

# NEPHESH HACHAIM 1:2

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

*Nephesh Hachaim* Gate 1, Ch. 2

1.

But, just how are we like G-d? To know that, though, we'd first have to realize that we're actually told that we were created "in the image of *E-l-o-h-i-m*"<sup>1</sup>. R' Chaim underscores the fact that that's the name of G-d that speaks to His being in control of all the universe's resources and capacities<sup>2</sup>.

And how much is G-d in control of all the universe's resources and capacities? Completely. For, when we humans build something out of wood, for example, R' Chaim points out, we don't start off by actually *creating wood*: we simply take whatever available pieces of wood we need and set them in place. And when we're finished, we leave, and the edifice we built stands on its' own.

But when G-d (as *E-l-o-h-i-m*) "built" the universe He created it out of sheer nothingness by means of His limitless ability<sup>3</sup>. And each and every moment literally He willfully imbues the world and its contents with "being and new light"<sup>4</sup>. In fact, were G-d to withhold that for an instant, everything would then simply return to sheer nothingness<sup>5</sup>. That's why The Men of the Great Assembly worded the prayers to read "He renews the act of creation daily"<sup>6</sup>, which means to say that G-d does that literally, moment by moment<sup>7</sup>.

2.

Thus G-d is said to be in control of all the universe's resources and capacities as signified by the term *E-l-o-h-i-m*<sup>8</sup> in that each and every resource and capacity is under His control, He provides them all with their capacity and power each and every moment, and He alone is capable of changing them and setting them in order as He sees fit<sup>9</sup>.

And we're *somewhat* like that, too, as we'll see.

Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup>We've translated the term as "the image of G-d" of course, since *E-l-o-h-i-m* is one of G-d's names, but that translation is still and all somewhat misleading as we'll see.

Now, we find that particular names depict specific characteristics. Someone named *Shmuel*, for example, may be called "*Shmulie*" by family, "*Shmulke*" by friends, "Samuel" (its English equivalent) by co-workers, "Sam" by others, etc. And this same man will likely act and be perceived by others according to the name in question. The same could be said about G-d, if you will. He too is represented by different names, seven of which are sacred (see *Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah* 6:2) and scores of which are more like "appellations" (see *Chizkuni* to Exodus 14:22), and each represents a trait.

R' Chaim's point is that particular names of G-d depict specific Divine characteristics and that we'd need to know which characteristic is being expressed here by the use of the name *E-l-o-h-i-m*.

<sup>2</sup> R' Chaim refers to the citation of that in *Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chaim* 5:1.

<sup>3</sup> This depiction explains the following detail: *E-l-o-h-i-m* is the name for G-d that's used in the recounting of creation (rather than the usual name *Y-h-v-h*). So we'd have expected R' Chaim's point to be that our having been created "in the image of *E-l-o-h-i-m*" implies that we're creative beings. Instead R' Chaim points out just how *unlike* G-d we are on that level. For while humans certainly affect change, we still and all arrive in the middle of things then leave. We're thus a vital element in the universe, but only an element nonetheless. Indeed, R' Chaim is underscoring the idea that we humans are not creative so much as *re-creative*.

And he cites Zohar 2, 96a in a note below which differentiates between the names *E-l-o-h-i-m* and *Y-h-v-h*, and he addresses the subject in 3:9 below.

As for G-d creating the universe out of sheer nothingness, see 1:13, 3:2 below, as well as Ramban and Gra's *Aderet Eliyahu* to Genesis 1:1, and Ramchal's *Da'at Tevunot* 194.

<sup>4</sup> "New light" means to say, additional degrees of animation.

See note to 1:13, 3:11 below and R' Chaim's remarks in *Ruach Chaim* 4:22, as well as Ramban to Genesis 1:4, Maharal's *Netzach Yisrael* Ch. 1, and *Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah* 1:1,

<sup>5</sup> See *Shabbat* 88a and Ramban to Genesis 2:17.

A point to be made is that since everything can thus *come undone and become sheer nothingness if G-d so willed it*, and yet He hasn't brought that about, G-d clearly intends for the universe to go on and isn't utterly displeased with it, as some might think.

<sup>6</sup> This is found in *Yotzer Ohr* before *Kriat Sh'ma*.

<sup>7</sup> R' Chaim also offers the fact that G-d is said to "be making" them now rather than to *have made* "the great luminaries" (Psalms 136:7) in the distant past.

He then offers a note here, his first in a long series of them throughout the book. We'll offer the gist of this one and others like it that help us understand the point at hand, but few others.

The note raises the question as to why none of this moment-by-moment activity is discernible to us. And it offers that it's because all of that goes on below the surface of things, in each thing's spiritual "elements" and "fathers" (i.e., its non-material roots and antecedents) (R' Chaim cites Zohar 1:23b as illustration of that fact. See 3:10 below for this same citation. Also see R' Yitzchak's note to 1:1 and *Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah* 4:1-2, 5 on this idea), which are themselves rooted in the four letters of G-d's name *Y-h-v-h* (see 3:11 below), and which all join together to produce each and every thing moment by moment as is also spelled out by the concept of the different "parts" of time (see *Hilchot Kiddush Hachodesh* 6:2 and *Pardes Rimonim* 2:1).

Also see R' Chaim's note to 1:13 below.

<sup>8</sup>... specifically, which is a plural term, thus alluding to G-d as *E-l-o-h-i-m* being in control of infinite numbers of things...

<sup>9</sup>R' Chaim's next note at this instance makes the point that the term *E-l-o-h-i-m* is sometimes used in other contexts in the Torah, as when it refers to idols and national overlords (see Psalms 96:5, Micha 4:5, Zohar 3:8a, 208a), and judges (see Exodus 22:9 and Rambam about that in *Moreh Nevuchim* 2:6). But given that none of these have inherent so much as G-d-given abilities (see R' Chaim's *Ma'amarim* 3 and *Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah* 1:1-4), they're clearly un-G-dly.