

DA'AT TEVUNOT - SECTION 2: CHAPTER 7

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Da'at Tevunot 2:7 (# 80 [middle) – 81)

1.

The idea just discussed that the body models one thing about G-d while the soul models another was best explained by a quote from the Zohar (3:257b) ¹. The Zohar there also addresses the point we'd made early on that while we attribute many traits to G-d, those traits don't depict G-d Himself but rather what He does when He interacts with us ².

So it would do us well to address both of these things, then go on to relate them to the body and soul. The Zohar there also underscores the fact that the soul's perfection alludes to G-d's own perfection just as its unknowable nature alludes to G-d's own unknowable nature. So, we'll touch upon that, too.

2.

Let it first be said that the traits that G-d exhibits here weren't formed ad hoc when the world was created. For nothing about G-d ever suddenly appears out of the blue. G-d in fact always had the ability to manifest those traits within His being ³. It's just that there came to be a point when one trait or another was appropriate to what was happening in the world and needed to be "called upon" just then, if you will.

3.

Now, the truth be known, we can't even refer to G-d by a *name*, let alone depict Him ⁴. We call Him "G-d" in order to refer to Him, to be sure, but that's not His actual *name* since we can only apply a name to something or someone that we can grasp, and we simply can't grasp G-d. Also because a name *defines* whomever or whatever it refers to, and G-d Himself can't be defined ⁵.

We likewise can't attribute *traits* to something we can't define or comprehend. And yet we seem to comprehend certain things about G-d, don't we?

The point of the matter is that we comprehend what He *does* when He interacts with us, as when He seemingly exhibits compassion, governance, and the like. So we use those terms to depict Him even though those depictions don't befit G-d Himself. But we only do that because He allowed us to.

We can now better understand something of the makeup of the body and soul, given all of this.

4.

As we know, the body is comprised of various component parts with distinctive functions⁶ while the soul is a single, indivisible entity that's utterly unlike the body⁷.

And yet the soul lies behind the body's functions. It's what hears with the body's ears, sees with the body's eyes, and the like, even though the soul itself is beyond such things⁸. As such, the soul functions within the body's components⁹ and since the soul uses these component parts to do what it does, it's somehow associated with those functions.

This contrast between the soul's actual makeup and its functions in the body, then, is analogous to G-d's makeup and His use of the traits attributed to Him when He interacts with the world.

For, even though He Himself is utterly removed from such traits, He nonetheless wants them to be attributed to Him. And so by virtue of the fact that He uses those traits to function in this world, He's said to *have* those traits when He really doesn't and He hasn't any inherent connection to them¹⁰.

We'll soon see how this discrepancy between G-d's being and His functions in the world also helps us to understand the relationship between the body and the soul, which itself will explain the human situation at all junctures¹¹.

Footnotes:

¹This theme will prove to be the thrust of this chapter, but that won't become clear until the end since a number of other points will need to be made. That makes the chapter difficult, but keeping this idea in mind will help us to understand it. See footnote 10 below.

Ramchal explained this citation from the Zohar in a number of his works including *Haga'aot Otzrot Chaim* 9, *Klach Pitchei Chochma* 27, 29, and *Iggerot Pitchei Chochma V'Da'at*. Also see *Eitz Chaim* 1:1.

²See 1:12 above where many of the very same points made here are first offered. The difference will lie in the fact that this idea is tied in here with the relationship between the soul and G-d's interactions with the world.

³So they could be said to lie latent somewhere deep in the Upper Reaches somehow, but not manifest.

⁴The English term "G-d" itself, incidentally, is said to be derived from the Proto-Indo-European term for "that which is invoked" or prayed to, which thus refers to what G-d *does* rather than what He is.

⁵This is a stunning statement, since we attribute *many* names to G-d and call out to Him by those names in our prayers to Him and the like. But the truth of the matter is that the four-letter name of Y-H-V-H referred to in the Torah which is said to be His "definitive name" (as opposed to E-L-O-H-I-M and the like which refer to His traits) only serves to depict His immortality (i.e., it contains the Hebrew words for "was", "is", and "will be"). And, as the Kabbalists explain, the four letters of that name themselves actually stand for certain phenomena that function in creation and afterwards and the like, and have nothing directly to say about G-d Himself. But all of this is beyond the subject at hand.

⁶And those various functions are analogous to the different depictions of G-d, as we'll see.

⁷The soul's oneness is analogous to G-d's own oneness which is utterly unfathomable.

⁸Just like G-d's own being is behind every trait that He exhibits in the world even though He's beyond it.

⁹Just as G-d, who is unlike anything in this world, functions within it by means of various traits.

¹⁰This is the gist of what Ramchal is saying here. We already know that the body models one thing about G-d while the soul models another, as we indicated in footnote 1 above. He's saying here that that theme also plays itself out in the difference between G-d's essence and His role in the world *and the soul's*.

For, just as the soul is unknowable, singular and beyond the doings of the world, G-d is likewise unknowable, singular and beyond the doings of the world. Yet both G-d and the soul interact with the world. The point is that just as the soul only "uses" the body's many and variable parts to interact with the world even though it's removed from those body parts by nature, G-d likewise "uses" or exhibits many and variable traits to interact with the world even though in His essence He's removed from the world. So we see that the body models G-d's ways when He interacts with the world while the soul models His ways when He *doesn't* interact with the world.

¹¹This alludes to the five junctures of time to be discussed in 2:10 below.