

HEAVEN ON EARTH

Reflections on the Theology of
the Lubavitcher Rebbe,
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

זצוקללה"ה נבג"מ זי"ע



by

Rabbi Faitel Levin



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KEHOT PUBLICATION SOCIETY
770 Eastern Parkway / Brooklyn, New York 11213

HEAVEN ON EARTH

REFLECTIONS ON THE THEOLOGY OF
THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE
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770 Eastern Parkway • Brooklyn, New York 11213
(718) 774-4000 • FAX (718) 774-2718

Order Department:

291 Kingston Avenue • Brooklyn, New York 11213
(718) 778-0226 • FAX (718) 778-4148
www.kehotonline.com

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Levin, Faitel.

Heaven On Earth : reflections on the theology of the Lubavitcher Rebbe /
by Faitel Levin.

p. cm.

1. Schneerson, Menachem Mendel, 1902-1994 2. Judaism—Doctrines. 3. Hasidism.
4. Habad. I. Title.

BM755.S288 L48 2000
296.3'092—DC21

00-020851

Printed in the United States of America

CONTENTS

PREFACE	VII
FOREWORD	IX
ONE / THE CONCEPT	
1. A Down To Earth Weltanschauung	3
2. A Synopsis of the <i>Dirah Betachtonim</i> System	6
TWO / METAPHYSICS REVIEWED	
3. Cosmology / A Hierarchy of Realities	27
4. Diversity and Unity	34
5. The G-d-World Relationship	43
6. The Drama of Creation	54
7. The Mystical Experience and Asceticism	63
8. The Language of <i>Dirah Betachtonim</i>	75
9. The Logic of <i>Dirah Betachtonim</i>	79
10. Religious Devotion	85
THREE / IN FOCUS	
11. The Nature of G-d	91
12. The Human / Body and Soul	104
13. Mitzvot / Their Spiritual Role and Function	114
14. The Afterlife	123
15. History / A <i>Dirah Betachtonim</i> Perspective	128
16. Sociology / The Practical Application of <i>Dirah Betachtonim</i>	138
APPENDIX / עצמות AND עצם	145
NOTES	153
INDEX	161
SOURCES	169

PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of blessed memory, was responsible for the revival of Jewish life and the Jewish experience in all parts of the world. A visionary in his times, the Rebbe embraced all issues of import to Jews, to the moral condition of society, and to the spiritual consciousness of humanity.

The Rebbe was a formidable scholar, prolific in both mystical and legal dimensions of Torah. His unique analytical style of thought has resulted in a monumental contribution to Jewish scholarship. More than 200 volumes of his talks, writings, correspondence and responsa have been published to date.

In celebration of the centennial of the birth of the Rebbe, we present Rabbi Feitel Levin's personal reflections on the theology of the Rebbe, culled from the vast body of the Rebbe's scholarship and assembled into a distinct weltanschauung.

Special thanks to Rabbis Yosef B. Friedman, Zalman Lent, Yoel Kranz, Dovid Olidort, Shmuel Marcus, and Avraham Vaisfiche.

KEHOT PUBLICATION SOCIETY

11th of Nissan 5762

FOREWORD

The Lubavitcher Rebbe's monumental religious projects are well known, but less familiar is his formidable theological prowess and his unique theological weltanschauung that has in fact served as the inspiration for his social programs. Over the course of decades, in numerous talks and writings, the Rebbe probed the depths of Scripture, the Talmud, the Midrash, the philosophical, Kabbalistic and Chasidic literature, offering both new insight to numerous texts, as well as original perspectives on the entire range of general metaphysical questions and Jewish philosophical issues. It appears fair to say that his comments on these matters amount to a comprehensive and consistent theological system, which has even its own logical infrastructure. However, information related to this system is scattered throughout the Rebbe's numerous speeches and writings, at times fully expressed and at times in mere nuance. I attempt in this book to present this theology as the comprehensive and integral system it is.

It should be noted, that I have taken the liberty to paraphrase as well as to provide analogies to facilitate the presentation of unfamiliar concepts. Generally, as its cover implies, this book should be treated as no more than the author's personal reflections on the Rebbe's teachings. As for style, I have

chosen to adopt neither the posture of the polemicist who preaches the superiority of his doctrine, nor that of the critic who assesses and evaluates, but rather something akin to that of the tour-guide who wishes to familiarize his fellow travelers with the local terrain and to highlight to them its notable features.

