

CHAPTER 9: MIRACLES □ PART 1

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

We've come to learn that reality has its limits, since there'll come a time when the entire center, outer rim, and each side of our world will be otherwise. Quite logically then, Ramchal chose to explain here the Jewish understanding of miracles, so as to clarify the difference between the ordinary and the extraordinary.

To that end he begins this chapter with the statement that "things only exist because G-d wants them to". While that seems to be a rather simple reiteration of the fact that G-d created everything, it's actually quite a bold idea. It also implies that nothing exists here and now without G-d's assent.

Now, among other things, that suggests that everything that exists must be alright with G-d -- including wrongdoing. It also connotes that everything meets with G-d's approval moment by moment or else it wouldn't continue to exist, which signifies that G-d is behind everything -- as well as within it, and surrounding it.

The whole subject is huge and chock-full of tremendous theological and philosophical repercussions. Suffice it to say for our purposes that while G-d can be said to "approve" of wrongdoing, that doesn't mean that evil and meanness is therefore OK. The point is that G-d has decided that there are instances when wrongdoing is a "necessary evil", as the expression goes, in the grand scheme of things, in order to bring about the ultimate and perfect good.

And while G-d does indeed stand behind, within, and around everything, which seems to give the impression that He is all that is, that's not so. For if all there was, was G-d, then human free choice and individual responsibility would be a sham, G-d forbid. Understand instead that while G-d is indeed present everywhere, He also "steps to the side", if you will -- hides Himself, and works in the background -- so as to allow for our presence here, too. But again, all of this is far afield from the point at hand ... albeit thorny and fascinating. In any event, Ramchal's next point is that the same is true of "all rules (of nature) and all characteristics". That's to say that all measured and perceived phenomena, as well as all the ways they act and interact, have been instituted by G-d, and only continue by His constant assent. And just as "He ordained these rules, He is likewise able to suspend or change them at will, at any time" -- that is, nothing is set in stone unless G-d "engraves" it, and everything is open for reconsideration at any time.

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.