The Purpose of (my) Life

# In General

### A. To Get Pleasure - Self-Centered

 **Ramchal, Mesilat Yesharim, Chapter 1** – Everything in the world is a test for man.

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| יסוד החסידות ושרש העבודה התמימה הוא שיתברר ויתאמת אצל האדם מה חובתו בעולמו ולמה צריך שישים מבטו ומגמתו בכל אשר הוא עמל כל ימי חייו.והנה מה שהורונו חכמינו זכרונם לברכה הוא, שהאדם לא נברא אלא להתענג על ה' ולהנות מזיו שכינתו שזהו התענוג האמיתי והעידון הגדול מכל העידונים שיכולים להמצא. ומקום העידון הזה באמת הוא העולם הבא, כי הוא הנברא בהכנה המצטרכת לדבר הזה.אך הדרך כדי להגיע אל מחוז חפצנו זה, הוא זה העולם. והוא מה שאמרו זכרונם לברכה ([אבות ד](https://www.sefaria.org.il/Pirkei_Avot.4)): העולם הזה דומה לפרוזדור בפני העולם הבא.והאמצעים המגיעים את האדם לתכלית הזה, הם המצוות אשר צונו עליהן האל יתברך שמו. ומקום המצוות הוא רק העולם הזה. על כן הושם האדם בזה העולם בתחלה כדי שעל יעשיית די האמצעים האלה המזדמנים לו כאן יוכל להגיע אל המקום אשר הוכן לו, שהוא העולם הבא, לרוות שם בטוב אשר קנה לו על ידי אמצעים אלה. והוא מה שאמרו, זכרונם לברכה ([עירובין כב א](https://www.sefaria.org.il/Eruvin.22a)): היום לעשותם ומחר לקבל שכרם.אך הדרך כדי להגיע אל מחוז חפצנו זה, הוא זה העולם. והוא מה שאמרו זכרונם לברכה ([אבות ד](https://www.sefaria.org.il/Pirkei_Avot.4)): העולם הזה דומה לפרוזדור בפני העולם הבא.וכשתסתכל בדבר תראה כי השלמות האמיתי הוא רק הדביקות בו יתברך, והוא מה שהיה דוד המלך אומר ([תהלים עג](https://www.sefaria.org.il/Psalms.73)): ואני קרבת אלקים לי טוב. ואומר (שם כז): אחת שאלתי מאת ה' אותה אבקש שבתי בבית ה' כל ימי חיי וגו', כי רק זה הוא הטוב. וכל זולת זה שיחשבוהו בני האדם לטוב, אינו אלא הבל ושוא נתעה.אמנם לכשיזכה האדם לטובה הזאת, ראוי שיעמול ראשונה וישתדל ביגיעו לקנותה, והיינו שישתדל לידבק בו יתברך בכח מעשים שתולדתם זה הענין והם הם המצות.והנה שמו הקדוש ברוך הוא לאדם במקום שרבים בו המרחיקים אותו ממנו יתברך, והם הם התאוות החמריות אשר אם ימשך אחריהן הנה הוא מתרחק והולך מן הטוב האמיתי, ונמצא שהוא מושם באמת בתוך המלחמה החזקה, כי כל עניני העולם בין לטוב בין (למוטב) לרע הנה הם נסיונות לאדם, העוני מצד אחד והעושר מצד אחד כענין שאמר שלמה (משלי ל ט): "פן אשבע וכחשתי ואמרתי מי ה', ופן אורש וגנבתי וגו'". השלוה מצד אחד והיסורין מצד אחד, עד שנמצאת המלחמה אליו פנים ואחור. ואם יהיה לבן חיל וינצח המלחמה מכל הצדדין, הוא יהיה האדם השלם אשר יזכה לידבק בבוראו ויצא מן הפרוזדור הזה ויכנס בטרקלין לאור באור החיים. | The foundation of piety and the root of perfect service [of G-d] is for a man to clarify and come to realize as truth what is his obligation in his world and to what he needs to direct his gaze and his aspiration in all that he toils all the days of his life.Behold, what our sages, of blessed memory, have taught us is that man was created solely to delight in G-d and to derive pleasure in the radiance of the Shechina (divine presence). For this is the true delight and the greatest pleasure that can possibly exist. The place of this pleasure is, in truth, in Olam Haba (the World to Come). For it was created expressly for this purpose. But the path to arrive at the "desired haven" ([Ps. 107:30](https://www.sefaria.org.il/Psalms.107.30)) of ours is this world. This is what our sages of blessed memory said: "this world is like a corridor before the World to Come" ([Avot 4:16](https://www.sefaria.org.il/Pirkei_Avot.4.16)). The means that lead a person to this goal are the commandments which the blessed G-d commanded to us. The place of the performance of these commandments is only in this world. Therefore, man was first placed in this world so that through these means prepared for him here, he will be able to reach the place prepared for him, namely, the World to Come, there to be sated with the good which he acquired through these means. This is what our sages of blessed memory said "today to do them, and tomorrow to receive their reward" ([Eruvin 22:1](https://www.sefaria.org.il/Eruvin.22a.1)). When you look further into the matter, you will see that true perfection lies only in clinging to G-d. This is what King David said *"But as for me, closeness to G-d is my good"* ([Ps. 73:28](https://www.sefaria.org.il/Psalms.73.28)) and, *"one thing I asked from G-d; that I seek, that I may dwell in G-d's house all the days of my life, to gaze on the pleasantness of G-d..."* ([Ps. 27:4](https://www.sefaria.org.il/Psalms.27.4)). For only this is the good, while anything besides this that people consider good is really emptiness and mistaken worthlessness. For a person to attain this good, it is proper that he first exert himself strenuously to acquire it, namely, to exert himself to cling to the blessed G-d through the power of deeds whose consequence is this end. These deeds are the commandments. The Holy One, Blessed be He, has placed man in a place where there are many factors that distance him from God, and these factors are the material temptations that cause man to be distanced from the true good if he is drawn after them. Thus, man is in the center of a fierce struggle, for all the matters of this world, whether good or bad, are tests for man – poverty on the one hand and wealth on the other hand, as Solomon said (Proverbs 30:9), “Lest I be sated and deny and say, ‘Who is God?’ and lest I became impoverished and steal. . .” or tranquility on the one hand and suffering on the other – such that man is embattled from every side. If a person is valiant and is victorious in the war on all sides, he will become the perfect person who is privileged to cleave to his Creator and leave the vestibule to enter the palace and bask in the light of life. |

