

Dvar Torah Outline — Ramchal (Derech Hashem), Perek 4: The Human Condition, Yetzer Hara, and the Pesach Lens of “Se’or Sheb’Isah” and “Shi’abud Malchuyot”

Abstract

This dvar Torah frames Perek 4 as an investigation into the human condition in this world through two lenses: the inner structure of the person and the external environment in which he lives. Using the Gemara’s language of “שאור שבעיסה ושיעבוד מלכויות”¹, it connects these two forces to Pesach: the internal “yeast” (yetzer hara) that puffs up the dough from within, and the external oppression of surrounding cultures and empires. The shiur then maps the path of inner revolution—through חכמה, דעת, בינה, and תפארת, גבורה, חסד, and גבורה—and ends by probing the deeper mechanism: physicality’s inherent “opacity” and “darkness,” the opposite of deveikut to Hashem.

I. Entering Perek 4: Two “tests” of man’s state in this world

A. The Ramchal’s opening framing

- “במצבו של האדם בעולם הזה יבחנו שני עניינים”
 - Two aspects determine the human experience in this world.

B. The two aspects

1. The internal construct of man

- “תכונת עצמו של האדם בחלקיו והרכבתם”
- How a person is built (soul/body composition) and its ramifications.

2. The external placement of man

- “והמקום אשר הוא מושם בו, וכל מה שמתלווה לו”
- The world, surroundings, pressures, and everything that accompanies him.

C. “This has everything to do with Pesach”

- Though this is metaphysical and developmental, it directly parallels the Pesach story:
 - Internal struggle vs. external servitude.
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II. Chazal’s terminology: The two barriers to doing Hashem’s will

A. The Gemara in Berachot and R. Alexandri’s cry

- Referenced statement:
 - We want to do 'רצון ה', but two forces block us:
 - “שאר שבעיסה ושיעבוד מלכויות”

B. Defining the two forces

1. the internal yetzer hara — “שאר שבעיסה”

- The “yeast in the dough” symbolizes something *inserted* that transforms the dough’s nature.
- The person is the “dough”; yeast makes it **חמץ**.
- The yetzer hara is described as embedded deeply in human reality (pre- and certainly post-Adam’s choice).

2. external pressure — “שיעבוד מלכויות”

- Society, culture, empire: an outer environment that makes avodat Hashem difficult.
 - People often over-focus on the “whips and quotas,” but Ramchal is highlighting an equally powerful internal dimension.
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III. Zooming in: Man as a composite where physicality dominates first

A. Man is built from two opposites

- “מורכב... שני הפכים... הנשמה והגוף”
 - Soul and body are opposites held together in one being.

B. Observation: physicality is initially primary and powerful

- “החומריות ראשוני בו ותולדותיו חזקות בו מאוד”
 - Physical needs are “unyielding”: food, clothing, shelter, warmth, etc.

C. When bodily need clashes with spiritual ideals

- Example: shabbat restrictions vs. extreme cold
 - The shiur illustrates that halachah itself recognizes the force of physical need (e.g., allowances in cases of significant suffering/illness).
 - Point: the body's demands can "push aside" other values unless properly guided.
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IV. Childhood development: why the yetzer hara feels like the "default"

A. A newborn is almost entirely physical

- "מיד אחר לידתו... כמעט כולו חומרי"
- "ואין השכל פועל בו אלא מעט"
 - A baby lacks developed higher faculties; behavior is driven by need and impulse.

B. The intellect strengthens gradually

- "וכפי השגת השכל ילך השכל הלך וחזק"
 - As the child grows, the mind develops.
 - The shiur associates this with the gradual entrance/expansion of the נשמה's presence and expression.

C. Even when the intellect matures, physicality retains control

- "ועל כל פנים לא יסור החומריות ממשול בו"
 - The הגוף establishes a חזקה (a default possession/advantage).

