

DA'AT TEVUNOT - SECTION 5: CHAPTER 3

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

1. "You need to be aware of a major principle about man's Divine service", Ramchal cautions, and it's this. "Each and every person and thing depends upon G-d and His emanations", so no one is his own master or in total control of his actions, given that G-d grants us all the wherewithal and ability to do anything through those emanations. There's just one thing that sets humans apart from other created beings and grants us some modicum of independence, though, which is our aforementioned free will. For, as our sages put it, "everything is in the hands of Heaven except the fear of Heaven" (Berachot 33b).

That means to say that while each and everything in this world is under G-d's direct control, our reactions to everything on the other hand (termed our "fear of Heaven" to allude to our emotional response to things) are our own and no one else's. We can react as well and wholesomely or as poorly and noxiously as we care to; that's up to us alone.

So while we're just as dependant on G-d's emanations as everyone else, we humans do have this one thing over the rest: we're utterly free enough to make our own moral and spiritual decisions as to how to react to whatever happens to us or around us, and to establish our own stature. But that's not always true.

In fact, before we entered this world, when we were pure souls, we too were utterly dependent upon G-d's dictates and could do nothing on our own. As only an embodied soul -- a human being with the full flower of human potential for good or evil -- can make his or her own moral and spiritual choices [1]. In its pristine state, the soul hasn't any independent will and is utterly dependent upon G-d's own will.

2. That goes far to explain of course the great merit due the righteous -- those who willingly and independently chose good over evil, and reached their full human potential on their own. They're considered G-d's "partners" in the work of bettering and eventually perfecting the world. They deserve a lot, and receive it indeed.

Now, even though the rest of the Jewish Nation isn't out-and-out righteous, still and all, each one us is righteous to some degree or another and the whole of our people is righteous in the aggregate. That's why Ramchal refers to us as G-d's "intimates", for we too have a share in the ultimate perfection of the world. And we thus enjoy certain privileges that even pure souls do not.

For while pure souls can be said to cling to G-d in their pristine state as a "privilege" of their naturally high station and are therefore a little "embarrassed", if you will, by their nature, given that they themselves hadn't done anything to deserve that high rank [2], we flesh-and blood humans, who have to earn that closeness, needn't feel embarrassed by the largess granted us since it would have been earned.

3. Ramchal offers that there's a very appropriate analogy to the difference between ourselves and pure souls given the above found in the Zohar (1, 5a). It speaks there of some who function as G-d's more humble servants and others who function as His close servants and intimates. The former call out to the King when they're in need to be sure, and He answers their requests -- but back-handedly, if you will. When the latter, closer servants call out to the King, though, He turns right around to listen to them earnestly and "chats" with them about their needs before fulfilling them.

The same is true of us. When we're close to G-d, He faces us in close contact in return, if you will, because we purposefully turn to Him in prayer, in service, and in acts of charity, and because we cling onto His presence in love.

When we aren't on that plane though -- or before we are, in preparation for it -- we're still "nourished" by G-d through His emanations, much the way pure souls are before they come into this world to earn their merits. But like those souls, we too aren't spoken to head-on, if you will, by G-d, as we're not yet deserving of that. It's only when we will have reached our full human spiritual potential by taking hold of our free will to draw close to Him that we will attach onto His full presence in love.

Thus we see that there are two ways that both pure souls and humans experience G-d and interact with Him: either head-on or back-handedly.

Notes:

[1] See note 6 to 1:8 as well as 1:10:2, 1:11 and elsewhere above for the temporary nature of our free will.

For Kabbalistic references see Klallim Rishonim 28 as well as R' Goldblatt's notes 1, 10, and 17 and his notes 77-80 on pp. 487-488 of his edition, and see R' Shriki's seminal note 132 (on free will in a Kabbalistic light).

[2] See 1:1:3 and note 5 there for a fuller discussion of this element.

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