

THE THIRTEEN PETALLED ROSE DIVINE MANIFESTATION

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The Holy One, Blessed be He, has any number of names. All of these names, however, designate only various aspects of divine manifestation in the world, in particular as these are made known to human beings. Above and beyond this variety of designations is the divine essence itself, which has not, and cannot have, a name. We call this essence, or God-in-Himself, by a name that is itself a paradox: "the Infinite, Blessed be He."

This term, then, is meant to apply to the divine essence in itself, which cannot be called by any other name since the only name that can be applied to the very essence of God must include both the distant and the near—indeed everything. Now as we know, in the realms of abstract thought, such as mathematics and philosophy, infinity is that which is beyond measure and beyond grasp, while at the same time the term is limited by its very definition to being a quality of something finite. Thus, for example, there are many things in the world, such as numbers, that may have in-finity as one of their attributes and yet also be limited either in function or purpose or in their very nature. But when we speak of the Infinite, Blessed be He, we mean the utmost of perfection and abstraction, that which encompasses everything and is beyond all possible limits.

The only thing we are permitted to say about the Infinite then, would involve the negative of all qualities. For the Infinite is beyond anything that can be grasped in any terms - either positive or negative. Not only is it impossible to say of the Infinite that He is in any way limited or that He is bad, one cannot even say the opposite, that He is vast or He is good. Just as He is not matter, He is not spirit, nor can He be said to exist in any dimension meaningful to us. The dilemma posed by this meaning of infinity is more than a consequence of the inadequacy of the human mind. It represents a simply unbridgeable gap, a gap that cannot be crossed by anything definable.

There would, therefore, seem to be an abyss stretching between God and the world and not only the physical world of time, space, and gravity, but also the spiritual worlds, no matter how sublime, confined as each one is within the boundaries of its own definition. Creation itself becomes a divine paradox.

To bridge the abyss, the Infinite keeps creating the world. His creation being not the act of forming something out of nothing but the act of revelation. Creation is an emanation from the divine light; its secret is not the coming into existence of something new but the transmutation of the divine reality into something defined and limited into a world. This transmutation involves a process, or a mystery, of contraction. God hides Himself, putting aside His essential infiniteness and with holding His endless light to the extent necessary in order that the world may exist. Within the actual divine light nothing can maintain its own existence; the world becomes possible only through the special act of divine withdrawal or contraction. Such divine non-being, or concealment, is thus the elementary condition for the existence of that which is finite.

Still, even though it appears as an entity in itself, the world is formed and sustained by the divine power manifested in this primal essence. The manifestation takes the form of ten Sefirot; fundamental forces or channels of divine flow. And these Sefirot which are the means of divine revelation, are related to the primary divine light as a body is related to the soul; they are in the nature of an instrument or a vehicle of expression, as though a mode of creation in another dimension of existence. Or, the ten Sefirot can also be seen as an arrangement or configuration resembling an upright human figure, each of whose main limbs corresponds to one of the Sefirot. The world does not, therefore, relate directly to the hidden God-head, which in this imagery is like the soul in relation to the human semblance of the Sefirot; rather, it relates to the divine manifestation, when and how this manifestation occurs in the ten Sefirot. Just as a man's true soul, his inapprehensible self is never revealed to others but manifests itself through his mind, emotions, and body, so is the Self of God not revealed in His original essence except through the ten Sefirot.

The ten Sefirot taken together constitute a fundamental and all-inclusive Reality; moreover, the pattern of this Reality is organic, each of the Sefirot has a unique function, complements each of the others, and is essential for the realization or fulfillment of the others and of the whole.

Because of their profound many-sidedness, the ten Sefirot seem to be shrouded in mystery. And there are indeed so many apparently unconnected levels of meaning to each - the levels, moreover, appearing to be unconnected - that a mere listing of their names does not adequately convey their essence. To say that the first Sefirah, Keter ("crown"), is the basic divine will and also the source of all delight and pleasure, only touches the surface. As is true with Hokhmah ("wisdom"), which is intuitive, instantaneous knowledge, while Binah ("understanding") tends more to logical analysis. Daat ("knowledge") is different from both, being not only the accumulation or the summation of that which is known, but a sort of eleventh Sefirah - belonging and yet not belonging to the ten. Hesed ("grace") is thus the fourth Sefirah and is the irrepressibly expanding impulse, or Gedulah ("greatness"), of love and growth. Gevurah ("power") is restraint and concentration, control as well as fear and awe; while Tiferet ("beauty") is the combination of harmony, truth, compassion. Netzah ("eternity") is conquest or the capacity for overcoming; Hod ("splendor") can also be seen as persistence or holding on; and Yesod ("foundation") is, among other things, the vehicle, the carrier from one thing or condition to another. Malkhut (a kingdom), the tenth and last Sefirah is, besides sovereignty or rule, the word and the ultimate receptacle.

