

The interrelation of Mystical cosmology and ethical self-development

Mysticism and cosmology are usually thought of as different from ethical self-development (self-growth, character improvement) etc but in Jewish mysticism they are the same.

The Bible begins with the story of creation, which is all cosmological-mystical and then the garden of Eden account, which is about utilizing Free Will to choose Good over evil, in other word sit is about ethics. The basic idea is that cosmogony and ethics are interrelated. (And this also forms the basis of Rambam and Ramchal.)

Moral self-development. Luzzato ('Ramchal') ties it to cosmogony, world to come etc, but it is also self-interest because it is the path to greatest ability to partake of the joy of God's splendour etc. Genesis sets up a cosmogony and free will moral responsibility etc but it is all this-worldly. That's why Ramchal and others speak more openly of the world to come, this world as a corridor to the next world.

We are created in God's image and our essence is the breath of God (God's spirit) as told in Genesis. So we become "Whole" only when we unite with God.....The level of after-life is determined via cause-effect rather than 'reward/punishment', and the purpose is Relationship with the Essence, which is its own reward: this world was created to be a vehicle for us to overcome challenges in order to achieve higher levels of internal development; the extent of effort and overcoming of obstacles correlates in the after-life to the amount of connection to God, which is the greatest pleasure. Everything in this world is in order to increase relationship with God, and it is the relationship which is its own reward.

Mesillat Yesharim (Ramchal): "For all the affairs of the world, whether for the good or for the bad, are trials to a man. To the extent that he has subdued his evil inclination and his desires, and withdrawn from those factors which draw him further from the good, and exerted himself to become united with it, to that extent will he attain it and rejoice in it. [Not reward and punishment but cause-effect of appropriate preparation.]

"When you look further into the matter, you will see that only union with God constitutes true perfection, as King David [the illustrious Mystic] said (Psalms 73:28), "But as for me, the nearness of God is my good," and (Psalms 27:4), "I asked one thing from God; that will I seek - to dwell in God's house all the days of my life..." How does one achieve this? Via compassion and kindness to others, overcoming one's nature....

Explanation: The wise people of all cultures have recognized that pleasures of this world, power, wealth, fame, sex, even knowledge, do not lead themselves to the goal that is sought – happiness or contentment and usually not even to sustained pleasure. Except perhaps for very very few, one in a million. For all the rest, what leads to the desired result is some human relationships, connection to community, and to God. Inner growth of self, compassion and loving-kindness for others.

But maybe we are here to suffer? To serve Earthly masters? Maybe we do not deserve happiness and shouldn't even seek it? No, he says. We were created to attain joy and pleasure, but it is the pleasure found in union with God, which by definition is 'the world to come'. But the way to attain that is in this world, and only via this world, only via meeting life's challenges.

So the bottom line is that we want joy and we are attracted by our instincts and by societal pressures instead to pleasures, and to the wrong joy/pleasures and sources of joy. We do indeed deserve joy, were created in fact to attain joy, but it is to be found by overcoming the instincts, not to be led by them, and the joy is in the world to come not in this one. And it is the joy of being connected to one's essence, source, the soul, the Creator of all.

Approaches to the right life: (not mutually-exclusive), and books which outline that Path

- Ethical Attitude: live life normally, have a job, a family, hobbies, but in everything (all the normal activities), ethical, model citizen etc. (ie nothing inner, and life is as usual) Book: Chofetz Chayim.
- Proactively-ethical, always looking about to see what needs to be done for others.

- Idealistic (ethical actions): very involved in volunteer work after work and on weekends, donate blood, lots of charity etc; choose a career that enables greatest contribution; more extreme: forego normality to go to live in some poor area and work hard. (nothing inner, life is visibly unusual): Various books promote this as spiritual path.
- Religious actions (piety)(devotional): life of study and prayer; Monastic or asceticism; extreme focus on all the commandments (ie nothing inner, life is visibly religious): Book: Shulchan Aruch
- Spiritual: inner spiritual development, defeat ego to attain humility towards God, develop a love and awe and even some fear of God; mystical experiences of union with God etc. (all inner, outer life may seem the usual from the outside, but maybe no social action like volunteering etc; holy shoe-maker): (Book: Mesillas Yesarim).
- Psychological: inner psychological development, defeat ego-based behavior, become aware of psychological flaws and try to correct them, see good traits in others and internalize them (also: ethical development in behavior towards other people, society).(inner, can be an atheist; outer life seems usual): Psychological version of Buddhist teachings, Mars/Venus etc.
- Spiritual/Psychological: religious development via psychological growth: Book: ??
- State of mind: Be always serious/in awe of God, be always joyful/love of God, be always doing/mitzvot

Place this and other books into the above context: R Tatz, “Living Inspired”: Recognizing the metaphysical patterns and motifs underlying historical events, personal life challenges.

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Comparing the Sulam and Ramchal (Compare also to others, Rambam, and eg “Living Inspired”)

Sulam:	Ramchal	Rambam.... “Living Inspired”
we were created to receive joy,	Same. The purpose is the oneg of connection to God, but is in next world. But in this world if we have dvekus we also have some...	
to obtain it we need to create the appropriate relationship with God,	Same.	
this is achieved via becoming like God,	Rambam lists this as a mitzvah. Ramchal....	
the way to do this is by turning ‘ratzon lekabel’ into ‘ratzon lekabel al menat lehashpiyah’.	Keeping mitzvos leads to dvekus, developing self...	
This-worldly pleasures are....	Ok, but for appropriate use; world is full of impediments, meant to be overcome, the joy at end is proportional to the struggle with theis-worldly impediments	
The role of the mitzvot....		