

DA'AT TEVUNOT - SECTION 4: CHAPTER 14

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

1. Ramchal almost gives it away here. He says that "those sages who understand the process of G-d's governance" of the cosmos know something that few others do. They know that G-d has "decreed that there be various (Divine) attributes connected in many and various ways to each other, which the acts (of governance) automatically result from". That is, that there are Forces acting in the cosmic background that bring about changes here. The rest of us simply don't know that, is his implication; and he just about says (and this is one of the very few places in Da'at Tevunot where he does), that all of this touches upon ideas enunciated in Kabbalah.

As we'd indicated all along, our task isn't to offer that but to explain Da'at Tevunot in terms that the rest of us can grasp. So we'll continue to do that here, with this one exception. Ramchal insists on reiterating that whenever G-d interacts with the world, He doesn't do so Himself in His full Glory, because His Being is unfathomable, as we'd indicated [1]. So He interacts by means of certain "control switches" if you will, which the Kabbalists refer to as the Sephirot [2]. They are the "(Divine) attributes connected in many and various ways to each other" referred to above.

In any event, let's recall that the subject under discussion is Divine Justice. And Ramchal is explaining how G-d administers it through these "control switches".

2. His point here is that G-d's "switches" are all interconnected like chain-links; and they all join in the most intricately and perfectly balanced of ways to accomplish the specific judicial task at hand. Some of them interact linearly, with some acting as the cause of others or products of others still; some interact laterally, affecting each other in turn and by degrees like partners; and others seem to "feed into" or to be "fed by" one another, and the like.

He offers a down-to-earth illustration of this. He compares it to someone trying to grasp something. The first thing he'd do would be to try to form a picture of it in his mind. But that wouldn't be enough, as he'd simply be left with a picture of it and nothing else. He'd have to dwell on the idea by taking it apart in his mind element by element, considering and reconsidering the points made, and then reconnecting the parts until he finally grasped the whole thing.

The same is true of spiritual phenomena, he offers. The "control switches" also need to act as causes and effects to each other the way an image in the mind "causes" the mind to then be affected in

such a way that it breaks down the other factors into their various component-parts, to be rejoined piece by piece, with one "feeding" into another or being "fed by" it, and the like. The other point is that just as the mental process is very, very subtle, the spiritual process is too, and even much more so. [3]

3. In short, as Ramchal encapsulates this section here, the point of the matter is that G-d brought various "control switches" about that are related to each other quantitatively and qualitatively, and all so as to bring about His desired outcomes from beginning to end.

Some of the interactions between them depend upon our behavior, since they're reward and punishment based, and thus they allow for wrongfulness. Others of the interactions, though, don't depend on our deeds and are all meant to bring about the revelation of G-d's utter sovereignty and the undoing of all wrongfulness we'd referred to several times before.

The ones that depend on our deeds react to us tolerantly, intolerantly, or judiciously depending of course on the moral quality and quantity of our own actions. Needless to say, there are many and various admixtures of the three that play themselves out instance to instance. And in order to grasp the various processes you'd need to understand the makeup of these "control switches" and the full range of their interactions [4].

But we'd need to understand our own input even more so, if we're ever to draw from this information in ways that would benefit our spiritual station, which is the whole point of course. We'll turn to that in the following section.

Notes:

[1] See 1:3:2 above and elsewhere.

[2] See note 1 to 1:12.

[3] See R' Friedlander's notes 394-395, 397, 399-400 for reference to the Kabbalistic themes alluded to here. For other Kabbalistic references made in this chapter see R' Goldblatt's note 10 to the text, and his note 74 on p. 486 of his edition; and see R' Shriki's notes 126-127.

[4] His implication, which is clearer in the original and elsewhere in his writings, is that one is indeed to study Kabbalah.

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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