

Hegione Ouziel

Part 1

Harav Ben Şion Me'ir Ḣai Ouziel

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Ben Şion Meir Ḥai Uzziel

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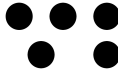
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Contents

Part 1: Divine Rewards	2
Chapter 1: The Creation of the World	4
Chapter 2: The Creation of the Human Race	7
Chapter 3: The Image of God	8

Part 1

Divine Rewards

Chapter 1

The Creation of the World

Praised be the Creator and exalted be the Maker, who created his world with wisdom and made Man, the crown of creation, in his image, as it is written, “*Bereshit bara Elohim*” — “In the beginning God created...”¹ The Aramaic translation known as the Targum Yerushalmi translates this verse, “With wisdom God created,” and the message hiding between the lines of this translation is stated explicitly by the holy Zohar: “Rabbi Yehudai said, ‘what is “*Reshit*”? It is the wisdom by which the world is supported, leading into sublime and secret mysteries”’.² “What is ‘*Reshit*’? It is wisdom, the innermost point about which the Psalm says, ‘All glorious is the king’s daughter within.’³ It is the awe which is the first commandment, concerning which the book of Proverbs says, ‘The awe of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.’⁴”⁵ King David wrote similarly in the Psalms: “O Lord, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom you have made them all.”⁶

Knowledge of this wisdom, in so far as a human being can attain it, acts as the cause of love and awe for He who created the world and sustains it, as Maimonides writes in his halachic code, “When a person considers these things, and is aware of all created beings from the angels and the heavenly spheres to human beings and others, and perceives the wisdom of the Holy One, Blessed be He, in all the beings he created and formed, his love for God will increase; his soul will thirst and his body will yearn to love God, Blessed be He. He will be in fear and

1 Genesis 1:1.

2 Introduction to the Zohar 3b.

3 Psalm 45:14.

4 Proverbs 1:74.

5 *Tikkunei Hazohar, Tikkun* 30.

6 Psalm 104:24.

in awe due to his lowliness, his worthlessness, and his insignificance ... he will see himself as a wretched and shameful object, empty and lacking.⁷

This is exactly the same idea as that expressed by the *Tikkunei Zohar*: "This is wisdom ... this is awe ... concerning which it is written, 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.'"

This is one of the cornerstones of the world's progress towards perfection, and King Solomon, the wisest of all men, summed it up in a few short words: "I know that whatever God makes, shall last for ever; nothing can be added to it, nor any thing taken away from it; and God has made it, so that men should be in awe of Him."⁸ Ribbi Yehuda said, "God created the world only so that he should be held in awe, as is written, 'God has made it, so that men should be in awe of Him.'"⁹ Maimonides interpreted this verse as referring to the eternity of the world and the renewal of its wonders: "He declares in these words that the world has been created by God and remains for ever. He adds the reason for it by saying, 'Nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it:' for this is the reason for the perpetuity, as if he meant to say that things are changed in order to supply that which is wanting, or in order to take away what is superfluous. The works of God being most perfect, admitting no addition or deduction, must remain the same for ever. It is impossible that anything should exist that could cause a change in them. In the conclusion of the verse, Solomon, as it were describes the purpose of exceptions from the laws of Nature, or an excuse for changes in them, when he says, 'And God doeth it (viz., He performs miracles) that men should fear before him.'"¹⁰

Maimonides means that when things happen outside the laws of nature, the reason for it is to make people believe that they are

⁷ *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah*, 2:2, 4:12.

⁸ Ecclesiastes 3:14.

⁹ bShabbat 31a.

¹⁰ Guide to the Perplexed 2:28, trsl. Friedlander.

God's creation, and are like clay in the hands of a potter who can do whatever he wishes with the world and everything it contains, and so that they will be in awe of Him.¹¹ All of this is summed up in Ribbi Yehuda's statement that "God only created His world," i.e. the laws of nature and the miracles constantly present in it are God's world, which He created to include both permanence and wonderful variety, "so that the work of his hands should be in awe of him." From this we learn that the world, as a whole and in all its details, was created through wisdom, and its objective is the perfection of human beings, who were created possessing marvellous wisdom possessed by no other creature, in order that they might attain wisdom and knowledge together with awe and love for God. That is the only true wisdom, from which all other branches of knowledge spring like branches from the trunk. They are all descendants and subdivisions of it, as the Rabbis said, "God has nothing in his world but the awe of Heaven, as it is written, 'And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God demand of you except to be in awe,' and it is written, 'And he said to Adam "Behold [*Hen*] — fear of God is wisdom,'¹² since '*Hen*' is Greek for 'one'."¹³

¹¹ Shem-Tov ibn Falaquera's commentary *ad loc.*

¹² Job 28:28.

¹³ bShabbat 31b.

