

Dvar Torah Outline — Ramchal (Derech Hashem): The Soul in the Body, Asymmetrical Warfare, and the Two-Step Avodah of *Sur Me'ra* → *Aseh Tov*

Abstract

This dvar Torah (learning session) develops the Ramchal's description of the נשמה entering the גוף as an inherently asymmetrical struggle: even when the powers are “balanced,” the battlefield is the body's “home court,” so the soul experiences exile in a foreign environment. Because the soul-body partnership is permanent (death is only temporary until תחיית המתים), the soul must invest in a lifelong process: first weakening the הגוף's darkness and then elevating the גוף to rise together with the נשמה. The session concludes by previewing the next layer of difficulty: not only is the body physical, but the entire world is physical and “dark,” constantly arguing that physicality is all that is real.

I. The Ramchal's starting claim: the soul is lofty—but becomes “exiled” inside the body

A. The key text (Ramchal, 'פרק ד', אות ב)

- “והנשמה עצמה אף על פי שבמצבה היא זכה ועליונה... הנה בהכנסה בגוף החמרי והסתבכה בו, נמצאת גרושה ודחוייה מענינה הטבעי אל ענין הפכי לו.”
 - (Even though the soul is intrinsically pure and exalted, when it enters the material body and becomes entangled in it, it is “divorced” and pushed away from its natural state into the opposite reality.)

B. Coercion and constraint: why the soul can't simply “leave”

- “וכבושה בו מכה מקריח... בלתי תוכל לצאת ממנו אלא אם כן תתאמץ בכח חזק מן הכח המקריח.”
 - (It is captive within the body by a compelling force, and cannot leave unless it exerts a stronger force than the one compelling it.)

C. Framing metaphor: “asymmetrical warfare”

- The soul has tremendous “capabilities,” but they are intentionally limited by Hashem so the contest remains meaningful.
 - Even in a state of שקול (“balance”), it does **not** mean equal conditions.
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II. The asymmetry: “home court advantage” belongs to the body

A. The problem

- If body and soul are two “components” combined, why assume the body sets the tone?
- Why isn’t the default that the body becomes spiritual?

B. The answer: the body is the מקום / environment (outer layer) of the interaction

- The body is the “arena,” the vessel in which the soul operates.
- Therefore the dynamic is not peer-to-peer but משפיע ומקבל (influencer/recipient):
 - The body, as recipient, only receives within its “worldview,” i.e., material terms.
 - The soul must translate itself into the body’s language: work *with* the body, not bypass it.

C. Practical implication

- Spiritual growth requires the soul to “relate to,” “talk to,” and “manipulate/work with” the body so the body can receive spiritual influence.
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III. Marriage as a mashal: עזר כנגדו and non-equal perspectives

A. The point of the mashal

- .can look like opposition/battle in a negative state “כנגדו”
- In a healthy state, it is two fundamentally different orientations that must be harmonized.

B. Why this mashal matters

- Reinforces the asymmetry: not two identical “forces,” but two different roles/perspectives that must learn to function together.

IV. The partnership is forever: death is only a temporary separation

A. The Ramchal's decree: body-soul is a permanent pairing

- “...ובְהִיּוֹת שְׁגֹר הָאָדוֹן בְּרוּךְ הוּא שֶׁהִרְכֵּבָה זֶה שֶׁל גּוּף הָאָדָם וְנִשְׁמָתוֹ לֹא תִפְרָד מֵעוֹלָם...”
 - (Hashem decreed that this composition of body and soul will never be separated.)

B. Clarifying question: but doesn't death separate them?

- The group raises: death separates body and soul.
- The Ramchal answers: that separation is temporary.

C. The key line: death is “לפי שעה” until resurrection

- “כִּי פְרוּד הַמֵּיתָה אֵינּוּ אֶלָּא דְבַר לְפִי שְׁעָה עַד תַּחֲיֵית הַמֵּתִים. אַחַר כֵּן צְרִיכָה לָשׁוּב לַגּוּף וּשְׁנִיָּהֵם יִתְקַיְמוּ יַחַד לְנֶצַח נְצָחִים.”
 - (Death's separation is temporary until תַּחֲיֵית הַמֵּתִים; afterwards the soul returns to the body and they endure together forever.)

D. Takeaway: you can't “wait it out”

- Since body and soul reunite eternally, spiritual work with the body is not optional or temporary.
 - The speaker emphasizes investment: like a lifelong marriage, this is not a “cab ride” arrangement.
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V. The mandated strategy: weaken the body's darkness, then elevate it with the soul

A. The obligation placed on the soul

- “הִנֵּה מְכָרָח שֶׁתִּשְׁתַּדְּל הַנִּשְׁמָה וְתִתְחַזֵּק...”
 - (Therefore the soul is compelled to exert itself and strengthen itself...)