**Mishnah, Makkot 3:16** – God gave the Jewish people many mitzvot to increase their merits.

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| Rabbi Chanania ben Akashya taught: The Holy One, Blessed be He, wanted to give merit to Israel. Therefore, He increased their Torah and mitzvot, as the verse states (Yeshayah/Isaiah 42:21), “God desired for the sake of His righteousness; He enlarged the Torah and expanded it.” | רבי חנניא בן עקשיא אומר, רצה הקדוש ברוך הוא לזכות את ישראל, לפיכך הרבה להם תורה ומצות, שנאמר (ישעיה מב, כא) יי חפץ למען צדקו יגדיל תורה ויאדיר |

**Pirkei Avot 2:1 – Attaching equal importance to every mitzvah.**

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| Be as careful to observe a “minor” mitzvah as in a “major” one, for you do not know the reward of any of the mitzvot. | **והוי זהיר במצוה קלה כבחמורה, שאין אתה יודע מתן שכרן של מצות.** |

**Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, Da'at Tevunot, No. 14**

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| The first principle… is that God desired that man should perfect himself and all that was created for him, and this itself will be his merit and his reward…His reward – that he will indeed be perfected, and will take pleasure in goodness for eternity.  | היסוד הראשון... הוא שרצה הרצון העליון שיהיה האדם משלים את עצמו ואת כל הנברא בשבילו, וזה עצמו יהיה זכותו ושכרו... שכרו - שהרי סוף סוף הוא יהיה המושלם, ויהיה מתענג בטובה לנצח נצחים. |

**Vilna Gaon, Even Shleimah 2** – What is life for, if not for character refinement?

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| The prime purpose of man’s life is to constantly strive to break his bad traits. Otherwise, what is life for? | עיקר חיות האדם היא להתחזק תמיד בשבירת המדות, ואם לא – למה לו חיים? |

### B. To Improve the World

**Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner, Nefesh HaChaim, Gate I, Chapter 3** – By making correct choices and performing good deeds, man brings tremendous spiritual benefit to the universe.

