

DA'AT TEVUNOT - SECTION 1: CHAPTER 19

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Da'at Tevunot 1: 19 (# 58)

1.

We're now at the end of the first section of *Da'at Tevunot* in which Ramchal has set out to explain how G-d interacts with us as well as what His ultimate plans for the universe are, and he's about to broach the recondite subject of the resurrection of the dead. His aim here, though, is to underscore the point made just before that it's G-d's will alone that steers everything ¹.

He'll do that by citing the well-known statement that "G-d is the site of the universe while the universe isn't the site of G-d" (*Breishit Rabbah* 68:9). But we'd need to uncover some things before we could come to understand how that statement illustrates the point that it's G-d's willingness alone that upholds the universe's very moorings.

2.

As Ramchal made the point early on ², we know that only G-d's existence is imperative ³. His point here is that everything else exists only because He *wants* it to ⁴. After all, aren't we told that G-d's will controls the great amorphous "upper waters" (*Breishit Rabbah* 4:3, *Ta'anit* 10A) and the colossal "support beams" that bear heaven and earth (*Chagigah* 12b); that it's His "outstretched arms" which the cosmos rest and depend upon for stability (*Ibid.*); and that He bears everything here down below from up above (*Yalkut Shimoni* 1:964) ⁵? But the truth of the matter is that G-d Almighty didn't need anything else: He single-handedly created and maintains the universe simply because He wants it to exist.

Knowing that, we can now understand the statement that "G-d is the site of the universe while the universe isn't the site of G-d". It means to say that while G-d Himself needs nothing in the background for Him to exist ⁶, the universe, on the other hand, simply couldn't exist without G-d in the background wanting it to exist ⁷. For, indeed, it's G-d's will alone that serves as the reality behind everything since nothing could exist without it.

For, He existed before anything else could have, though certain ancient thinkers denied that,

claiming instead that both He and the universe always existed. But that's not true as the universe isn't immortal -- G-d had to want to create it, as nothing could exist without that in the background. Indeed, G-d wasn't at all impelled by any "need" to create the universe: He created everything completely "out of the blue" and by dint of His own will.

3.

Ramchal then cites something that seems to contradict this. The psalmist wrote, "May G-d's glory endure forever; May He always be pleased with ⁸ His handiwork" (Psalms 104:31). Doesn't that seem to imply that it's His handiwork -- we -- who please Him; that somehow we're able to see to it that He's glorified forever; and that He's thus in some way better-off by our existence?

But of course that's not so, and the explanation is as follows. Being that nothing could exist without G-d's willingness for it to exist, the only reason why it could be implied that we have those abilities is because He *wanted* there to be entities that could please and glorify Him. Indeed, everything exists, is interacted with and continues to exist only because G-d wants that to be so ⁹.

Footnotes:

¹ Refer to the end of 1:18. Also see *Clallim Rishonim* 4.

² See 1:5 above and note 1 there.

³ I.e., only His existence is indispensable while everything else is expendable.

⁴ As such, everything then *becomes* indispensable because He wants it to exist. It's just that they're not inherently indispensable like G-d is. There are very many deep implications to this idea, but suffice it to say it follows that *whatever* exists is thus purposeful, intended, and indispensable, without exception.

⁵ That's to say that while these statements set out to explain the "mechanics" of G-d's control, G-d doesn't literally take hold of the upper waters or the support beams, and He doesn't have arms to bear the cosmos, but He does *will* all of those things to function the way they do so the universe can exist.

⁶ Because His existence is imperative and depends on nothing else, as we said.

⁷ That is, while G-d's willingness for the universe to exist functions as the "site", "space" or "setting" within which everything is situated -- its background, His existence requires nothing of the sort.

Understand it also as underscoring the fact that while G-d can contain the entire universe and thus all of reality, *and more*, in His being, His being is too large for the universe to contain.

⁸Or, *by*...

⁹Ramchal is making an important albeit erudite point here. He's reiterating the important idea that not only is G-d's being imperative but His will and thus His utter sovereignty (after all, what greater proof of His sovereignty is there than the fact that He need only stop willing for the universe to exist and it will!) are also utterly imperative.

See Ramchal's own comments to *Klach Pitchei Chochma* 1, and see our first note to 1:5 above.