

RAMCHAL BIOGRAPHY: PART 3 □ KLACH PITCHEI CHOCHMA (□138 OPENINGS TO WISDOM□)

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Part Three: Klach Pitchei Chochma ("138 Openings to Wisdom")

1.

Klach Pitchei Chochma is one of those Ramchal-works that's unheard of by most but highly treasured by his enthusiasts for one and the same reason: because it expounds on and spells out Kabbalah fully and profoundly. We'll touch upon its Kabbalistic elements in the course of this essay to be sure but we won't delve into them at length since that's beyond this forum.

In fact, Klach (as we'll refer to it here, as many do) is a work within a work. For Ramchal wrote an argument for the study of Kabbalah -- that also acts as an introduction to -- entitled Ma'amar HaVeichuach ("A Discourse [that serves as] The Argument"), In it Ramchal set out to lay out what's important about the study of Kabbalah for those already well-grounded in other areas of Torah-study. He supplied three mechanisms within that work for the beginner to approach Kabbalah.

The first mechanism was a terse and succinct laying-out of the key Kabbalistic principles in ten short chapters. (It was later published as a separate work entitled Klallot Hallan ("The Principle Elements of The Tree [of Life]").) The second - and third - mechanism is Klach itself. We term it the second and third mechanisms within the larger work because Klach is comprised of two parts: 138 essential principles of Kabbalah set out straight, and a full explanation of those principles which Ramchal himself provided for the sake of clarity. So, again, what we have is a large work, along with two (or three) others within it, that all set out to explain Kabbalah.

Ramchal wrote several other such works of Kabbalistic principles, but what sets Klach apart from the rest of them is this. We're told (by Ramchal, which has been corroborated by the Vilna Gaon and several others of their ilk) that The Holy Ari's Kabbalah system is fraught with symbolism and is not to be taken literally. If that's the case, then what was The Ari actually talking about anyway? Ramchal set out to explicate just that in Klach (and elsewhere as well, though not as succinctly).

That's to say that Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai provided us with an breathtaking, mysterious gift (the Zohar) which he set in a beautiful locked box so as to keep it safe; The Ari provided us with the key for the box (i.e., his own writings), but when we unbolt it we're struck by the fact that the contents

themselves can't be make sense of ("They're stunning?" we'd say, "... but what do they mean?"); but now, thanks to Ramchal's Klach we can fully appreciate Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai's bequest.

2.

Here's something of a list of contents for Klach. It starts off with certain rather open and above-board subjects, and then becomes increasingly esoteric after a short while. So, for example, the first three of the 148 Openings are entitled: "G-d's existence, His will, and His reign", "G-d only wants to bestow goodness, (and so) even wrongdoing is a means by which He bestows goodness and by which His sovereignty is made manifest", and "The ultimate goal of creation is to bestow G-d's ultimate goodness upon His creatures" respectively. It soon goes from there to, "The make-up of the sefirot and what the Infinite meant to reveal through their contents", "The [spiritual makeup] of the twenty-two letters [of the Hebrew alphabet]", "Primeval Man and his gleam", "[How] The Beard discloses the administration of Chadar by means of the Three Crania" and the like.

There are other, less esoteric (albeit complex) subjects under discussion as well, including Adam and Eve's downfall, The World to Come, faith, Divine judgment, the seven days of creation, form and matter, the Jewish Nation, death, the function of mitzvot, the righteous, and the like.

We'll now delve somewhat into the gist of the first Opening.

3.

Let's first explore a telling statement Ramchal makes early on there.

"Kabbalah" he claims, "is first and foremost meant to exhibit the truth of the [Jewish] faith". His point is that what Kabbalah does so well is explain why we believe what we do, and by implication, why we do what we do as Jews. In other words, it's the backdrop to G-d's theatre set out right before our eyes; a parting of the great screen that allows us insight into ultimate truth.

"It [also] comes to explain" he adds, "how all ... [of creation] materialized out of the Supreme Will" rather than out of sheer nothingness and at random. "It [likewise] shows how everything is governed as it should be", rather than by chance, "by G-d" alone; and all "so as to bring the entire cycle of creation to perfection in the end." How dazzling a statement of purpose and Divine intention!

He also makes the following vital declaration. "We're not talking about G- d Himself whatsoever" in this work, instead we'll be "discussing G-d's Will alone, which is all-powerful and limitless" since "we're [only] permitted to speak of it." That's to say that whatever we touch on in this work has only to do with G-d's wishes for the universe - not with Himself. This is a profound and extraordinary idea which comes down to the following. G-d Himself -- as He is in His Being, utterly beyond all things having to do with space and time, which define our universe -- is thus utterly unfathomable. His wishes, though, can be fathomed (because He wants them to be). And so understand that all of Kabbalah as well as all of Jewish Thought only touch upon G-d's disembodied wishes. A world of things could be said about this, but space will not allow.

4.

Be that as it may, the first Opening's overarching statement reads as follows:

"The Infinite's Sovereignty ... lies in the fact that only His Will exists, and that no other will exists other than through Him. And so He alone is in control The entire structure is built on this foundation." This is clearly a profound statement of G-d's overarching presence in the universe and of the extent of His reach. But it's a rather difficult statement to understand (and to abide, frankly, it's that stunning). We're forced to offer only the following details.

Ramchal begins to explain the notion in his comments thusly. "G-d's sovereignty is the foundation of [the Jewish] faith and the root of wisdom". Hence it's the first thing to be covered.

The gist of the matter is that, "just as we're to believe ... that only G- d's existence is imperative" -- that G-d is the only Being who must exist for anything else, and that everything and everyone else is utterly expendable, "so too must we believe in the absolute nature of His power and will." That "just as His existence is imperative ... while everything else derives from Him -- so too, His will and power are imperative", which is to say that only "His power [and will] alone holds sway, and all other wills exist only in synch with this Will."

And the idea that, "the entire structure is built on this foundation" means to say that "everything brought into existence by G-d" hinges upon the fact and knowledge of G-d's overarching sovereignty.

May G-d grant us all the wherewithal to appreciate His presence in our midst!

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