

Dvar Torah Outline — Ramchal on the Soul in a Physical World: The “Obvious” Challenge and the Deep Wisdom that Turns Darkness into Light (Derech Hashem, Chelek 1, Perek 4)

Abstract

This dvar Torah traces the Ramchal's argument that a human being is immersed in physicality on three fronts: our bodies, our world, and our daily involvements. That physical immersion creates an “asymmetrical” struggle: the body is compulsory and immediate, while spirituality is not forced upon us. Yet the Ramchal's key chiddush is that **from the depth of Hashem's wisdom**, this very lowliness becomes the engine of human greatness—because transforming physical darkness into spiritual light is what generates the highest kavod Shamayim and the deepest dveikus.

I. Context: where we are in the Ramchal

A. Location in the sefer

- Learning 'פרק ד' אות ג' (then transitioning into 'אות ד').
- Prior point (from the previous session):
 - Man begins as physical, which is both a challenge and (eventually) an advantage.

B. The baseline disadvantage of spiritual reality

- Since everything we directly experience is physical:
 - Physical feels “real.”
 - Spiritual can feel “maybe yes, maybe no,” like “nothing really happened” if it wasn't physical.
 - The result: a built-in bias of perception—our default “reality” is חומריות.
-

II. 'ג' אֹת: Man's involvement must be physical

A. The Ramchal's claim: our עסק is inevitably material

- "והעסק של אדם בו... אי אפשר שיהיה אלא עסק חומרי וגופני"
 - If the things we need (food, clothing, housing) are physical, then our engagement with them is physical.

B. A proposed "escape" and why it fails

- Thought experiment: become a monk, ignore the world, meditate.
- The obstacle:
 - "ותכונותיו של האדם עצמו והרכבת חלקיו מכריחים לו העסק הזה"
 - The body's design compels needs: food, warmth, protection.

C. A logical structure (a "syllogism")

1. Everything around us is physical.
 2. Interaction with physical things is physical.
 3. Man must interact to survive.
- Therefore: man cannot avoid being involved in physicality.

D. The asymmetry: physical is forced; spiritual is optional

- A person is compelled into physical involvement ("three days without water" framing).
- Spiritual pull exists, but it's not coercive:
 - Nothing forces a person into spirituality the way hunger and survival do.

E. Expansion: needs create a "snowball" of חומריות

- Not only food and drink:
 - "זאי אפשר לו מבלי הון וקניין"
 - Money/property are required to access basics in real life (transportation, work, housing, family expenses).

F. Summary line of 'ג' אֹת: three layers that sink a person into חומריות

- "ונמצא שבין מצד גופו של אדם... בין מצד עולמו ובין מצד עסקיו... הוא טבוע בחומר ומשוקע בחשכה"
 1. גופו — the body
 2. עולמו — the physical world surrounding him
 3. עסקיו — the necessity of physical engagement

- Consequence:
 - .are required to elevate oneself "ועמל גדול והשתדלות חזקה"
-

III. Why is the Ramchal stating something "obvious"?

A. David's question: isn't this self-evident?

- The class reaction: we all know we must eat, work, handle life—why belabor it?

B. Answer: you must identify the enemy's advantages before fighting

- The "obvious" is actually strategic:
 - If a person struggles with *כוונה* in *תפילה* or meaning in *מצוות*, the Ramchal is framing why:
 - A *נשמה* inside a *גוף*, in a physical world, busy with physical burdens.

C. The "captivity" metaphor

- Is the *נשמה* "held captive"?
 - Sometimes, for a person sunk in physicality, it can resemble captivity.
 - But it's a spectrum:
 - from shackled in darkness
 - to mastery where the body is disciplined and directed.
-

IV. Transition to "אות ד': מעומק עצת חכמתו" — why emphasize "depth"?

A. Shimon's question

- If Hashem's wisdom is perfect, what does it add to say:
 - "ואולם מעומק עצת חכמתו יתברך..."

B. Defining "depth" via the *מים משל*

- Shallow water: you can see everything.
- Deep water: you can't see the bottom; what's happening isn't readily apparent.

- So “עמוק” means:
 - Not obvious at first glance; only understood beneath the surface.

C. Proof from Derech Hashem (Chelek 2)

- The Ramchal calls the distinction between Israel and the nations:
 - “מן העניינים העמוקים שבהשגחה... הוא עניין ישראל ואומות העולם”
- Why “deep”?
 - Superficially they appear the same:
 - “שמצד טבע האנושי נראה היותם שווים באמת”
 - But in Torah reality they are profoundly different:
 - “ומצד ענייני התורה הם שונים שינוי גדול... כמינים המשתנים לגמרי”

D. Linking back: physical involvement looks bad—until you see the depth

- At face value (‘אות ג’): physical immersion appears purely disadvantageous.
- The “depth” (‘אות ד’): the opposite is true.

V. The central chiddush of ‘אות ד’: From physicality itself, a person reaches perfection

A. Hashem structured reality so the challenge becomes the pathway

- “אילץ סדר הדברים באופן... שאף בהיות האדם שקוע בחומר בהכרח... יוכל מתוך החומר עצמו והעסק הגופני השיג את שלמותו”
- Key idea:
 - Not *despite* physicality, but **through** physicality.

B. The reversal: lowliness becomes greatness

- “ואדרבה השפלות תהיה הגבהתו”
- The human achievement is to invert the environment:
 - “בהיותו הופך החושך לאור”
 - “וצלמות לנגה יזריח”

C. The practical framing

- Life forces you to deal with broken pipes, floods, bills, and responsibility.

- The Ramchal's point:
 - These are not distractions from avodas Hashem only;
 - they are raw material for elevation when handled correctly.
-

VI. How does this create the greatest kavod Shamayim? (Daas Tevunos)

A. Recalled foundation from earlier learning

- The greatest זכות is to bring honor to Hashem's Name.
- That merit yields the ultimate שכר:
 - מדרגת דבקות.

B. What brings more honor: buildings or people?

- You can build a grand shul—even a Mikdash—bringing kavod.
- But the deeper kavod is:
 - transforming the “handiwork of Hashem” (a person) from low behavior to sanctity.

C. “It begins at home”: inner work cannot be outsourced

- You can educate, encourage, facilitate another person.
 - But transformation is driven by free will:
 - the highest kavod is a person elevating his own גוף.
-

VII. Maharal: Why mitzvos make us “גיבורי כח” more than angels

A. The difficulty is the point

- :are heavy and demanding “מעשה מצוות”
 - getting up, going out, overcoming inertia and desire.

B. The Jewish greatness: overcoming the יצר

- Doing mitzvos requires:
 - “כובש את יצרו”

- Therefore we are described as:
 - "גיבורי כח"
 - who "ועושין רצון קונם".

C. The advantage over angels

- "מה שלא תמצא דבר זה בעליונים כלל"
 - Angels serve without inner resistance.
 - Humans, precisely because we are embedded in חומר, can create a higher sanctification.
-

VIII. In Summary

- The Ramchal establishes three forces that immerse a person in physicality: **body, world, and involvements**, making spiritual life genuinely difficult.
- This "obvious" reality matters because it explains spiritual struggle and clarifies what we're up against.
- means the real design is only seen beneath the surface: Hashem arranged "מעומק עצת חכמתו" that **the very חומריות becomes the mechanism of עלייה**.
- The human mission—and supreme kavod Shamayim—is to **transform darkness into light**, achieving **dveikus** through overcoming resistance in real, physical life.