

CHAPTER 1:5 THE CREATOR

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

1:1:5

Next is that G-d's being is "simple" ¹. That's to say that while we and everything else around us are a mélange of many distinct and dependent capacities and elements, G-d isn't. His being is a single pure and indivisible reality ².

He's certainly depicted as exhibiting many separate mental, personal, and supernal traits and capacities -- after all He's said to have a will of His own, to be wise, capable, and perfect, among other things -- but still and all His own being is singular, pure and indivisibly simple ³. In other words, He's simply G-d, but He expresses His being in many ways.

It's just that we need to use such terminology when we refer to Him ⁴. In fact, how could we *not* describe Him in such terms? To say that He has none of those traits would seem to deny His omnipotence and would disparage Him in our eyes.

The point is that in His essence He's inexplicably pure and indivisible; we just can't fathom that since it's so out of our experience which is space-, time-, and material-bound ⁵. In fact, Ramchal warns never to "draw an analogy between what we see in created beings and G-d's own being, as the two are wholly disparate and we can't assess one from the other". Can there be any two things more polar opposite than Creator and created being?

His being "simple" in essence is another one of those things that we need to depend on the Tradition to know ⁶. We can, though, rely on certain logical deductions to bolster our faith in the fact that there's a creative, purposeful Being above the laws of nature, who is without lacks, imperfections, multiplicity, and relativity. As otherwise nothing else subject to those less than perfect traits could come about or continue to exist.

Notes:

¹ See *Yesodei HaTorah* 1:7, *Sefer Halkkurim* 2:9, and *Pardes* 5:4.

² The original is terse and confusing at this point, so we'll cite it here and explain it as best as we can. Ramchal speaks of "the (human) spirit", by which he clearly means the mind, and therefore means to

contrast it with G-d's "spirit" or makeup. That implies of course that he equates the human mind with its spirit (*Nephesh* in Hebrew), and that he means to use it to contrast it with G-d's being. But that's very confusing to us, since we don't equate the mind with the spirit, and we'd never equate either with G-d's Being. So let's present his statement with that in mind.

Ramchal says that the human mind "has many different and distinct capacities -- like memory, will, and imagination -- and (that) each is separate from the others. Memory (for example) has its own boundary, will has its own; and memory never enters into the boundaries of will or vice versa, with the same being true of the other (mental capacities)". He means to say that each one of our mental capacities is separate from the others, but that G-d's "spirit" or essence can't be subdivided like that: each of His capacities "bleeds" into the others, if you will; and that the lot of them are in fact one "simple", unadulterated entity that is G-d.

The point of the matter is that while we can blend our various capacities (we can, for example, evoke a memory of an aroma and thus combine the tactile with the cerebral, etc.) we nonetheless would have to consciously and purposefully combine the two, while everything about Him is simply "there", in G-d, and wholly, simply so.

We presented that idea in easier terms in the above text to prevent this confusion.

Contrast this with Rambam's discussion of the oneness of the human *Nephesh* at the beginning of the first chapter of *Sh'moneh Perakim*.

³ See *Hilchot Teshuvah* 5:5 for a discussion of what sets G-d's thinking process apart from ours.

It would help at this point to hearken back to our discussion in 1:1:2 where we referred to the two perspectives from which to approach G-d: as He is Himself, within His own Essential Being; and as He is when He relates to His created phenomena. As such in His own Being G-d is a single, simple entity, but when He relates to us He exhibits certain traits.

Let's use this analogy. Most things in this come about as a result of a single, simple thought. Let's suppose for example that I have the idea that I'd always like to "do the right thing". That single simple thought has countless applications in the world, of course. In much the same way, when G-d relates to the created world He manifests His simple Being in countless ways.

⁴ See *Klallim Rishonim* 1 and *Ma'amar Halkkuim* ("BaBorei Yitbarach") as well as *Moreh Nevuchim* 1:36, 46, 47, and 52, and *Pardes* 3:1, 4:9.

⁵ In the past, humankind had too often been struck by its own supposed ability to grasp things fully, and to be able to enunciate what it grasped. And it believed that what couldn't be enunciated just didn't exist. So science did its best to plot and graph everything exactly, literature strove to say things "just so", art and music tried to "capture the moment" perfectly, etc.

At a certain point in modernity, though, it became clear that things weren't what we perceived them to be. So science addressed issues like "chaos" (for example), literature turned to evoking hazy and nuanced senses of things, and art and music allowed for the abstract and discordant. By this point we've apparently given up on the struggle altogether and settled for *virtual* reality.

Now, the Kabbalists always knew that virtual reality is all one could ever hope to understand in this world. For our senses only experience things so deeply and no further. We simply don't have the capacity to dig deeper down to "actual" reality, much like the ancients didn't have the capacity to grasp the truer picture that the microscope would have allowed them to.

As such we'd offer that there are essentially four levels of reality: surface reality, microscopic (and submicroscopic) reality, virtual reality, and the actual reality. Mankind settled far too long for a surface view of things, we were then thrilled with a microscopic view, and we have only now come upon virtual reality in the face of the actual level of reality which we now know is beyond us. Though not often spoken of, this acquiescence to virtual reality is an exciting and profound admission of human limitations.

Ramchal's point is that when it comes to spirituality, the best we could ever hope for are virtual depictions. For the life of the spirit is far beyond our grasp. Consequently, G-dliness (which can only be described as "meta-spirituality") is hopelessly further yet beyond us.

Rambam evoked a remarkable image relevant to our point in his comments to *Perek Chellek*. He declared that we haven't any more capacity to fully grasp the spiritual than fish have the wherewithal to grasp the idea of fire! Drawing upon that we'd venture to say that we haven't any more capacity to fully grasp G-dliness than fish have to grasp the idea of *ideas*!

⁶ See 1:1:2 above.

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.