In truth, to do justice to the task undertaken here it is necessary to devote a work of far greater proportions, undertaking a careful scholarly study, setting the thought-system under discussion against the background of other Jewish systems, and more specifically against earlier Chasidic writings, and moreover, earlier Chabad-Lubavitch teachings. Such a work would aim to demonstrate where the Rebbe interprets earlier Chasidic texts in a unique light or offers totally new insight.

But as the years have passed, preoccupation with other matters, for better or for worse, has deprived me of the opportunity to realize this goal.

Consequently, this work is not without considerable shortcomings. First, the work is not exhaustive but merely illustrative of the Rebbe's theology. Second, in a rather arbitrary way, it casts only some topics against the background of but some earlier thought systems, though usually the systems of major importance. Third, and most important, it is not free of generalizations when it portrays concepts as the Rebbe's original insight, as some of these ideas are to be found, at least in some form, in previous writings (the Chabad Chasidic classic popularly known as *Samach-Vov* would be a notable example).

Nevertheless, it appears justified to maintain, as this book does, that the general thrust of the Rebbe's theology, whilst firmly rooted in classic Chasidic teachings, is strikingly innovative. Indeed, even those relevant perceptions that were expressed previously are no longer isolated thoughts, but are

FOREWORD

now incorporated into a total system. Where he is not the creator of the building blocks, the Rebbe is the master architect who incorporates these blocks into an impressively innovative edifice, in which, in turn, each brick assumes new meaning. There is perhaps nothing as telling as the fact that in his index to the classic Chasidic work, *Tanya*, first published in 1953, the Rebbe did not even mark an entry for *Dirah Betachtonim*, the key phrase of his theological system. It was only after several decades of expounding this theology that the Rebbe personally added the entry.

The Rebbe has furthered many Chasidic teachings to their logical conclusion, thereby continuing the tradition of the great Chasidic leaders to progressively reveal the hidden mystical dimension of Judaism. And it is these teachings that this book attempts to paraphrase.

More than two decades have passed since this book was originally conceived, some fifteen years since it was initially committed to writing, and more than a decade since the Rebbe referred it to Agudas Chasidei Chabad's publishing department. As the book gathered dust, the Rebbe added countless new insights to its subject matter. (English style has also changed during this time; particularly, the once pervasive use of the masculine gender is, appropriately, no longer normative.) I nevertheless leave the book as it stands, in the hope that though somewhat dated it remains an acceptable contribution towards understanding the remarkable theology of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Rabbi Faitel Levin

Melbourne, Australia
11th of Nissan 5762

SECTION ONE THE CONCEPT

A DOWN TO EARTH WELTANSCHAUUNG

A SYNOPSIS OF THE DIRAH BETACHTONIM SYSTEM

CHAPTER ONE

A DOWN TO EARTH WELTANSCHAUUNG

Since the dawn of his creation, man has been fascinated by the tensions that arise between his mind and body, between the spiritual and the physical, between the immediate and the transcendent. On the one hand, he finds himself operating through a variety of bodily faculties—he sees with his eyes, hears with his ears and absorbs nourishment through his mouth; but on the other, he finds his mind drifting afield, exploring horizons far and wide, his spirit soaring free and far beyond. Similarly, the reality man encounters outside himself appears on the one hand observable, controllable; but at the same time, it persistently defies his grasp, subject to forces, mysterious, unknown. Man finds himself in the here and now, yet hears echoes from an awesome beyond.

It is this dissonance between man's body and soul, this discord between the physical and the spiritual, which gives rise to the study of metaphysics; it is this friction which fires the mystic; this tense mutuality that forms the stage upon which the drama of religion unfolds. In *metaphysical* speculation man probes the relationships between the known and the unknown, the real and the ideal, between G-d, World and

HEAVEN ON EARTH

Man, searching for answers to the eternal questions: Who is man, body or soul? Why and how does G-d relate to the world as we know it? *Religious* man does not merely reflect and inquire; for him the question mark, as it were, becomes an exclamation point: he *responds* to the spiritual, defines his role in life vis-à-vis the transcendent. And the *mystic* is veritably obsessed with this dichotomy, soaring up and away from the physical to merge with the spirit, away from the strictures of body and self to dissolve in the transcendent All.