Chapter 2

The Creation of the Human Race

The creation of the human race was the final stage of creation, since it unified all created beings. All of the visible and concealed forces in creation are dead bodies waiting for human action to discover them and activate them. What is more, human beings have a special power which is not shared even by the angels: the image of God, as the verse says, "God created Man in his own image." The rabbis commented on this verse, "Beloved is Man who was created in God's image, but a special love was shown when it was revealed to him that he was created in God's image."¹⁴

In other words, the human race is more favoured than all creation since it was created in the divine image, and a special favour was made known to man when he was told that he was created in the divine image. As Maimonides writes, "Making known the extent to which we are favoured is a favour in its own right. Sometimes someone is granted a favour out of pity, and this is done discreetly so that he should not feel ashamed."¹⁵ Rabbenu Yonah also writes, "Man would have been favoured by being created in the divine image even if it had not been made known to him that he was created in the divine image, but he was favoured after being created in God's image and granted the additional favour of being told of this."¹⁶

¹⁴ Avot 3:14.

¹⁵ Commentary to the Mishna *ad loc.*

¹⁶ *ibid.*

Chapter 3

The Image of God

“And God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him.” This verse does not specify what “the image of God” means, and this has caused error among the ignorant, who lack the image of God and are unaware of His presence within themselves. They punctuate the verse incorrectly and read it, “In the image, God created him”, as if God created man in the image. Ibn Ezra rejected this incorrect and misleading interpretation.¹⁷ Rashi also wrote “God showed special favour by creating humans in his image ... and anyone who distorts the meaning by saying that he was created in the image is guilty of misbelief.”¹⁸

Ibn Ezra continues, “[Sa’adia] Ga’on interprets ‘in our image, in our likeness’ as ‘ruling,’ by which he means in the image that He saw in wisdom as being good, and for the honour of the human race this was attributed to God.” In other words, Sa’adia Gaon’s interpretation of the verse is that man was created in the image that God saw as good, and “in God’s image” means in the image of greatness of honour, as in the verses “they went out of His land”,¹⁹ and “The earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof.”²⁰

This should never have been written: Ibn Ezra is putting a false interpretation into Sa’adia’s mouth. Here is what Sa’adia actually wrote, translated from the Arabic: “God created man in his image, He created him as a ruler.” That is, the image of God in man is the image of rulership, just as the word *elohim* in Hebrew means both “God” and

¹⁷ Genesis 1:27.

¹⁸ Avot *loc. cit.*

¹⁹ Ezekiel 36:20.

²⁰ Psalm 24:1.

“judges,” as in the verses “the owner of the house shall approach *elohim*,”²¹ “the cause of both parties shall come before *elohim*; he whom *elohim* condemn,”²² and “Thou shalt not curse *elohim*.”²³ Sa’adia also translates “The sons of *elohim* saw the daughters of men”²⁴ as “the sons of the powerful,” which is similar to Onkelos’ Aramaic translation and Rashi’s commentary “The sons of the rulers and the judges.”

So when he writes “He created him as a ruler,” it is intended as an explanation of the meaning of “in His image” – i.e. that the image of man is the image of rule and domination, which is called “*elohim*,” and this is the image of God as it is revealed to us in his absolute power. This is clear because Sa’adia did not write “God created him as a ruler.” but “He created him as a ruler,” clearly showing that man’s domination is derived from the image of the Creator, which is an image of magnitude and significance. This is the image of God which he bestowed on the descendants of Adam, as in the blessings laid down by our sages: “Blessed be He Who bestowed a portion of His wisdom to those who revere Him” and “Blessed be He Who bestowed a portion of His honour on flesh and blood.”²⁵ He states this more explicitly in his book, as follows: “Among the Biblical utterances, now, with a figurative meaning is the statement of Scripture: *And God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him* (Gen. 1:27). This [linking of the image with God], I must explain, is merely a way of conferring honor. That is to say just as, even though all lands belong to Him, God honored one of them by saying: “This is My Land,” and although all mountains are His, He honored on mountain by saying: “This is My mountain,” so did He, [although] all forms are His, honor one of them by saying: “This is

²¹ Exodus 22:7.

²² *ibid* 8.

²³ *ibid* 27.

²⁴ Genesis 6:2.

²⁵ bBerachot 58a, MT Hilchot Berachot 10:11.

my form, by way of distinction.”²⁶ Here Sa’adia is clearly stating that he understands the expression “in His own image, in the image of God created He him” in the sense of magnitude and significance. Thus he intended to dismiss the error of anthropomorphism and explain the repetition of the word “image”, by explaining the image of the Creator in man is the image of honour and supremacy given to man because of his significance and unique characteristic of dominion and rule, which is the image of God, the one King and Rule of the world and of the human that he created, as the verse says, “Yours, Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honour come from you; you are the ruler of all things.”²⁷

²⁶ *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* 2:9, transl. Samuel Rosenblatt, Yale University Press 1948.

²⁷ I Chronicles 29, 11–12.