

CHAPTER 1: G-D □ PART 3

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

It follows then that whenever we speak about G-d we're forced to use metaphor and simile rather than say things straight out, Ramchal points out. That's to say, we use words to depict Him, to be sure, but they're inexact because there's simply no choice.

Now, that's a decidedly unscientific way of doing things, but common enough in our experience. It's somewhat like trying to describe your reactions to an idea you'd come upon that you found to be profound and very galvanizing because of who you are and what you've been through, but which wouldn't mean as much to others. Suppose, for example, you came to learn that you were adopted.

You could describe yourself as being thunderstruck and keeled over by the idea, for example; or report that your heart pounded and your head throbbed when you came upon the news, your jaw dropped, you suddenly became of cold and quiet, etc., and that would help explain how moved you were by the discovery. But no one other than you could put the pieces together and come to know as well as you how revolutionary and eye-opening a discovery that was for you.

That is, you could describe how you felt when you learned it, or perhaps even suggest that others imagine themselves finding out that they'd been adopted, but you could never express the profundity of that discovery in your own life to anyone. In much the same way we can describe G-d's effects on the cosmos, or draw analogies to Him in our own experiences, but we could never describe G-d Himself (as only He could do that).

For as Ramchal puts it, "our language only refers to the natural and finite world" and we have no other choice but to speak of such things. But G-d is transcendent of all that, so we simply don't have the vocabulary to refer to Him. The lesson that we should draw from that is that whatever we say about G-d is inexact if not out-and-out wrong, but we're impelled to speak of Him in order to understand what He asks of us in this world, and that we should keep this idea in mind at all times.

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