B. Stage 1: reducing the כוח חושך החומריות

- “וְתִהְיֶה הוֹלָכָת וּמַחְלָשָׁת אֶת כַּח הַשָּׁר הַחֲמֻרִיּוֹת...”
 - (...progressively weakening the power of the darkness of materiality...)

C. Stage 2: the body rises *with* the soul

- “עד שישאר הגוף בלתי חשוך... ואז יוכל להתעלות הוא עמה ולאור באור עליון...”
 - (Until the body is no longer dark; then it can elevate with her and shine with supernal light.)

D. Noted grammatical/idea point: soul vs. body pronouns

- The speaker tracks Hebrew gender usage:
 - .with masculine גוף; presented with feminine language נשמה
 - A question is raised: if the soul is the *משפיע*, why isn't it “masculine” in the metaphor?
 - Answer: Ramchal doesn't address it here; requires a separate discussion.
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VI. תחיית המתים: what “body” returns?

A. Question raised

- What does “גוף” mean at resurrection—same body as we recognize?

B. Answer given (brief)

- Initially recognizable but “perfected” (no defects).
 - Then it rapidly becomes something beyond our current understanding, transcending familiar physicality (as previously discussed in earlier sessions).
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VII. The world's darkness: האדם starts far from דבקות

A. Summary of the מצב האדם in this world

- “בעולם הזה הוא במצב אחד שהחמר חזק בו... ובהיות החמר עכור וחשוך, נמצא האדם בחשך גדול.”
 - (In this world materiality is strong; since matter is opaque and dark, a person is found in great darkness.)

B. The spiritual distance this creates

- “ורחוק מאד ממה שראוי לו שיהיה להיות נדבק בו יתברך.”
 - (Very far from what is fitting—clinging to Hashem.)

C. Practical focus: where a person must put effort

- “ואמנם, בזה צריך שישים השתדלותו...”
 - Why “השתדלות” and not “do it”?
 - Answer: complete success is not fully in human control; האדם initiates effort and Hashem assists (parallel to Mesillat Yesharim’s treatment of קדושה).
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VIII. The two-step ladder of growth: סור מרע ועשה טוב

A. The Ramchal’s two movements restated

- Strengthen the soul against חומר:
 - “לחזק את נשמתו נגד כח חמרו”
- Then improve/elevate one’s מצב:
 - “ולהיטיב את מצבו, להעלות עצמו מעליו אל עליו...”

B. Ordering principle: first remove the negative, then build the positive

- Shlomo HaMelech’s framing: סור מרע ועשה טוב.
- חז”ל illustration:
 - “הטובל ושרץ בידו” (One who immerses while holding a שרץ does not become purified.)
 - (You can’t purify while still holding the source of impurity.)

C. Modern mashal: “flowers after abuse” doesn’t fix the relationship

- Good deeds (“flowers”) don’t repair spiritual damage while ongoing harm (“abuse”) continues.
- First step is to stop the destructive behavior—“stop the bleeding”—then build.

D. Clarifying a question: can someone still connect to Hashem while in a low state?

- Yes, connection and hope always exist.
 - But עבירות diminish the *quality* of connection.
 - For real שינוי, the first move is stopping the destructive action.
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IX. “עד השיעור הראוי לו” — what does “the fitting level” mean if growth is endless?

A. The problem

- If **עולם הבא** involves endless ascent, what does “the appropriate measure” mean?

B. The answer: closing the initial gap

- The soul and body begin with a “massive gap.”
 - “Fitting level” means: raise the body to an aligned state relative to the soul so they can grow together.
 - After alignment, further growth continues indefinitely.
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X. Preview of **אות ג**: the environment itself is **חומרי** **וחשך**

A. Not only the body is physical—the world is too

- “**המקום אשר הוא בתוכו גם הוא חומרי וחשך.**”
 - (The place—the world around him—is also physical and dark.)
- “**וכל הנמצאים שבו חומריים.**”
 - (Everything within it is physical.)

B. The argument the world constantly “makes”

- Even before discussing **פרנסה**, **עבודה**, and necessities:
 - Simply seeing a tangible world all day pressures a person to conclude:
 - “Physicality is real; spirituality is hidden.”

C. Next step (to be continued)

- A later obstacle will be human involvement in physical needs (housing, food, livelihood).
 - For now, the first environmental challenge is perception: the world itself “preaches” physicality nonstop.
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XI. In Summary

- The נשמה's descent into the גוף is a forced entanglement where the soul is "pushed" into an opposite environment.
- The struggle is asymmetrical: the body has "home court advantage" as the מקום and מקבל.
- Since soul and body reunite forever after תחיית המתים, spiritual work with the body is an eternal investment.
- The avodah proceeds in order: weaken material darkness (סור מרע) and only then elevate and build (עשה טוב).
- Beyond the body, the entire physical world is an added layer of "darkness," constantly obscuring spirituality and reinforcing the challenge.