

DA'AT TEVUNOT - SECTION 1: CHAPTER 12

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Da'at Tevunot 1:12 (# 44 [end] - 46)

1.

We'd need to first elaborate on one crucially important and elemental point about G-d and His interactions with us before we can discuss the various epochs we spoke of, though.

We see G-d seeming to act certain ways toward us that have lead the prophets and our sages to depict Him as "compassionate", "gracious", "mighty", and the like, depending on the circumstances. But that could be misleading, because it speaks of His *interactions with us* rather than of G-d Himself¹.

2.

For not only is it utterly impossible for us to comprehend G-d Himself², but we're actually forbidden to delve into His Being³. As His own being is beyond our ken, and because nothing within our experience is within His own⁴.

In fact, attributing to Him even the greatest of all things known to us would be an insult to Him and is utterly irrelevant to His presence. For everything in the universe -- be it good or bad, perfect or imperfect -- has been purposefully created anew by Him and has been made for *our* needs and experience rather than His. As it's said. " To what, then, will you compare Me? Whom am I equal to?" (Isaiah 40:25).

As such, all of the actions and traits attributed to Him have nothing to do with G-d Himself! For while a human being's actions come about as a consequence of his character, G-d's "actions"⁵ are a pure product of His will alone⁶ and are merely suited to the needs and makeup of His creations⁷.

And so in short: G-d is comprised of nothing that we're comprised of or exhibit, He alone is the true perfect Being to whom no imperfections can be attributed. He's utterly unfathomable, and nothing about our reality is relevant to His⁸.

3.

It's just that He wanted to create beings, to interact with them, to be benevolent and grant His blessings to, and to exhibit a degree of His *Yichud* to (which is greater than any other blessing) so that we might bask in His light. So He established the sorts of righteous rules and regulations we know of in order to interact with Him.

And He *seemingly* adopted all sorts of attributes, which He only did in order to exhibit as much benevolence upon us as is possible. Now all of those attributes and such are attributed to Him since He did the things He did, even though He was forced to do none of them⁹. In fact, He could have acted otherwise in ways unfathomable to us, as He very well can do even now.

4.

At bottom, then, it comes to this. G-d's reign is thorough, complete, purposeful, and constant; absolutely nothing can thwart it, as we explained. And His being is unfathomable to all of us, despite the fact that we can discern His actions, which point to His presence and allude to Him so that we might sense Him. But all we can grasp of him comes from those actions and nothing else.

Footnotes:

¹ See 1:3:2, 1:4:1.

There's a major dilemma involved in the subject at hand that comes to this: if, as we'll soon see, G-d Himself is unfathomable, then how can He be depicted at all? But if He can't be depicted, then how is the Torah to refer to Him and how can we speak of Him whatsoever? And if we and the Torah can't refer to Him, then how are we to worship Him and draw close to Him, seeing how remote He would be from our minds? So there has to be some way of referring to Him.

The truth of the matter is that the subject of G-d's depictions has concerned many of our greatest thinkers (see *Moreh Nevuchim* 1:56–60 for example, and *Chovot Halevovot* 1:10). The Kabbalistic solution to the problem lies in our being allowed to discuss the *means* G-d uses to interact with the world -- His "tools", if you will, which they termed His *sephirot* -- rather than Him. For by understanding His tools, we understand His methodology, and by understanding his methodology we understand something of His thinking, which then helps explain *something* of Him.

The best classical text for a full treatment of the *sephirot* is R' Yoseph Gikatilla's *Sha'arei Orah*. For references to *sephirot* in Ramchal's works see 2:6, 4:14 below; *Klallim Rishonim* 1; *Da'at Tevunot* 80, 156, 180; *Klach Pitchei Chochma* 5-11, 24-25; *Pitchei Chochma v'Da'at*; and elsewhere.

Another point to be made is that a major issue associated with depicting G-d is that those descriptions make it seem as if He acts one way now and another at another time -- as if He were very human, and was affected by circumstances enough to need to change. But if G-d were indeed affected by things so, then He'd be beholden to them and not omnipotent. He would also be quite knowable. After all, it would be easy enough to keep track of what would move Him in one direction

or another to thus determine what makes Him "tick" and ultimately to control Him. But that's entirely preposterous since G-d is utterly unknowable and is indeed omnipotent. It thus becomes clear that the traits that G-d is depicted as having are meant to speak to something else altogether. And that's where the Kabbalistic perspective spoken of above comes into play.

² In His own being, apart from and irrespective of absolutely everything and everyone.

³ See *Chagigah* 11b and 13a.

See the following works of Ramchal about our not being able or allowed to speak of G-d Himself: *Da'at Tevunot* 80, *Adir Bamarom* p.59a, *Ma'amar HaVichuach* 44, and *Ma'amar Yichud HaYirah*. Also see the Vilna Gaon at the end of his commentary to *Sifra D'tzniutah*, "Sod Hatzimtzum"; the beginning of HaRav m'Fano's *Yonat Elim*; Ramban's introduction to his commentary to the Torah, *Tikkunei Zohar* 17a (*Petach Eliyahu*), and *Moreh Nevuchim* 1:58-59.

⁴ As G-d is not "merely" the Creator of the universe en toto and of all of reality -- He's beyond all of it.

⁵ ... aren't like that, they ...

⁶ That's to say that He's not compelled by anything to act -- all of His actions are a pure product of His will to do this or that.

⁷ See 1:2:4.

⁸ This is where non-believers go wrong: they belittle G-d and think He is like us because He often has things come about the way we do things. But He is not at all like us, has none of our intentions or impulses, and *He is a wholly other sort of being*.

After all, among other things, *G-d is the only entity not to have been created*. Just consider how radical a departure that fact is from reality as we know it! It sets G-d apart from absolutely everything past, present, and future; and other than His utterly sublime, perfect, single, and simple perfection, it's the most singularly important factor separating us from Him.

⁹ Unlike human beings who are forced to do things as a consequence of our makeup. Indeed, G-d's forced to do nothing.

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

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