

NEPHESH HACHAIM 1:1

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Nephesh Hachaim Gate 1, Ch. 1

1.

Amazingly enough, we're said to have been created "in the image of G-d" (Genesis 1:27, 9:6). But what exactly does that mean? It surely speaks to a core-central part of our being that we'd have to comprehend if we're ever to understand ourselves. So the greater part of this first Gate goes about explaining it while the idea reiterates through the entire work either overtly or subtly.

In point of fact, most of the mystical teachings of the Zohar focus on this seemingly other-worldly phenomenon ¹. But we won't be exploring the Zohar's understanding of that here so much as the more implicit meaning of our having been created in His image as the earlier Literalists understood it

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2.

Now, the idea of our having been created in G-d's "image" certainly isn't to be taken literally, as G-d hasn't an "image" per se ³. What it implies is that we have *something* in common with Him ⁴ -- something vitally important as we'll see.

Let's explain the analogy between our beings and G-d's image this way. It's written for example that "I was like a bird of the wilderness; I was like an owl of the wasteland" (Psalms 102:7). That's certainly not to say that the person who's speaking here has wings or a beak, or that he'd literally become a bird; but rather, as the Literalists explained it ⁵, that he's *somewhat bird-like* in that he might for example wander about the desert in solitude the way certain birds do or the like, but nothing more than that ⁶. So our having been created in G-d's "image" implies that we're somewhat like G-d. We'll soon see what it means ⁷.

Footnotes:

¹See *Eitz Chaim* 1:2 for this point.

The Zohar (*Parshat Ki Taitzai* 279b, *Tikkunei Zohar* 19, 42a) uses the term *Adam Kadmon* ("Primordial Man") when discussing this, thus referring to a more abstract notion of humankind. But R' Chaim's

point is that he'll be speaking about *us* specifically (though the term *Adam Kadmon* will be cited in 3:8).

Ari refers to *Adam Kadmon* very often in *Otzrot Chaim*, *Sha'ar Halggulim*, and in *Drush Adam Kadmon*. He uses the expression *Tzelem Elokim* ("The Image of G-d") in *Otzrot Chaim*, too. R' Chaim's son R' Yitzchak (who wrote the Introduction above) added a lengthy and comprehensive treatment of the idea of *Tzelem* as explained in the Kabbalistic literature here which we won't be addressing.

² The so-called "Literalists" included Rambam (in this instance most especially and specifically, as we'll see in note 6 below), *Chizzkuni* (Genesis 1:26), *Rabbeinu Bachai* (Genesis 1:27) and others. They were termed literalists because they strove to explain what the Torah was actually expressing.

Now, the themes that R' Chaim discussed at this point and in the work as a whole were often discussed in the works of the Chassidic Masters who preceded him. We'll cite some of the more cogent ones and discuss the differences between R' Chaim's and their perspectives at points. Suffice it to say that R' Chaim's insights are clearly his own, as shown by the originality of his wording and imagery.

Thus, see *Degel Machane Ephraim* (*Bereishit*), R' Shneur Zalman of Liade's *Likkutei Torah* (*Ki Tavo*), and *Noam Elimelech* (*Likkutei Shoshanna*).

³ After all, isn't it written, "To whom can you compare G-d, and what likeness can you arrange for Him?" (Isaiah 40:18)?

⁴ That is, there's a remote resemblance between G-d and us.

⁵ See *Sha'ar HaHakdamot* 5d for a discussion of the Literalists in this context.

⁶ This explanation of the extent of the metaphor is derived from the very first chapter of *Moreh Nevuchim*. Also see Ramban's comments to Genesis 1:27.

⁷ Also see *Ruach Chaim* 2:1 and 2:2, 5 below for a different discussion of this, as well as Ramchal's *Da'at Tevunot* 80 and *Kinat Hashem Tz'vaot* 2.