

DA'AT TEVUNOTSECTION 1: CHAPTER 5

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Da'at Tevunot 1:5 (# 35 - 36 [beginning])

1.

The idea of G-d's *Yichud* seems simple enough: doesn't it just indicate that G-d is the only L-rd, there's none other? Well, while that's true overall, there are many factors in the tradition that expand on it that would need to be underscored and explained.

But the main thing we'd need to do would be to cite five theologically-calamitous mistakes that people make which prevent them from accepting just how unmitigated and absolute G-d's sovereignty is ¹.

2.

The first of them (which seems rather laudatory and respectful of Him at first blush) is to think that G-d is "far too exalted", much too "removed from the world to concern Himself with it" in Ramchal's words. That in fact was the viewpoint of some early idolaters, who then worshipped the stars and constellations, which they considered G-d's lofty agents on earth ².

The second is to reason that since, as we're taught, G-d is perfect, whole, and utterly benevolent, and yet there's evil and wrongdoing in this world -- then there have to be two deities: one of whom is responsible for the good and another for the bad ³.

The third mistake people have made ⁴ is to assume that the "laws of nature" (as well as the constraints of "destiny" and of "happenstance") are indefatigable facts of life not to be denied, and that even G-d is beholden to them. They also believe that the sooner a person acknowledges those "rules" and starts to play by them, the better off he is, and that the longer he denies them the more likely he is to fail ⁵.

The fourth is to believe that His deeds are sometimes subordinate to man's actions. They assert as an example the notion that while G-d had once chosen the Jewish Nation in fact to carry out His mission in this world, He no longer favors us since we continue to sin and stray, and that He was thus "forced" to abandon us, G-d forbid, as a consequence of those actions ⁶.

And the fifth mistake is to assume that though He is the Creator of each and every thing, we can still-and-all do things to get around His wishes or affect His deeds. Mistakenly believing that G-d must be vulnerable in some realm or another, and that they could subject Him to their manipulation and cunning, they would, for example, try to manipulate the sort of supernatural forces that G-d is thought to acquiesce to ⁷.

Footnotes:

¹ Doubtlessly meaning to underscore the importance of the idea -- which he says in the text is *the* cardinal and over-arching truism of the Jewish Faith -- Ramchal elaborates here on verses that depict G-d's sovereignty. We didn't cite them above because they seem redundant in this sort of a treatment, but we'll quote them here.

We're thus told that "G-d is the L-rd" which is to say, the Absolute, Omnipotent Sovereign, "in Heaven above and on the earth below", i.e., in orbits we experience and in others we cannot; "there is no other", i.e., that's true of Him, and Him alone (Deuteronomy 4:39). See *Sanhedrin* 67b on this verse.

"Behold, I am He" the Torah quotes G-d as declaring, meaning to say that G-d alone is the Absolute Sovereign, "there is no '(other) god' with Me" i.e., He shares sovereignty with nothing and no one else. And the Torah underscores the point with the Divine affirmation that, "I (alone) bring on death and I bring to life; I wound and I heal" (Deuteronomy 32:39), thus asserting the profundity and finality of G-d's determinations.

And we're taught that G-d is "unchangeable; (so) who could turn Him around?", which is to say that He cannot be dissuaded from doing anything He's determined to do. It's also said that "He does what He wants" (Job 23:13), for after all, "Who'd (dare) say to Him, 'What are You doing?'" (Job 9:12). In short we're to understand that G-d's rule is absolute and supreme. Nothing and no one could ever thwart Him.

It's important to point out that Ramchal spoke of three sorts of *Yichud* in his writings. The one here refers to G-d's utter sovereignty, as we'd indicated. There's an instance of *Yichud* more fundamental to that though which is referred to as the *Yichud* -- the uniqueness -- of G-d's existence, that is, the fact that only His existence is imperative (i.e., He alone is indispensable). That is, while everything else's existence is expendable, G-d's must exist if anything else is to. See *Derech Hashem* 1:1:3 as well as See *Ma'amar Halkkurim* ("BaBorei Yitbarach") and *Ma'amar HaChochma* ("Aleinu Leshabaiyach") for a discussion of that. Also see Rambam's *Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah* 1:2.

The third sort is more esoteric and is referred to as the *Yichud* of *Reisha v'Saifa*, "The conjunction of the beginning and end". See Ramchal's *Sod HaYichud* (found in *Ginzei Ramchal* p. 264). It refers to the point in the ultimate future when everything will return to G-dliness. But that's not at all mentioned in *Da'at Tevunot*, our subject at hand, nor is it easy to explain without a huge and distracting discussion.