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| In this manner, as it were, God created man and gave him power over myriads upon myriads of forces and countless worlds. He placed them in the hands of man so that man could control and affect them with every detail of his actions, deeds, words, and thoughts and with all manner of conduct, for good or for bad, Heaven forbid. For with his positive actions, words, and thoughts, man preserves and gives strength to many spiritual forces and worlds and adds sanctity and light to them, as the verse states (Isaiah 51:16), “I placed My words in your mouth . . . to plant the heavens and found the earth.” Similarly, our Sages state (Berachos 54a): “Do not read [the reference to Torah Sages as] ‘your sons’ but rather ‘your builders.’” For it is they who arrange the upper worlds, as a builder arranges his building, and they endow them with strength. The converse is also true, Heaven forbid, that a man’s improper deeds, words, or thoughts destroy many forces and sacred spiritual worlds beyond count or measure. As the verse states (ibid. 49:17) “Your demolishers and your destroyers…” Alternatively, man’s improper deeds can darken or diminish their light and sanctity, Heaven forbid…This is the meaning of the verse “God created man in His image, in the image of Elokim” and “for in the image of Elokim He made man.” Just as God is Elokim, i.e., the master of all powers that exist in all the worlds, and He arranges them and controls them at every moment in accordance with His will; so too He appointed man as the one who opens and closes myriads of forces and worlds based on all the details of his conduct in all of his matters, literally at every time and moment, in accordance with the spiritual root of his actions, words, and thoughts, as if he were also the master of their powers, as it were. | כן בדמיון זה כביכול ברא הוא יתברך את האדם והשליטו על רבי רבוון כחות ועולמות אין מספר, ומסרם בידו שיהא הוא המדבר והמנהיג אותם עפ"י כל פרטי תנועות מעשיו ודבוריו ומחשבותיו וכל סדרי הנהגותיו הן לטוב או להיפך ח"ו, כי במעשיו ודבוריו ומחשבותיו הטובים הוא מקיים ונותן כח בכמה כחות ועולמות עליונים הקדושים, ומוסיף בהם קדושה ואור כמ"ש (ישעיה נא, טז): "וָאָשִׂם דְּבָרַי בְּפִיךָ גו' לִנְטֹעַ שָׁמַיִם וְלִיסֹד אָרֶץ". וכמאמרם ז"ל (ברכות סד, א) "אל תקרא בניך אלא בוניך". כי המה המסדרים עולמות העליונים כבונה המסדר בנינו ונותנים בהם רב כח, ובהיפוך ח"ו ע"י מעשיו או דבוריו ומחשבותיו אשר לא טובים, הוא מהרס ר"ל כמה כחות ועולמות עליונים הקדושים לאין ערך ושיעור. כמו שכתוב (שם מט, יז) "מהרסיך ומחריביך וגו'". או מחשיך או מקטין אורם וקדושתם ח"ו...  זהו "ויברא אלקים את האדם בצלמו בצלם אלקים וגו'". "כי בצלם אלקים עשה וגו'". שכמו שהוא ית' שמו הוא האלקים בעל הכחות הנמצאים בכל העולמות כולם, ומסדרם ומנהיגם כל רגע כרצונו, כן השליט רצונו יתברך את האדם שיהא הוא הפותח והסוגר של כמה אלפי רבואות כחות ועולמות על פי כל פרטי סדרי הנהגותיו בכל עניניו בכל עת ורגע ממש כפי שרשו העליון של מעשיו ודבוריו ומחשבותיו, כאילו הוא גם כן הבעל כח שלהם כביכול. |

