

DA'AT TEVUNOT - SECTION 7: CHAPTER 4

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

1. Few things rankle the human heart more than contradictions, truth be known. And while most of us have learned to accept ambiguity and "fuzziness" by the time we become adults, we'd actually much prefer that our reality be neat, clean, and smooth. But it's very often not, and that's especially true of messages from Heaven. For, as we pointed out already, only Moses received blunt and straightforward responses from G-d while the other prophets simply didn't.

In fact, as Ramchal points out, their visions were sometimes "polar-opposites" of each other, "at one and the same the same moment". And so G-d would seem to appear angry, mild-mannered, jovial, and more at any particular moment to a prophet (see Soferim 16:2; Yalkut Shimoni, Yitro 286; JT Nedarim 3:2; and BT Rosh Hashanah 27a for other examples) or others such things.

2. How can that be? It's because their visions weren't of "the things themselves", Ramchal explains, but were specifically "prophetic visions" -- figurative rather than literal images of what was going on -- that depended on G-d's designs at the time. The point is that those visions need not have fallen under any "law" of reality or of nature whatsoever -- including those of the sort of logic and consistency we're used to.

For, at bottom, each vision was meant to express something about G-d's otherwise inscrutable ways in the world. And if that called for contradiction or the like, well, then so be it. But don't think it ends there: there are other daunting things about the prophets' insights, as we'll see [1].

[1] For kabbalistic references to this chapter see R' Friedlander's note 502 and R' Shriki's note 181.*

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.