D. Vilna Gaon (re: Megillat Esther) as a remez for inner struggle

- The Gaon reads Achashverosh's expanding rule as symbolic of the yetzer hara's expanding dominion:
 - A "first stage" of early childhood (associated with "seven")
 - An immaturity window extending into young adulthood (associated with "twenty")
 - A danger of lifelong entrenched patterns (associated with "a hundred")
 - Core takeaway:
 - The yetzer hara gets a head start; habit and "normal" are shaped early.
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V. The “revolution”: how does a person overturn the default?

A. The required process: grow, learn, and strengthen

- “אלא שאם יגדל בחכמה”
 - Growth begins with wisdom.
- “וילמוד בה”
 - Learn it deeply.
- “ויחזק בדרכיה”
 - Strengthen oneself to live it—bring it into action.

B. Identifying this as (חב"ד) חכמה–בינה–דעת

1. **חכמה** — the principle / rule / truth
 - You must first know what reality is and what Hashem wants.
2. **בינה** — understanding nuance and application
 - The “how” of applying principles to varied situations.
 - Linked to “הבן בחכמה” (attributed in the shiur to a tradition connected with Avraham Avinu).
3. **דעת** — integration that changes behavior
 - Bridging intellect into emotion and action so knowledge becomes lived reality.
 - Illustrative example: knowing smoking is harmful vs. truly internalizing it enough to stop.
 - Without דעת, Torah knowledge can remain “in the head” without transforming the person.

C. Interdependence of the three

- No בינה without חכמה; no דעת without both.
 - The goal is transformation, not information.
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VI. From inner knowledge to disciplined character: conquering nature

A. The Ramchal’s language of self-mastery

- “הנה יתאמץ לכבוש את טבעו”
 - Strengthen to conquer one’s nature.

- “ולא ישלח רסן תאותו מידו”
 - Don’t “let go of the reins” of desire.
- “זיתעצם ללכת בהליכות השכל”
 - Walk steadily in the paths of the intellect.

B. Mapping this to חסד–גבורה–תפארת

1. the revolutionary drive outward — חסד

- Compared to Avraham’s model: initiative, movement, changing reality.
- The person must “go out” of the default patterns and make a revolution.

2. vigilance and restraint — גבורה

- Holding tight control so gains aren’t lost.
- Mussar image: the Alter of Kelm like a lion-trainer—never complacent.
- Even a small recognition of a desire (“I like X”) demands caution and discipline.

3. the straight, enduring path — תפארת

- Continuing consistently in “ההליכות השכלי,” step after step.
- Framed through the Avot model: sustaining and expressing the integrated path forward.

VII. The deeper mechanism: why physicality intrinsically blocks deveikut

A. Moving from observable reality to inner essence

- “אולם תוכיות הענינים...”
 - Not just what we see, but what’s happening underneath.

B. The nature of physicality: opacity and darkness

- “שבמציאות החומר ועצמותו נמצא האחירות והחשך בטבעו”
 - Physicality is, by nature, עכור (turbid/opaque) and חשך (dark).

C. Why this matters spiritually

- “והוא... הפכי... לקרוב אל הקל יתברך... ומזדבקים בקדושתו”
 - Physicality is the opposite of what is required for closeness to Hashem.

D. Makkat Choshech as an analogy: absence of light vs. presence of darkness

- The shiur distinguishes two levels:
 1. **Lack of light** (a deficiency)
 2. **A palpable darkness** (a “thing” with presence)
 - This becomes a model for how “darkness” can be more than mere ignorance—it can be an active obstacle.
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VIII. In Summary

- Perek 4 identifies two battlefronts of human life: **inner composition** and **external environment**.
- Chazal's categories—“**שאור שבעיסה ושיעבוד מלכויות**”—become a Pesach framework for understanding the internal yetzer hara and the external pressures of culture and history.
- The default human starting point is bodily dominance; the yetzer hara gains an early “חזקה” through habit and development.
- The path to change requires **דעת, בינה, חכמה** (knowing, understanding, integrating) and expresses itself through **תפארת, גבורה, חסד** (revolution, restraint, steady alignment with intellect).
- The underlying reason the struggle is so hard: physicality is inherently **opaque** and **dark**, opposing the clarity needed for deveikut to Hashem.