

CHAPTER 1:4 THE CREATOR

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

1:1:4

Next are the ideas that G-d's existence "depends on nothing else", and that He exists "of His own volition" ¹. In other words, He is utterly and infinitely Self-sufficient.

It's easy enough to understand the first statement. After all, He must depend on nothing or no one else in order to exist given that, by definition, an Almighty G-d would simply have to be independent, sovereign, and Self-sufficient. And only He could survive in such a state.

That's simple enough. The next statement, though, is a little more opaque. By saying that G-d exists "of His own volition", Ramchal is stating that G-d's existence isn't a rule that He has to follow. G-d exists simply because He wants to exist, period. Again, He's independent and above all rules.

The ancient Greeks believed that their gods (and there's simply no comparison) were beholden to something greater than they -- the so-called "Fates". If something was fated to happen, they claimed, there was nothing a Greek god could do to prevent it. G-d Almighty, though, is beholden to nothing.

In fact, many people mistakenly believe that G-d is beholden to logic. As if logic were more powerful than He, just as the "Fates" were more powerful than the Greek gods. But that's simply not true. G-d is no more beholden to logic than He is to, say, gravity ².

Notes:

¹ As it's written, "the world and its fullness are Mine" (Psalms 50:12).

See *Ma'amar Halkkurim* ("BaBorei Yitbarach") which also underscores G-d's utter Self-sufficiency with the remark that He's "unaffected by anyone or anything else". But that suggests a number of things -- most significantly for our own purposes, that He isn't affected by our prayers or our actions. Why pray then if G-d isn't moved to change His decisions in response to our prayers and pleas? And why be good if doing so wouldn't make any difference in the end? Isn't it written, "If you sinned, what do you do to Him, and if your transgressions are many, what do you do to Him? If you are righteous, what do you give Him? Or what does He take from your hand? Your wrongfulness (only affects) a man like yourself, and your righteousness (only affects) a son of man" (Job 35:6-8).

These are extraordinarily profound questions which have been answered numbers of times in the Tradition. Suffice it to say for now that we pray and strive to be good because G-d wants us to, given that doing so deepens, widens, and enriches our hearts and souls. That's to say that He wants us to for our own benefit rather than for His own (see 1:2:1 on G-d's utter benevolence). So He's indeed not personally affected by our prayers and righteous deeds, but He's in favor of them; and is there anything better a mortal can do than to acquiesce to G-d's favor?

Also see *Klach Pitchei Chochma* 1 (in Ramchal's own comments), as well as *Yesodei HaTorah* 1:2.

² As such, all attempts to force G-d into a logical corner fail in the end. And all questions of, say, whether He could create a force greater than Himself or not and the like are simply irrelevant to His utmost, absolute sovereignty.

Rabbi Yaakov Feldman has translated and commented upon "The Gates of Repentance", "The Path of the Just", and "The Duties of the Heart" (Jason Aronson Publishers). His works are available in bookstores and in various locations on the Web.