

# CHAPTER 1:2 THE CREATOR

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

1:1:2

The next thing is that only G-d can comprehend His true Being; we simply cannot <sup>1</sup>. But to fully understand that we'd need to point out that there are two perspectives from which to approach G-d: first, as He is Himself, within His own Essential Being, where He's said to be "transcendent" (beyond us); and second, as He is when He relates to His created phenomena and is said to be "imminent" (close to us) <sup>2</sup>.

Let's quickly make ourselves clear, though. Make no mistake about it -- there's only one G-d, and He is who He is wherever He is and from whichever perspective we're referring to. We're merely referring to *when we can experience Him or when we can't*.

When G-d is alone in His own Essential Being, He is utterly, utterly unfathomable and out of our experience. That's to say that it's as impossible to grasp Him when He's in His own Being as it is to fully and truly grasp what's on someone's mind at any one moment.

For were I to catch you deep in thought, I might *assume* you're thinking about this or that either because that's what you tend to think about, that's what *I'd* be thinking about, or that's what most people in your situation would be thinking about. But I really couldn't know. And were I to offer that you were thinking about one thing or another, I might be partially right -- but *only* partially so. Because while you might indeed be thinking about eating, for example, as I'd claim, you might also be thinking about money, your umbrella, daisies, the color ochre, etc., etc. And though you could indeed be thinking about eating, you might nonetheless be thinking about eating a wholly different way than I'd ever imagine.

In any event, just as I can never know you as you are, from within in all your fullness, though I can know you from without to some extent from your actions-- I can likewise never know G-d from within, though I can know Him somewhat from His actions <sup>3</sup>.

Ramchal goes on to say that what we do know about Him as He is, though, is that He's "utterly whole" and lacks for nothing <sup>4</sup>. That is, that He's utterly self-contained and self-sufficient, utterly independent <sup>5</sup>.

How do we know that? From the prophets <sup>6</sup>, from ancient traditions, and from personal, soul-based experience, Ramchal offers <sup>7</sup>. And he cites a verse to illustrate that which reads "Take great care... never to forget what you saw with your own eyes... and let your children and your grandchildren (etc.) know about the day you stood before G-d your Lord at Horeb (i.e., Mount Sinai)" (Deuteronomy 4:9-10).

In other words, as our sages put it, each one of us was at Mount Sinai on a soul-level when G-d appeared in His utter wholeness there <sup>8</sup>; and it thus behooves us to perpetuate that "racial memory" in the here and now by passing it on through the tradition.

Interestingly enough, though, Ramchal hears the objections of some skeptics out there, and offers that, in point of fact, G-d's utter wholeness can also be verified logically <sup>9</sup> demonstrated in nature, and can be derived from physics and astronomy. And the suggestion is that the curious would do well to study their works, or arrive at their own proofs.

But he declares that we won't be depending on such proofs in this work, but rather on the principles laid down by the tradition attesting to G-d's wholeness, which he'll thus be presenting in the course of this work.

There are two things to be said about that. First, that Ramchal's point seems to be that logical, experimental insight invariably comes upon a brick wall when it tries to fathom the unfathomable. But at least it somewhat satisfies the testy soul who will not give in.

And second, that while we might not be able to recall the "racial memory" of experiencing G-d up close at Mount Sinai for ourselves, studying the traditions about it and sensing it deep in the heart that way is next best.

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> As it's written, "His greatness cannot be fathomed" (Psalms 145:3). That's because our thoughts are of a whole different order than G-d's; as it's written, "'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways', declares the L-rd. 'For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts (higher) than your thoughts'" (Isaiah 55:8-9).

See *Da'at Tevunot* 32-33; also see 39-40 there where Ramchal lays out the difference between G-d's thought process and our own. See *Moreh Nevuchim* 1:58.

At bottom it comes to this, like everything else, our thought processes, logic itself, intuition, and the like -- that's to say, everything that we use to fathom things --- was created by G-d outright in the course of creation. So G-d Himself, who preceded all that, cannot be fathomed by anything that came about in the course of creation.

Ramchal makes the astounding point elsewhere that the creation of the universe -- the creation of all of reality -- is just *one* of G-d's capabilities (see *Ginzei Ramchal* pp. 226- 227, 247, also see *Da'at Tevunot* 54, and *Klach Pitchei Chochma* 24). The implication is that He could (and might still, we just don't know) have occupied Himself with wholly other things. So is it any wonder that we know very, very little about Him other than in relation to the reality we know of?

<sup>2</sup> See *Megillah* 31a and *Zohar* 3:225a for a discussion of G-d's transcendence and immanence. The verse "Holy, holy, holy is G-d of Hosts, the whole world is full of His Glory" (Isaiah 6:3) refers to His immanence, while the one that reads "Blessed is G-d's Glory from His place" (Ezekiel 3:12) refers to His transcendence.

<sup>3</sup> See *Da'at Tevunot* 80 and *Adir Bamarom* p. 209 for a discussion of knowing G-d through His actions as opposed to through His Being. Also see *Moreh Nevuchim* 1:58-59.

<sup>4</sup> See 1:2:1 below, as well as *Yesodei HaTorah* 2:8, *Moreh Nevuchim* 3:19, *Emunot v'De'ot* 1:4, and *Sefer Halkarim* 2:1.

<sup>5</sup> Hence G-d is entirely and truly free, immortal, and all-powerful in ways we can't fathom. See final paragraph of note 1 above.

<sup>6</sup> See *Ma'amar HaVichuach Choker u'Mekubal* (in *Sha'arei Ramchal* p.31).

<sup>7</sup> Based on his research into the original text of *Derech Hashem*, R' Yoseph Spinner points out that from this juncture until the end of 1:1:2 what's written is encased in brackets, and that it serves as a sort of addendum which the original publisher placed in the text itself. Some may think that this would seem to indicate that Ramchal may not have written this part himself and that it was added in by an editor or someone else. But that doesn't seem likely, given that Ramchal said in the text of 1:1:5 below, "This too is one of the things we know of from the tradition, which we'd written of already", referring to his remarks here in 1:1:2.

He also made the same point about the revelation at Mount Sinai (and more), though, in his Introduction to his *Ma'amar HaVichuach Choker u'Mekubal* (in *Sha'arei Ramchal* pp. 29-31). Also see *Yesodei HaTorah* Ch. 8.

<sup>8</sup> See Rashi and Ramban to Deuteronomy 29:14.

<sup>9</sup> See the first gate of *Chovot HaLevovot*.

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