Note, that throughout these enterprises, whether it be casual metaphysical speculation, normative religious activity or intense mystical experience, one thing remains constant: the firm premise that the physical world in which we live is “lower” than the spiritual, that the mind is more lofty than the body, that the finite is restrictive whereas the transcendent is free. The arrow, as it were, points sharply upward.

This book, however, presents a theology that admires the physical, respects the body and aspires for the immanent. Here is a world-outlook that regards specifically that which is most physical and finite as the arena for the greatest religious endeavor and achievement. Not that this weltanschauung is anti-mystical, dismissing the transcendent to the realm of the irrelevant, preferring to deal with hard and fast reality. To the contrary, it is a theology that develops within a mystical framework and indeed draws its sustenance from the entire gamut of mystical concepts, perceptions and experiences. But nevertheless, it insists that true spirituality is to be experienced in the physical, that ultimate transcendence is to be found in the immanent, that the most mystical encounter of all is to be attained in the here and now. According to this revolutionary world-outlook, the metaphysical, religious and mystical arrows point sharply downward.

THE CONCEPT

Accordingly, this system provides unique insight into the central place of the performance of physical *mitzvot* (religious requirements) in Judaism. For this theology emphasizes that the most important area of the Jew's religious endeavors, the ultimate vehicle by which he creates a link with his G-d, is specifically via the performance of physical *mitzvot*, or even by sleeping or eating when undertaken in order to acquire adequate strength to serve G-d. It is, claims this world-view, binding straps of hide to the arm and head (*tefillin*) rather than prayer, consuming fine meals (on Shabbat or Festivals, for example) rather than meditation, wherein lies man's ultimate connection with the Divine.

Naturally, this appears to be not only in sharp contrast to conventional religious thinking, but philosophically quite implausible. Indeed, a totally new perspective on man, world and G-d needs to be learned in order to appreciate this world-outlook. The following chapter offers a short synopsis of this system, and later chapters present a more comprehensive overview of this here-and-now oriented *weltanschauung*, originally expounded by the Lubavitcher Rebbe in thousands of essays and talks.

Few Hebrew terms will be used in this book, but one such term will greatly facilitate our presentation: *Dirah Betachtonim*. This is the term we will use to refer to this revolutionary world-outlook; since the primary basis for this thought system is the brief Midrashic statement: "G-d desired to have a *Dirah Betachtonim*,"¹ that is, "a dwelling place in the lower realms." It is in particular the thorough processing of this Midrashic statement at the hands of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, extracting every iota of its meaning, that has resulted in the ideas that represent the theological system we shall henceforth refer to as *Dirah Betachtonim*.

CHAPTER TWO

A SYNOPSIS OF THE DIRAH BETACHTONIM SYSTEM

One of the aspects of Judaism that has most puzzled thinkers through the ages is the importance it attaches to specific modes of behavior. The Torah prescribes six hundred and thirteen obligations, many of them concerned with the minutiae of everyday life, requiring specific physical acts. The observant Jew must bind cowhide to his arms (*tefillin*), must wear fringes of wool on his clothing (*tzitzit*), must partake of and refrain from specific foods. Even the Sabbath, the most religious day of the Jew's week, a day ostensibly set apart for matters of the spirit, appears at best burdened with thousands of laws governing the minutest of actions, and at worst, a day devoted to indulgence in sumptuous meals ushered in by a cup of alcoholic drink.

Many have wondered: Should not religion be preoccupied with matters of the soul? Should not the bulk of Jewish religious literature, the major portion of time devoted to religion, and generally the primary arena for Jewish expression pertain

THE CONCEPT

to man establishing a relationship with G-d in his heart and mind, rather than numerous do's and don'ts concerning apparently mundane matters?

Now, classical Jewish thinkers have, of course, defined a variety of roles for physical mitzvot. For example, they are needed in order to regulate our physical side, enabling our spirit to engage in true worship; or alternatively, that the objects and acts involved in mitzvot are symbolic of spiritual realities or devotional states. But such approaches do not seem to justify the central place accorded physical obligations by Judaism.

Activities such as prayer, meditation, even fasting, appear to be appropriate modes of worship. These, it seems, are ideally suited for achieving the worshiper's goal: They enable him to set his body aside, to rise above his natural surroundings and become more spiritual, to move closer to G-d. But when laying *tefillin*, wearing *tzitzit* or eating a Shabbat meal, though the worshiper's acts are directed towards G-d, he evidently retains his involvement with his carnal, mundane self, much as he is still concerned with ordinary, tangible objects such as leather, wool or food—hardly appropriate, it appears, for ideal, central worship.