Keter	
Binah	Hokhmah
(Daat)	
Gevurah	Hesed
Tiferet	
Hod	Netzah
Yesod	
Malkhut	

All these Sefirot are infinite in their potency, even though they are finite in their essence. They never appear separately, each in a pure state, but always in some sort of combination, or details of such a combination, expresses a different revelation. The great sum of all these Sefirot in their relatedness constitutes the permanent connection between God and His world. This connection actually operates two ways; for the world can respond and even act on its own.

On the one hand, the ten Sefirot are responsible for the universal law and order, what we might call the workings of nature in the worlds. As such they mix and descend, contracting and changing forms as they go from one world to another, until they reach our physical world which is the final station of the manifestation of divine power. On the other hand, the events that occur in our world continuously influence the ten Sefirot, affecting the nature and quality of the relations between the downpouring light and power and the recipients of this light and power.

An old allegory illustrates this influence by depicting the world as a small island in the middle of the sea, inhabited by birds. To provide them with sustenance, the king has arranged an intricate network of channels through which the necessary food and water flow. So long as the birds behave as they are endowed by nature to behave, singing and soaring through the air, the flow of plenty proceeds without interruption. But when the birds begin to play in the dirt and peck at the channels, the channels get blocked or broken and cease to function properly, and the flow from above is disrupted. So, too, does the island that is our world depend on the proper functioning of the Sefirot; and when they are interfered with, the system is disrupted, and the disrupting factors themselves suffer the consequences.

In this sense, the entire order of the Sefirot with its laws of action and reaction, is in many ways mechanical. Nevertheless, man, who is the only creature capable of free action in the system, can cause alterations of varying degrees in the pattern and the operation. For everything man does has significance. An evil act will generally cause some disruption or negative reaction in the vast system of the Sefirot; and a good act, correct or raise things to a higher level. Each of the reactions extends out into all of the worlds and comes back into our own, back upon ourselves, in one form or another.

In this vast sublime order, the mitzvot - study and practice of the Torah, prayer, love, repentance - constitute only details or guidelines. The mitzvot teach us how certain acts, thoughts, and ways of doing things affect the Sefirot and bring about a desirable combination of blessedness and plenty, making the world better. In fact, before the performance of every mitzvah there are certain words to be said aloud - words intended to cause a great abundance to flow in from the higher worlds in order to illuminate our souls. Which means that every mitzvah has a specific essence through which it influences the system of the worlds and creates a certain kind of connection between the worlds and man. Thus, even though from many points of view our world is small, it can be seen as the point of intersection of all the other worlds, principally because of this power of human beings, creatures possessed of free will, to change the fixed order of things. It is as though our world were a kind of control room from which the ten Sefirot in their various possible combinations can be made to operate.

A transgression - that is, a disruption of the order in the system has two results. First, it causes a kind of short circuit and skews or distorts the descent of divine plenty. Second, the shock set off by this short circuit stimulates the world of the kelipot the outer shells, and causes them in turn to set off a negative charge within the particular system that belongs to the life of the transgressor. This is what is meant by the reward and punishment that are said to follow on every

action of a human being. Nor is it only a deed that so affects the system of the Sefirot; it is also a thought, an Intention, or any of the various stirrings of the human soul. For Instance, whenever a person prays - whether he prays in the prescribed manner which is oriented toward the higher worlds, or whether he engages in private prayer, uttered aloud or merely contemplated in the heart-he is able to influence the order of events. In fact, a man's spontaneous inward motions, those that have nothing to do with either his overt actions or his conscious thoughts, frequently reach up to and act on higher levels. When a man prays to be cured of sickness, for example, he is asking for grace, for a change in a vast network of systems: from the fixed system that apportions good and evil as a whole to those secondary and fluctuating systems from which descends the physical realm with its own portion of pains and miseries. He is, in other words, requesting a rearrangement within a huge complex of interlocking orders, both in the higher worlds and in the world of nature.

