

CHAPTER 9: MIRACLES □ PART 4

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Ramchal now allows us a tantalizing peek into one of the methods those higher souls might use to bring on miracles and wonders. The process under discussion is termed "Theurgy" and it's defined as the ability to bring about change in the world through the recitation of Divine names. While he doesn't expand much upon the idea here in Ma'amar Halkkurim (the book upon which this work is based), Ramchal does delve into at some length in Derech Hashem ("The Way of G-d" 3:2) which we'll refer to here.

As Ramchal puts it here, and quite esoterically at that, "G-d wanted to be called by a variety of names that would correspond to the Supernal Influences which emanate from Him to this world and thus control it". Let's explain the significance of names and of these "Supernal Influences".

We're taught that what names do is help define and somehow represent the named thing's essence. That may explain why we call out a person's name when he seems to be in a coma, for example, or when he's otherwise unconscious and we want to revive him. We hope to "capture" his essence that way and to set a spark going in his brain that would help him reorient him to himself.

The "Supernal Influences" refers to the following. As we'd learned in Ch. 2 above, there are various Transcendent Forces in the Heavens that serve as sublime and ethereal counterparts to everything in the cosmos, and Ramchal is referring to them here.

His point is that while no name could ever capture G-d's essence, He has nonetheless given certain names to these Forces which can then be "awoken" when called upon by name and change things on a very esoteric level. As he puts it here, "the mention of His (various) holy names would have the ability to bring about all sorts of wonders in the world".

Understand of course that not everyone could use those names and hope to affect change. Only certain special souls can. And they themselves could be affected by reciting them: we're taught that they could come to commune with angels and other spiritual entities by means of them, and thus become privy to certain mysteries.

In any event, when such a person -- termed a Baal Shem, a "Master of a (Divine) Name" -- recites one of these names (or a combination of them) it acts as a catalyst above and below that sets off reactions throughout.

The most famous Baal Shem of all in the modern era was the Baal Shem Tov ("Master of The Good

(or, Best) Name" 1700-1760), the founder of the Chassidic movement, who was indeed capable of initiating wondrous phenomenon in his time. But the existence of one Baal Shem or another was cited by Hai Gaon (939-1038), Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi (1075-1141), by the Kabbalists, and by others. Though we don't know of them, there are assumedly a number in our midst as well.

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.