The *Dirah Betachtonim* system, however, provides new insight into the role of physical mitzvot, surprisingly pointing out that it is in fact specifically these acts that bring man to the greatest spiritual heights, beyond the reach of what are generally considered more spiritual forms of worship. This thought-system maintains that upon closer consideration it can be demonstrated that the premise that underlies much of the conventional preference for “higher” worship, is in fact mistaken—that in fact the precise reverse is true. Specifically physical, mundane actions directed towards G-d represent the acme of religious endeavor; it is specifically through these “lower” forms of worship that the human realizes true communion with G-d.

HEAVEN ON EARTH

The substantiation of this position will require some metaphysical exploration. Religious endeavor represents, of course, the establishing of relationships between man and G-d, as well as making reality more G-dly. It follows, therefore, that a better understanding of G-d, man and reality will enhance the prospects of correctly assessing the relative values of various types of worship. Hence, during the course of this book we shall learn to discern various dimensions of G-d, of man and of reality—and this exercise will bring us to the surprising conclusion that mundane physical worship reaches deeper into the soul of man, deeper into the substance of reality and deeper into the G-dhead, as it were, than does spiritual worship.

In this chapter we shall find in brief, and in later chapters in greater detail, that the significance of physical worship can be appreciated in two contexts: First, it is specifically the “lower” forms of worship that manifest the *infinity* of man’s spiritual capabilities, as well as G-d’s true *infinity*; second, and most important, it is specifically these forms of worship that relate to the Divine Essence, in a manner involving the *essence* of man and reality.

CONTEXT 1 – INFINITY

MAN’S SPIRITUAL SCOPE

It is true that when performing a physical mitzvah, the physical act in and of itself is not concerned with the intellectual or emotional experience of G-d, as would be the case during meditation and prayer. Here, neither the knowledge of G-d nor G-d’s love nor His awe possess the mind and heart of the worshiper as they do during higher forms of worship. But on the other hand we might note, man’s heart and mind are his *naturally* more sublime faculties. They are intrinsically more G-dly. Thus, when man utilizes the inner recesses of his heart and mind to establish a relationship with G-d through

THE CONCEPT

prayer or meditation, he is establishing a relationship only with that part of himself initially closer to G-d. Whereas through physical mitzvot, not only those parts of man naturally suited to worship—naturally more spiritual, naturally closer to G-d—but also his mundane material body or even external physical objects, inherently distant from all matters spiritual, are involved in his relationship with G-d.

Thus, here the true *scope* of man's spiritual capabilities becomes manifest. By performing physical mitzvot man declares that not only his higher, more abstract faculties, but even that part of his self and his reality that are normally distant from matters abstract and spiritual are in communion with G-d. Prosaic leather *tefillin* rather than heartfelt prayer demonstrate that even entities that appear to be devoid of any lofty or spiritual quality, even entities that are apparently alien to G-d, are in truth compatible with Him.

An analogy: The best spot to evaluate the range of a powerful spotlight with the unaided eye is not directly beneath the lamp, but at the furthest point where its light reaches. True, directly beneath the lamp, the light is at its most brilliant. It is specifically here that the lamp provides ample light even in the middle of a dark night to illuminate a playing field or to allow reading a book. It is also specifically closer to the source that the purity and color of the light can be better perceived. But on the other hand, the *range* of the spotlight can best be evaluated specifically at the furthest point where its light reaches—as its rays penetrate a distant alley hundreds of yards away.

Similarly, with regard to spiritual matters. Whilst praying or meditating, the brilliance, character, purity and color of worship, as it were, are at their peak. Here man is occupied with noble matters. Leaving his mundane body behind, he

illuminates his soul with the transcendence of G-d. But here his spiritual *range* is not evident. The potential *scope* of his spiritual capabilities, that is, of his capacity for compatibility with G-d, is realized specifically beyond the inspiration of heart and mind, as the furthest reaches of his personality and environment are illuminated by his relationship with G-d.

Put in other words: Man is capable of entering into a total relationship with G-d. He is capable of being spiritual throughout. His soul is capable of reaching every part: it is potentially infinite. And this *infinity* of the soul finds expression specifically through physical mitzvot.

THE SCOPE OF G-D'S REACH

There are, of course, two sides to worship: Man establishes a relationship with G-d, and concomitantly, G-d touches man. So far, we have viewed the matter from man's point of view; let us now look at it from G-d's side, as it were.

