

BS"D

United Noahide Academies® - A project of Ask Noah International.

Class #2: Foundations of Torah, Principals of Faith, and Moshiach (the Messiah)

Lesson 8: The Ultimate Good of the Era of the Redemption

Material for Lesson #8: Excerpt from the book

"I Await His Coming Every Day: Analytical Studies by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson of the Rambam's Rulings on Mashiach and the Ultimate Redemption"

Adapted & Translated by Rabbi Eliyahu Touger. Edited by Uri Kaploun

Published and copyright by Sichos In English, with full permission granted to Ask Noah International.

Lesson 8 material taken from:

https://www.sie.org/templates/sie/article_cdo/aid/2328350/jewish/The-Ultimate-Good-Of-The-Era-Of-The-Redemption.htm

Note: This lesson contains some emendations to the source text, so our UNA students should study the email text for the purpose of the course.

Aspiring to a Knowledge of G-d

Two Windows to the Future:

Concluding his description of the Era of the Redemption in Hilchos Melachim, the Rambam writes:[148]

In that Era there will be neither famine nor war, neither envy nor competition, for good things will flow in abundance and all the delights will be as freely available as dust. The occupation of the entire world will be solely to know G-d.

This passage appears to echo a principle stated by the Rambam in Hilchos Teshuvah [Laws of Repentance]:[149]

"The Torah has promised us that if we observe its [commandments] with joy... [G-d] will remove all the obstacles that prevent us from such observance, such as illness, war, hunger, and the like. Similarly, He will grant us all [types of] good things to reinforce our observance of the Torah... and [thus to have the opportunity to] grow wise through scholarship and to perform mitzvos."

The Rambam's intent in this passage of Hilchos Teshuvah is to explain the divine scales of reward and punishment. When a person observes the Torah and its mitzvos, G-d brings about circumstances that will provide him with material benefits so that he, in turn, will be able to expand and upgrade his observance. In the Era of the Redemption, therefore, when we will observe the Torah and its mitzvos in a consummate manner, we will be granted divine blessings in abundance.

Differences Between the Above Two Sources:

Although in conception the two passages cited above are complementary, close analysis discovers several differences between the wording used in each:

When the Rambam describes in Hilchos Teshuvah how G-d will remove various impediments to our observance of the Torah, illness is listed as the first - and thus, the primary - hindrance, while in Hilchos Melachim it is not mentioned.

In Hilchos Melachim the Rambam writes that the world will be free of "envy and competition," while in Hilchos Teshuvah this subject is absent.

In Hilchos Melachim the Rambam mentions "delights," which he does not do in Hilchos Teshuvah.

In this connection, it is noteworthy that the use of a poetic phrase in Hilchos Melachim ("all the delights will be as freely available as dust") is not at all in character for the Rambam in the straightforward Torah-law context of Mishneh Torah.

Halachah [Torah Law] - The Medium by which the World is Refined:

The above difficulties can be resolved by focusing on the Rambam's intent in composing the Mishneh Torah, and also on the fact that he chose to conclude the text with Hilchos Melachim, and in particular, with the coming of the Mashiach.

As he writes in his Introduction, the Rambam conceived of the Mishneh Torah as a work of Halachah, Torah law. What is the intent of Halachah? To refine the world at large so that it will exist in harmony with G-d's will. There have been times during which this intent has been put into practice by Jewish kings. In the most complete sense, it will be realized in the Era of the Redemption, when the observance of all the mitzvos associated with the Beis HaMikdash [the Holy Temple in Jerusalem] will be restored ...[150] Similarly, the effect of the mitzvos in the world at large will be complete. There will be no pressures or disturbances hindering the observance of the Torah. Furthermore, "Knowledge, wisdom, and truth will be abundant,"[151] and an all-pervading atmosphere of perfection will encompass every element of existence.

This is the state described at the conclusion of Hilchos Melachim.[152] In contrast, the passage from Hilchos Teshuvah originally cited describes a state in which the Jewish people's observance and the effects of this observance on the world at large have not attained the perfection of the Era of the Redemption.

Perfect Observance will bring Perfect Health:

On this basis, we can begin to resolve the difficulties raised above. Firstly, there is no need to state that there will be no illness in the Era of the Redemption; this is self-evident.

