

DA'AT TEVUNOT - SECTION 1: CHAPTER 3

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Da'at Tevunot 1:3 (#'s 32 - 34 beginning)

1.

Some people are said to enjoy "global vision" in that they seem to see things on the ground from on high and to take the big-picture into account. Others, though, including Ramchal, experience what we'd term "*cosmic vision*". For while also seeing things from on high, these more exalted souls also see them from beginning to end with a clear view of ultimate consequences.

And so we find Ramchal making certain "cosmic" statements like the following here: "When we dwell on the whole array of G-d's actions" at creation, then on "every major deed He has brought about since He placed man on earth" *since* creation, to every deed that "He assured us through His holy prophets that He'd (eventually) bring about, it becomes entirely clear" that....

So let's see what we'd notice if we too could take all of that into account, since it will explain so many things to us about G-d.

2.

Before we get to that, though, there's something we'd need to understand clearly ¹. It's that even though we'd been told ² that G-d wants us to grasp Him and that we're capable of doing that in fact, it's nonetheless vitally important to know that *we could never grasp G-d's full and infinite being*. That's simply beyond us. We *can* understand though (and will experience in the end) a fragment of G-d's being.

After all, Ramchal points out, isn't it said, "Can you fathom the mystery of G-d? Or can you probe the limits of the Almighty?" (Job 11:7); indeed, "who can enunciate the mighty acts of G-d or fully declare all His praise?" (Psalms 106:2) ³.

As such, while we'll be discussing the overarching pattern of G-d's ways in the world, the direction that His actions are heading in, here in the universe, and His over-all goals -- which is all very buoyant, stunning, and electric unto itself -- we nonetheless won't be discussing G-d Himself ⁴.

In any event, our grasping even that relatively "small corner" of His being is what Ramchal and others assure us will bring us the great soul satisfaction we'd spoken of ⁵.

3.

And so Ramchal now depicts what one would come to realize if we were able to "dwell on the whole array of G-d's actions", on "every major deed He has brought about since He placed man on earth", and on everything "He assured us through His holy prophets that He'd (eventually) bring about" cited above.

It would be the fact that G-d's sovereignty and rule are supreme ⁶.

That's to say that the one over-arching theme we'd see playing itself out in the long course of time from creation to the end of time is the fact that G-d is fully in charge of everything -- despite an almost endless array of paradoxes that seem to contradict that. We'll expand upon this phenomenon shortly again and later on, as it's one of the major themes of *Da'at Tevunot*.

Footnotes:

¹ Keep in mind that what's to follow is one of the things we'd have to understand before we can know what we can draw upon to perfect ourselves -- which is the actual subject at hand, as indicated at the end of 1:2.

² See 1:2:1.

³ The truth be told, Ramchal will indeed be probing many hidden things in the course of this work. But let that serve as a lesson as to just what's hidden from us and beyond our inquiries and what only seems to be.

⁴ G-d is utterly, utterly unfathomable, but not only because we aren't privy to the mystery of His being, with the implication that eventually we just might. It's because He is beyond space and time, and exists on a "plane" that existed before He created reality and will continue to exist after reality is undone.

Nonetheless, in a manner of speaking, the one and only G-d can be said to have two "sides", if you will. There's His "private side" -- the way He is in His own element, where He is "Himself" and where no one other than He ever experiences Him. And then there's His "public side" -- the way He presents Himself outside of Himself, in the universe.

The point is that we won't be discussing His "private side" since we simply cannot, but we can and are even encouraged to dwell on His "public side".

Let it also be said that while He's not really Himself under the latter circumstances and is somewhat "restricted" there, nonetheless since we could potentially relate to Him under those circumstances, and since His assuming His "public side" best serves His ultimate goals, He presents Himself that way to us.

⁵ See 1:2:2 for a citation of this experience, and also see *Adir Bamarom* p. 396.

That's to say that while we may become dismayed by the fact that we can only discern a small part of G-d's being, all the same, discerning even that small part will bring us the unfathomable bliss promised us. In fact, the implication is that a revelation of a higher order would for all intents and purposes be just too much and would undo us.

⁶ This factor is termed the playing out of G-d's *Yichud*. The word *Yichud* is derived from *Echad*, one, and literally translates as "unity" or "uniqueness", but that's not the point here. It's closer to the idea of professing faith in the *Yichud Hashem*, "G-d's Oneness" (see *Sefer HaChinuch*, Mitzvah 417), i.e., in Monotheism, which is the gist of Ramchal point. What it comes down to is a belief in the doctrine that G-d alone is in control of the universe.

The term will be expanded upon later. See for example 1:5:5, 1:7:2, 1:10:1, etc. See R' Shriki's *Rechev Yisrael* pp. 167-228, and his important essay *HaYichud* in his commentary to *Da'at Tevunot* pp. 61-66. And see *Klach Pitchei Chochma* 1-4 for a definition of the concept as well as a discussion of its dynamics.

This chapter is discussed on an esoteric level in *Clallim Rishonim* 3. The discussion there touches upon and goes beyond our discussion of the notion of *Tzimtzum* in our notes to the previous chapters so it would help to put *Tzimtzum* (and what's beyond it) into context here in order to explain what's said in *Clallim Rishonim*.

Simply put, the Ari said at the beginning of *Eitz Chaim* that *before* G-d created the cosmos all that existed was Himself. Given that He's all-encompassing, infinite, and omnipotent, and that no mortal or finite being could exist in His environment, G-d "contracted" or "concealed" His full being so as to allow for an environment in which lesser beings could in fact exist, and that process is what's termed *Tzimtzum*.

By doing that, G-d then created an "empty space" -- a space devoid of His manifest presence -- which would indeed allow for finitude to exist. Ramchal's point in *Clallim Rishonim* is that that realm is what's under discussion here, since it's where G-d's full being cannot be experienced.

That empty space was said to have been created in the "center" of the primordial "space" that was suddenly "devoid" of Him. Ramchal makes the point that the word "center" in this context isn't to be taken literally, since we're talking about a realm that's beyond space and time; it's only the "center" in the sense that it occupies "center stage" when it comes to G-d's intentions for the universe.

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.