### C. To Achieve Truth

**Rambam, Hilchot Teshuva 10**

A person should not say: "I will fulfill the mitzvot of the Torah and occupy myself in its wisdom in order to receive all the blessings which are contained within it or in order to merit the life of the world to come." "[Similarly,] I will separate myself from all the sins which the Torah warned against so that I will be saved from all the curses contained in the Torah or so that [my soul] will not be cut off from the life of the world to come." It is not fitting to serve God in this manner. A person whose service is motivated by these factors is considered one who serves out of fear. He is not on the level of the prophets or of the wise. The only ones who serve God in this manner are common people, women, and minors. They are trained to serve God out of fear until their knowledge increases and they serve out of love. One who serves [God] out of love occupies himself in the Torah and the mitzvot and walks in the paths of wisdom for no ulterior motive: not because of fear that evil will occur, nor in order to acquire benefit. Rather, he does what is true because it is true, and ultimately, good will come because of it. This is a very high level which is not merited by every wise man. It is the level of our Patriarch, Abraham, whom God described as, "he who loved Me," for his service was only motivated by love. God commanded us [to seek] this rung [of service] as conveyed by Moses as [[Deuteronomy 6:5](https://www.chabad.org/9970#v5)] states: "Love God, your Lord.'' When a man will love God in the proper manner, he will immediately perform all of the mitzvot motivated by love.

# II. Personal Purpose

**ספר חובות הלבבות שער ד - שער הביטחון פרק ג**



**משלי פרק טז פסוק ד**

כֹּ֤ל פָּעַ֣ל יְ֭קֹוָק לַֽמַּעֲנֵ֑הוּ וְגַם־רָ֝שָׁ֗ע לְי֣וֹם רָעָֽה:

**פירוש הגר"א:** וסוד העניין של ארבעת הפסוקים (א-ד) הוא: דרך ועצה טובה לאדם, איך להתנהג ולילך ברצונו יתברך. כי לכל אדם ואדם יש לו דרך בפני עצמו לילך בו, כי אין דעתם דומה זה לזה ואין פרצופיהם דומים זה לזה, ואין טבע שני בני אדם שווה.

וכשהיו נביאים, היו הולכים אצל הנביאים ([בראשית כה כב](https://he.wikisource.org/wiki/%D7%91%D7%A8%D7%90%D7%A9%D7%99%D7%AA_%D7%9B%D7%94_%D7%9B%D7%91)): "לדרוש את ה'", והיה הנביא אומר, על-פי משפט הנבואה, דרכו אשר יילך בה, לפי שורש נשמתו ולפי טבע גופו. וזהו: ([משלי טז א](https://he.wikisource.org/wiki/%D7%9E%D7%A9%D7%9C%D7%99_%D7%98%D7%96_%D7%90)): "לאדם מערכי לב" - שלו לא היה רק **לערוך לבבו** לדרוש את ה' בכל לבבו, "ומה'" היה "מענה לשון", על ידי הנביא, איך יתנהג.

ומשבטלה הנבואה, יש רוח הקודש בישראל. ואיש - רוחו הוא יודיענו איך להתנהג. ורוח הקודש יש לכל אדם ואדם, אך ([תהלים לב ב](https://he.wikisource.org/wiki/%D7%AA%D7%94%D7%9C%D7%99%D7%9D_%D7%9C%D7%91_%D7%91)): "אשרי אדם לא יחשוב ה' לו עוון ואין ברוחו רמיה" ... ואין ברוחו שום דופי, אז ([משלי טז ב](https://he.wikisource.org/wiki/%D7%9E%D7%A9%D7%9C%D7%99_%D7%98%D7%96_%D7%91)): "תוכן רוחות ה'" ו"כל דרכי איש זך בעיניו", וזהו ([משלי יט כא](https://he.wikisource.org/wiki/%D7%9E%D7%A9%D7%9C%D7%99_%D7%99%D7%98_%D7%9B%D7%90)): "רבות מחשבות בלב איש ועצת ה' היא תקום".

**Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Alei Shur, Vol. I, p. 168**

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| The Talmud states, “Each and every person must declare, ‘The world was created for me’ (Sanhedrin 37a). Rashi explains that this means that I am considered as important as the entire world …“Like the entire world” – This is the one-time life experience of each person – there was never a person like him; nor will there ever be a person like him throughout history. I, with my special character strengths, the child of my particular parents, born in a specific time period, and in a particular environment – certainly there is a unique challenge that is placed upon me. I have a special share in the Torah, and the entire world is waiting for me to complete my challenge. For my mission cannot be exchanged with anyone else in the world!  | "כל אחד ואחד חייב לומר: בשבילי נברא העולם"- רש"י: "כלומר: חשוב אני כעולם מלא, לא אטרד את עצמי מן העולם בעבירה אחת". (סנהדרין לז, א)"כעולם מלא" – זוהי חוית חד-פעמיותו של האדם, שלא היה עוד כמותו ולא יהיה כמותו עד סוף כל הדורות. אני עם המיזוג המיוחד של כוחותי, בן לאותם אבות, נולד בתוך אותה תקופה ובאותה סביבה- בודאי עבודה מיוחדת מוטלת עלי, חלק מיוחד לי בתורה, וכל הבריאה מחכה לי שאתקן את המוטל עלי, כי את עבודתי לא אוכל להחליף עם שום אדם אחר בעולם! |

**Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, Derash Moshe, Parshas Va’eira**

Rashi explains that in some places the Torah mentions Aharon before Moshe and in other places it mentions Moshe before Aharon, to teach that they were equal. This is puzzling, since Moshe was the master of all prophets and the teacher of the world, and the Torah was given through him; how can it be said that Aharon was equal to him?

We can explain . . . that since throughout his life, Aharon fulfilled God’s will perfectly, it is possible to say that he was equal to Moshe, even though Moshe was greater because he had more missions. Nevertheless, since they both did as they were commanded in accordance with their abilities, they were on an equal level. This is how I explained the Talmud in Bava Basra 10b, where it states that Yosef, the son of Rabbi Yehoshua, became ill and lost consciousness. [When he revived,] his father asked him what he had seen and he replied, “I saw an upside-down world. The people who were on a higher level were below, and those on a lower level were above.” His father said, “You saw the world clearly.” But this is very puzzling: how could he have said it was an upside-down world? Certainly in this world a person sees only with his eyes, whereas that [Next World] is the world of truth.

It must be that he saw that even in the world of truth, the people who were considered superior here were also superior there, and the inferior people were still inferior there, but the superior people there were nevertheless in a lower position than those who were inferior to them, and that is why he called it an upside-down world. His father replied that the world was seen clearly because God does not demand of a person more than he is capable of achieving. Therefore, those who had limited abilities and the like but still accomplished in accordance with their abilities, fulfilled their mission in this world and therefore they earned a higher position [in the Next World]. The superior ones, however, even though they were greater and had performed more virtuous deeds, still were capable of achieving even more Torah and good deeds in accordance with their abilities, but they were slightly negligent in accomplishing this and therefore earned a lower stature. Thus, it emerges that when two people act in accordance with their abilities, they are considered on an equal level.

[**https://www.chabad.org/library/article\_cdo/aid/108390/jewish/What-is-Lifes-Purpose.htm**](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/108390/jewish/What-is-Lifes-Purpose.htm)

In addition, every soul has a specific purpose besides the general purpose of making an abode for G–d in this world. The Baal Shem Tov said that a soul, in addition to keeping the Torah and mitzvot, may descend to this world and live for 70 or 80 years just to do a favour for another in the material or the spiritual realms. How does one know one’s own specific purpose? How does one know which favour is the purpose of one’s soul’s descent? The answer is that everything happens by Divine Providence and if a person is presented with a certain opportunity, this is certainly sent from Above and should be treated as if it is the purpose of one’s soul’s descent.

Our Sages stated, “everything is from the hands of heaven except the fear of Heaven.” This means that whatever happens to a person is from Heaven. The particular time and place a person lives and his station in life, whether rich or poor etc., is decided from Above. A person’s only contribution is “the fear of Heaven” – his reaction in any given situation. We are all presented with unique opportunities and challenges and it is our lot in life to utilise them for the Divine purpose.

**George Bernard Shaw – A Splendid Torch**

This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.

I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community, and as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can.

I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no “brief candle” for me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.