In Hilchos De'os [Laws of Personality Refinement],[153] where the Rambam outlines a course of conduct designed to bring a person physical health, he promises:[154] "I guarantee that anyone who conducts himself in the ways which I have prescribed will never fall ill." In the Era of the Redemption, as part of the complete observance of the Torah and its mitzvos, people will follow these rules of health, so that illness will be unknown.

Since Hilchos Teshuvah, in contrast, describes a less perfect state, there is the possibility that a person will be motivated by his desires and fail to conduct himself according to the rules of health. Concerning such a state, therefore, it needs to be stated that G-d will "remove...illness" in order to enable a man to fully observe the Torah.

Erasing Envy:

In Hilchos Melachim,[155] the Rambam explains that there is a relationship of cause and effect between the removal of the obstacles and the generous flow of divine beneficence: "There will be neither famine (lit., 'hunger') nor war, neither envy nor competition, for good things will flow in abundance."

For this relationship to be effective, not only must a man receive divine blessings, but he must also be conscious of them. Otherwise, he may fall prey to "envy and competition." Furthermore, his envy might cause him to feel - albeit in an allegorical sense - "hunger", a craving desire for his colleague's possessions which might ultimately lead to conflict.

For this reason, the Rambam emphasizes that in the Era of the Redemption, "good things will flow in abundance and all the delights will be...freely available." The "good things" and the "delights" will be consciously appreciated by their recipients - for otherwise, these terms would be inappropriate. And because of the manifold nature of these blessings, "there will be neither famine nor war, neither envy nor competition."

Possessing Delights Without Being Possessed by Them:

Being involved in material delights in the Era of the Redemption is, however, somewhat problematic. At a time when humanity and the world at large will be refined and elevated to a state of perfection, it is difficult to conceive that a man would choose to invest his time in physical delights, matters that the Rambam describes[156] as "meaningless nonsense."

Rambam resolves this difficulty by stating that the delights will be "as freely available as dust." Although they will be accessible to man - and he will partake of them for the sake of his health and physical welfare - he will consider them like "dust", i.e., as being utterly worthless. Though we will live in an era of material prosperity, our attention will not be focused on it. Rather, "the occupation of the entire world will be solely to know G-d."

Imperfection in the Present Era:

In Hilchos Teshuvah, in contrast, the Rambam does not mention "delights". Since Hilchos Teshuvah describes a state in which man and the world at large are still in need of refinement, an individual may not have cultivated himself to the degree that he considers superfluous luxuries to be "as dust." On the contrary, there is the possibility that were he granted them, his involvement in physical pleasures would even hamper his observance of the Torah and its mitzvos. Therefore, although the Rambam emphasizes that a person will receive abundant divine blessings as a reward for past observance and as an encouragement for observance in the future, these blessings will not necessarily include "delights".

Moreover, since the delights will not be possessed by everyone, the possibility remains for "envy and competition," which could lead in turn to "famine and war." Nevertheless, the Rambam assures us, although these undesirable traits will exist in the world at large, G-d will prevent them from affecting those individuals who devote themselves to the observance of the Torah.

Perfection in the Study of the Torah:

As a result of the rich multitude of divine blessings in the Era of the Redemption, "the occupation of the entire world[158] will be solely to know G-d." This implies two concepts:

Because "good things will flow in abundance and all the delights will be...freely available," a man will not have to work for his livelihood. In the present era, in contrast, as the Rambam writes in Hilchos Talmud Torah:[159]

Anyone who decides that he should engage in the study of Torah without working and be supported by charity desecrates the Name of G-d.... It is most meritorious for a person to derive his livelihood from his own labor.

...the nature of our environment is such that we are all required to devote a certain amount of time to earning a livelihood. In the Era of the Redemption, in contrast, ... our energies will be directed to "the knowledge of G-d."

In that Era we will still observe the mitzvos; indeed, it is then that our observance will attain perfection, as mentioned above. ... we will be able to learn how to observe the mitzvos perfectly in a relatively short time. Thereafter, our attention will be devoted to the deeper dimensions of Torah study.

An Outpouring of Divine Knowledge:

As the Rambam continues:

...as it is written,[165] "For the world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the ocean bed."

By quoting this prooftext,[166] the Rambam highlights the manner in which the knowledge of G-d will permeate the world and the thought processes of every individual person. To understand the simile: The vast variety of creatures that live on the dry land are readily discernible as separate entities. A vast multitude of creatures likewise inhabit the ocean. Nevertheless, when looking at the ocean, what we see is the ocean as a whole and not the particular entities which it contains. Similarly, although in the Era of the Redemption the world will continue to exist, individual creatures will lose consciousness of their separate identity and will be suffused with the knowledge of G-d.