Physical worship achieves a similar advantage for the manifestation of G-d as it does for man's spiritual development. Prayer and meditation focus upon the greatness of G-d. As it were, during these forms of worship, Divine qualities, such as G-d's wisdom or love, touch the worshiper. But in the commonplace performance of physical mitzvot no Divine attribute is apprehended by man; no Divine quality, neither G-d's wisdom nor His love become manifest to the worshiper. Physical acts with ordinary objects make no Divine "statement"; they are, in themselves, uninspiring neutral acts. But on the other hand, it is specifically this latter form of worship that demonstrates G-d's all-encompassing scope: Hereby G-d touches not only that which is inherently closer to Him, namely, man's mind and heart, but also the furthest reaches, i.e. man's physical body and inanimate uninspiring objects. Physical worship in particular, then, manifests both man's as well as G-d's *infinity*.

THE CONCEPT

G-D'S INFINITY

It is axiomatic to Judaism that G-d created all of reality and is perpetually interested in all of existence, no matter how seemingly trivial or insignificant. Though G-d is transcendent, beyond human comprehension, to relegate Him to the seventh heaven, declaring Him too great to be involved with the trivial minutiae of human existence, runs contrary to the very essence of Judaism, which emphasizes G-d's total dominion over all and G-d's involved concern with the acts of mortal men. Put somewhat differently: G-d's interests and domain are not confined to any specific range of spheres or any particular range of entities or characteristics, no matter how sublime or lofty; He is, rather, far reaching, all-encompassing—infinite.

With this in mind, let us take a step back and ask: Why is it that we normally assume that prayer and meditation are meaningful to G-d, that the mind and heart—contemplation, love and awe—are avenues whereby to approach G-d? Why, conversely, is it commonly maintained that the mundane is beneath the scope of G-d's interests, that no possible spirituality can be manifest in a piece of leather fastened to a human skull? It is, of course, due to our perception of G-d's greatness, out of respect for His transcendence. Wishing to elevate G-d, we tend to perceive a sharp split, a chasm, that divides this carnal reality from the abstract sublimity which He is. It appears to us that, by definition, G-d's otherliness is antithetical to the ordinary nature of this reality, that G-d's loftiness cannot accommodate the mundaneness of bodily acts. The finite and physical, it seems, are an arena from which G-d is excluded precisely due to His greatness.

But as we have noted, this exclusion of G-d runs contrary to a most basic premise of Jewish faith. This notion of dichotomy or duality—of a realm to which G-d relates and a realm

HEAVEN ON EARTH

which is beneath Him—is contrary to the fundamental principle of Judaism that G-d is Omnipresent, interested in all of reality, no matter how lowly or apparently G-d-forsaken. G-d is not limited by His greatness, not confined to His otherliness; G-d is far reaching and is of an all encompassing compatibility. It is anathema to Judaism to maintain that G-d relates merely to the good and not to the bad, merely to happiness but not to pain, merely to man's abstract faculties but not to his body—merely to prayer, but not to ordinary physical objects.

Thus, physical mitzvot assume, in fact, a most important role in worship. If the recognition of the all-encompassing reach, the infinity of G-d, is indeed integral to a correct perception of G-d, this notion must be represented by a central part of worship. There must be some most important form of worship whereby it is manifest that G-d who is hereby worshipped is *all* encompassing, infinite—not merely a Being who is greater than our mundane reality, to be apprehended solely in His transcendent attributes of Love, Awe or Wisdom. And this infinite dimension of G-d indeed finds expression in physical mitzvot. The performance of specifically these mitzvot expresses the notion that not only contemplation and love, but even the mundane and finite, even that which appears to be divorced from anything spiritual, such as leather and wool, is in truth compatible with G-d—part of G-d's kingdom, a vehicle for the Divine will. It is hereby that man demonstrates that G-d is not merely Wise and Benevolent, that the Deity is not merely of some particular quality, great in form or degree, but is accommodating of all qualities, high or low; that He is all encompassing—infinite.

We shall elaborate further in later chapters; but for now, in brief: If worship amounts to man entering into a relationship with G-d, and G-d, in turn, touching man and his reality—

THE CONCEPT

physical worship is indeed of unique value. Via mitzvot, finite and mundane as they are, man carries the Divine torch to the furthest reaches, roping in and sublimating his own lower dimensions and even the external world at large, thereby manifesting both the *infinity* of his own spiritual capabilities as well as the *infinity* of G-d.