² Those who think this way reason, "Wait a minute. He's G-d! Why should He care about petty and ultimately inconsequential things like this world and us?" In Ramchal's words, they think that He has left us under the control of "the stars, constellations, and their celestial counterparts, which then oversee the (workings of the) world".

Some likewise-minded people today start off with something of the same premise but go elsewhere with it. "Since G-d is so lofty and transcendent" they contend, "He apparently left us to our own devices". What they mean to suggest is either that we're now on our own in the universe, masters of our own fate, and accountable to no one; or worse yet, that G-d is an aloof Master of the Universe who wouldn't deign to concern Himself with this world. But both approaches are wrong. The first because it limits G-d's reach and doesn't factor in His ability (and wish) to interface with this world and ourselves in an imminent, near-at-hand sort of way. And the second is wrong because it limits His concerns for and faith in us, whom He created to fulfill His ultimate purpose.

³ Ramchal is referring to Zoroastrianism which thrived in Talmudic times and threatened Jewish beliefs. It maintained that a pair of co-equal deities called *Ahura Mazda* (the beneficent "Wise Lord") and *Angra Mainyu* (the malevolent "Evil Spirit") competed with each other for control of the universe (see *Sanhedrin* 39A).

The truth be known, that error is either based on our inability to fathom how a good G-d could allow for evil to manifest itself so often, or at all; or on our failure to appreciate when an instance of bad might actually prove to be good. The seeming contradiction and confusion in all that is so bothersome to some poor souls that they lapse into heresy or spiritual mayhem in the face of it, G-d forbid. But all of this will be discussed later.

⁴ And continue to make to this day, perhaps even more so than in the past, in fact.

⁵ But that would suggest that these "laws" existed before G-d Himself did, since *they* rather than He would be the very underpinnings of everything in the world. Yet that's absurd, for by definition G-d never *didn't* exist, so nothing could ever have preceded Him; and since He's the Creator, He created those forces, too, and is thus beyond and above them.

It also follows, then, that since He is in fact beyond and above them (and everything else, as well), that these rules *aren't* immutable. And rather than being "laws" of nature and facts of life, they're actually only some of the multifarious, mutable means G-d uses to govern this world; that is, that like everything else, they too are beholden to Him, the Absolute Sovereign.

See *Adir Bamarom*, vol. 1, p. 458 and *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 150, 158 for discussions about how misguided and limited our perceptions can be.

⁶ First off, let's quote G-d's own words about the fixed and abiding nature of our people's relationship

to Him. "I will never give My glory to another (nation)" (Isaiah 48:11), since He has established a covenant between Himself and us that's to last forever. And that as a consequence of that covenant He'll expunge many of the things we do against Him, we're assured.

"I, I myself, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and will not remember your sins" (Isaiah 43:25), G-d said at one point; "I will remove the iniquity of that country (Israel) in one day" (Zechariah 3:9), He said at another; and He once assured us that "In those days and in that time... the iniquity of Israel will be searched out, and there will (be found to) be none; and the sins of Judah (will be searched out, too) and not be found. For, I will pardon those whom I leave as a remnant"(Jeremiah 50:20).

That's to say that His covenant with us is eternal and beyond others' expectations. And that G-d is unaffected by and above our own or anyone else's deeds, as well as any system He Himself set up to determine worth and merit. For as He put it, "I will be gracious to whomever I will be gracious -- even though he may not be worthy of it". And "I will show mercy upon whomever I will show mercy, even though he may not deserve it"(Berachot 7A). Also see Genesis 17:1-2, 7; Isaiah 54:10 and 59:21; 1 Chronicles 16:15-17; and elsewhere.

That's not to deny the consequences that any one of us would have to suffer for our having broken our end of the bargain and sinned. For, despite the covenant between G-d Almighty and our people, the truth of the matter is that transgressions are transgressions indeed every bit as much as merits are merits; everyone must answer for his or her own deeds.

⁷ But they too are wrong. For G-d alone is G-d, and the Absolute Sovereign. Nothing can thwart Him. He alone reigns supreme; nothing exists save for the fact that He wills it to; and He oversees everything. He Himself enacted all laws and ordinances, and they're thus beholden to Him, rather than He to them.

There will indeed be times when G-d chooses to accede to man's deeds, but He needn't do that if He chooses not to. And He's likewise above even supernatural laws. After all, He Himself set it all in place and granted it its capabilities. He instituted everything and can correspondingly change and undo anything. For He alone is all-powerful.