However, this state of being will not negate the world's existence. On the contrary, it will affirm the true existence of the world, for[168] "All the beings of the heavens, the earth, and whatever is between them came into existence solely from the truth of His Being."

Aspiring to a Knowledge of G-d:

In Tanya[169] it is explained that the future revelations of the Era of the Redemption are dependent on our divine service in the present time of exile. Since reward and punishment are structured according to the principle of "measure for measure," our efforts to bring about the future revelation of a universal knowledge of G-d should resemble, albeit in microcosm, the state to be attained in that Era. Thus, to the fullest extent possible at present, our energies must be directed towards gaining a knowledge of G-d. And this endeavor will hasten the advent of the Era when that knowledge will permeate the entire world. May this goal be realized in the immediate future.

Footnotes:

148. Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings (Hilchos Melachim) 12:5.

149. Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance (Hilchos Teshuvah) 9:1.

150. Op. cit., 9:2. [See the above essay on "The Function of Mashiach," where this theme is developed.]

151. Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance (Hilchos Teshuvah), loc. cit.; see also Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings (Hilchos Melachim) 12:4.

152. Considering the above, we can understand why the Rambam chose to conclude the Mishneh Torah with a description of the Era of the Redemption rather than with a description of the World to Come.

The Rambam considers the World to Come as the ultimate good and the most complete reward man will receive (see Hilchos Teshuvah 8:1-2, 9:2). Nevertheless, he conceives of the World to Come as the world of the souls, a spiritual realm where it will be impossible to observe the mitzvos (in contrast to the Ramban, whose view [of eternal life in the physical world for the righteous] is accepted in the teachings of Chassidus). Therefore, as a conclusion to the Mishneh Torah, which is a text of Halachah [Torah Law], he chooses to describe the Era of the Redemption, the age when the observance of Torah law and its effects in the world at large will reach their ultimate perfection.

153. Ch. 4.

154. Loc. cit., 4: 20.

155. This contrasts to Rambam, Laws of Repentance (Hilchos Teshuvah), where this relationship of cause and effect is not stressed.

156. Rambam, Laws of Repentance (Hilchos Teshuvah) 8:6.

158. From the expression "the entire world," and particularly from the contrast to the next clause, which specifies "the Jews," it appears that this phrase includes Gentiles as well. Since, as the Rambam quotes in Laws of Kings 11:4, we will ultimately witness the fulfillment of the prophecy (Zephaniah 3:9), that "I will make the peoples pure of speech so that they will all call upon the Name of G-d," [also] non-Jews will be devoted solely to seeking "the knowledge of G-d."

159. 3:10-11.

165. Isaiah (Yeshayahu) 11:9.

166. More particularly, the concept to be explained depends on the final words of the verse, "as the waters cover...." Significantly, when quoting this verse in Laws of Repentance (Hilchos Teshuvah) 9:2, the Rambam omits the conclusion of the verse.

168. Rambam, Laws of the Foundations of the Torah (Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah) 1:1.

169. Ch. 37.

*****Quiz for Lesson 8*****

Class #2: Foundations of Torah, Principals of Faith, and Moshiach (the Messiah).

Copyright 20'07, Ask Noah International Inc.

1. What will every person be primarily occupied with in the Era of the Redemption?
2. For what purpose will G-d grant mankind so many blessings in the Era of the Redemption?
3. What is accomplished when people observe the Torah laws that apply to them?
4. When will the Torah laws be observed in their most complete sense?
5. In what part of the writings of Rambam (Maimonides) does he outline a course of conduct designed to bring a person physical health?
6. How will people feel about the "good things" and the "delights" that will be readily available for everyone in the Era of the Redemption?
7. Why is "the waters [which] cover the ocean bed" a good analogy for the knowledge of G-d that will be in the world the Era of the Redemption?
8. Upon what do the future revelations of the Era of the Redemption depend?
9. What subject does the Rambam discuss at the very end of his entire 14 volumes of Mishneh Torah?
10. Whose view of the ultimate World to Come does Chassidus accept:
Rambam's (that it will be a purely spiritual level), or Ramban's (that it will be in the physical world)?