

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 1:8

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

We'll now touch upon a vital point. Which is that G-d's Oneness doesn't only imply that He's the one and only Creator; it also says something about His very Being: that only He is **truly** one, as we'll explain, and that nearly everything else is one by circumstance alone. So let's delve into the difference between what Ibn Pakudah terms "true", bona fide opposed to mere "circumstantial" oneness.

We often use the term "one" to describe things that are **more** than one, in fact. As when we refer to a car, for example, which is actually an amalgam of many, many different parts, as a single entity. For a single car isn't one thing so much as as a bundle of "ones" (i.e., a combination of one motor, one steering wheel, one brake, etc.). We only call it "one" for convenience sake. After all, it would be unwieldy to say, "I'm going to take the combination of motor, steering wheel, brake.... for a drive." So "one" single car is an instance of a plural thing that's taken to be one thing by dint of circumstance.

Other things that aren't truly one-- though we take them to be-- are things that have properties and that experience change. Which is to say, **everything** we consider to be a single entity-- other than G-d and the number one, as we'll see.

For everything we know of experiences coming into being, then ceasing to be; everything is comprised of an essence (the thing itself) and properties; and everything experiences change either in composition, makeup, or state of being. Hence, nearly everything we know of is actually **an amalgam**, i.e., an array of components, experiences, and states of being. And we once again attribute "oneness" to things by dint of circumstantial and for convenience sake.

So what's "true" oneness?

Ironically, there are **two** forms of true oneness. There's "abstract" true oneness, and "actual" true oneness. The number "one" is an example of abstract true oneness, simply because it isn't an **instance** of any one thing so much as the **idea** of it (i.e., it doesn't describe any one thing specifically, it's merely the number one).

But something that's **actually, truly one** would have to be, first off, free of properties; and secondly, absolutely unsubject to change (in ways we indicated before). Thus it would have to be indescribable, unlike anything else, utterly independent, and it would be the root of everything else.

Hence only G-d is actually and truly one. For only He can be depicted in such terms.

There's one last detail, though. Can't "true oneness" be considered a property itself? After all, it describes G-d, doesn't it? Ibn Pakudah acknowledges that the point's well taken, but adds the following. When we refer to G-d as "truly one" what we're really doing is denying plurality in His Being, rather than attributing anything to Him (which is known as "negative attribution").

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