This pattern of divine manifestation and human relation to it may seem to be mechanical in its determinism, but it is depicted with far more personal and symbolic imagery in the scriptural sources. That is to say, in the various religious and philosophical works of the Jewish tradition, a variety of allegorical signs and figures of speech are used to signify the same thing; so that we may read of the eye of God scanning the face of the earth, the ears of God hearing all sounds, of the Holy One, Blessed be He, being pleased or angry, smiling or weeping. All these, of course, relate to the pattern of His manifestation through the ten Sefirot in their various configurations, analogous as the Sefirot are in their parts to the organs and limbs of the human body (man being made in the image of God in his body as well as in his soul). We thus have a paradigm of the essential relationships in the universe, if not of the essences themselves; and we may speak of the right hand of God as the force or power that gives, that pours out the abundance, that helps and loves; and we may speak of the left hand as the force that restrains and protects, reduces and inflicts, recognizing the harmony, or the living connection, between everything and everything else in the system of the Sefirot.

Thus, too, when the prophets describe their sublime vision of God, His revealing Himself in the Sefirot they have to present the vision in a human context in order to be true to its emotional significance for men. Their descriptions may be considered as allegorical frameworks, using man as a metaphor for the Supreme: both in the human details they employ and in the use of the idea of man as a complete entity, a microcosm. The human hand then becomes analogous to Hesed ("grace") which in another configuration can be represented as water, or light, or any other variation of a symbolic metamorphosis. Therefore, too, when someone who prays or performs a mitzvah relates to the higher system, he may impose images upon that system, metamorphoses of the same higher force, to the point of regarding God as a humanlike figure sitting on a throne, every feature of which expresses a revelation within the Sefirot, in different worlds, one above the other.

Even though the order of forces is almost infinite in its Immensity and complexity and seems mechanical and automatic and even though what seems mechanical includes not only matter and the laws of nature but also the operations of laws beyond nature, of good and evil, intention and prayer, thought and feeling-this order is never the less transfused with the flow of divine plenty. And in this order man, though only a tiniest part of the whole, is also an effectual and meaningful actor in it.

The fact that man is only a very small detail, a dot and less than a dot as against the Infinite, is balanced by the fact that it is precisely he in his smallness who gives each of the parts its

significance. Since there is an order of causes and influences, and a prime mover of all the worlds, every single person can, in his deeds, thoughts, and aspirations, reach to every one of these points of existence. Not only is man free to act on the system, each of his deeds has-in all the worlds, in terms of space and time and of the Supreme or Ultimate Reality- immeasurable significance. In contrast to all the automatic patterns of forces functioning in the cosmos, man alone moves independently within the system. He alone is important to the manifestations because he can change them, cause them to move from one level to another. Furthermore, man-dwelling as he does in two different worlds and undergoing profound inner struggles is given the chance to rise far beyond the level of our existence and the place in which he spiritually finds himself, and to act on higher worlds without end.

Precisely because the Divine is apprehended as an infinite, not a finite, force, everything in the cosmos, whether small or large, is only a small part of the pattern, so that there is no difference in weight or gravity between any one part and another. The movement of a man's finger is as important or unimportant as the most terrible catastrophe, for as against the Infinite both are of the same dimension. Just as the Infinite can be defined as unlimited in the sense of being beyond everything, so He can be defined as being close to and touching everything. Here is the point of the personal human contact, for in spite of the vastness and order of all those systems, the independent acts of man - his mitzvot and his transgressions -cannot be explained in terms either of mechanics or, on the other hand, of magic.

When one relates only to the one is not relating to anything real. For deeds or thoughts do not operate by themselves separate from the Infinite, He who is the very life of the worlds. All the systems of the ten Sefirot, even though they carry out the laws of nature and beyond nature, have nothing real in themselves. In relation to the Infinite Light Himself they are less than a nothingness clothed or covered by an appearance of something real; they are only names, designations, points of departure for establishing a relationship, having nothing substantial in themselves. So that prayer, repentance, the cry of man to God, even though they are dependent upon and cut across a limited, deterministic system, neither work upon nor even address that system.

when man reaches certain heights, he learns more about God, the order and arrangement of things, relationships between one action and another, and the power and significance of law. Nevertheless, in the last resort the relationship to the Divine is individual. It is a completely private affair, the relationship of the single man in all his uniqueness of self and personality, oblivious of the infinite distance between himself and God, precisely because God in His being infinitely distant, beyond any possible contact is Himself the One who creates the ways, the means of contact, in which every, though, every tremor of anticipation and desire on the part of man work their way until they reach the Holy One Himself, the Infinite, Blessed be He.