us in achieving that ultimate purpose. Enjoying the physical pleasures of this world, amassing luxuries, and achieving material betterment should not be considered the priorities of one's life. The performance of mitzvot, Torah study, acts of kindness, and character refinement are the tools with which we can earn our eternal reward and achieve our purpose on this planet.

God has placed the world – the physical world we know, and even the spiritual worlds above us – in our hands. This provides us with a great opportunity for making the world a better place (an abode for the Divine Presence), but also places a great responsibility on our shoulders. We strive to align our priorities with these goals.

### DO I HAVE AN INDIVIDUAL MISSION IN LIFE?

Every individual is required to observe mitzvot, study the Torah, be kind to others, and work on refining one's character to the best of one's ability. But although these are general guidelines, each individual is also created with his own individualized set of strengths and weaknesses, and God's Providence places each person in a unique set of life circumstances that determine the tests with which he will be faced over the course of his life. Each person has an individual course, destiny, and role to play in the overarching purpose of the world.

Each individual must look at the abilities he possesses and the challenges he faces, and recognize that they will determine his path in life. Every person should strive serve God to the best of his ability in the situation that God has given him.