CONTEXT 2 – G-D’S ESSENCE

Upon reflection, it will become clear that though we have found a significant role for physical mitzvot, we have continued to retain the notion that the physical and the Divine are essentially antithetical. It is the spiritual arena, we have continued to maintain, that is inherently close to G-d, whereas the physical is remote. We have merely pointed out that there is value in involving even that which is inherently *far* from the Divine. Indeed, the particular value we found in physical mitzvot lies specifically in that they demonstrate that G-d is able to relate even to the physical, that G-d can stoop so low, as it were, to encompass also that which is inherently distant from Him. Now, however, we will proceed to demonstrate that in fact the “lower” forms of worship reach *inherently* deeper into the G-dhead than the “higher” forms of worship—for the physical, precisely *because* it is physical, roots in the deepest recesses of G-d. This virtue of the physical does not lie in its potential sublimation or spiritualization—in transcending, that is, denying, its natural physical self; rather, as said, unique spiritual value lies in the physical specifically *because* it is physical.

In a nutshell: The “higher” forms of worship relate merely to G-d’s attributes, to His character and qualities; whereas the “lower” forms of worship which involve the physical relate to the Divine *Essence*.

Now, the logical distinction between essence and attributes

once dominated philosophical speculation. Maimonides writes, “whoever cannot distinguish between that which is . . . essential and that which is accidental . . . cannot speak philosophically at all.”¹ But this distinction has fallen from prominence in the modern philosophical climate, requiring us to first devote some space to elucidate what the notion of G-d’s Essence means—and subsequently return to find that specifically the physical relates to this deepest aspect of G-d.

A QUANTUM GAP

Numerous adjectives have been employed to describe G-d. He is referred to as Omnipotent, Omnipresent, Omniscient, Wise, Benevolent, and by many synonyms and variations of these terms. (In the previous section we learned to appreciate yet another, very significant term—Infinite.) From a more profound perspective, however, all of these descriptions, though intending to glorify and elevate G-d, do not describe His true greatness. In truth, they paradoxically serve to disguise and help man ignore His true nature.

When referring to G-d with these adjectives, G-d is regarded within the human frame of reference. We are saying in effect that G-d is **all**-powerful, **all**-present, **all**-knowing etc., unlike humans who are merely powerful, present and knowing. Human notions such as power, presence and kindness are applied to G-d, merely with accompanying qualifications concerning the quantity or quality of these characteristics. Thus, a true definition of G-d, on His own terms, remains elusive.

To clarify: According to Jewish teachings, G-d’s true nature is totally inaccessible to man. By his very human nature, man can never cross into the reality that is G-d’s. The notion of G-d’s transcendence implies not only that G-d is at the very subtle end of a continuum which leads from mundane man to Him, that G-d is, as it were, on the highest rung of a ladder

THE CONCEPT

upon which both He and man stand; but rather, that an uncrossable chasm divides man and G-d.

A simplified analogy for this would be the position of a blind person trying to appreciate a visual masterpiece. Turning in the right direction or rubbing or washing his eyes will bring him no closer to appreciating the painting. He is unfortunately lacking, in essence, the very faculties necessary for apprehending light, color and visual form altogether. There are no methods of which he can avail himself to cross the gulf. Even if he might be able to glean some sense of the work by way of analogy—for example, he might be told that this particular painting arouses sensations similar to those aroused by a specific musical masterpiece—he cannot be privy to the experience of vision itself. The chasm is unnegotiable.

Similarly, G-d operates, as it were, on a different “operating system” to man, G-d exists in a different frame of reference; and hence, an uncrossable gulf divides man from G-d. Consequently, all descriptions humans might choose to use regarding G-d are ultimately inefficient: they are merely descriptions of what man encounters of G-d in his own, very different frame of reference.

Moreover, and now unlike with the blind person, the realities of man and G-d are not two parallel realities, not two experiences which share some common ground as do the visual arts and music, permitting reasonably accurate analogies to be drawn from one to the other. A “quantum gap” separates man from G-d. Consequently, no analogy within one system can meaningfully apply to the other. No adjective or metaphor appropriate to man’s world can be used with any hope of approximation with regard to G-d. Thus, all descriptions of G-d depict at best how G-d is *manifest*; all adjectives employed with the aim of circumscribing His greatness describe merely

HEAVEN ON EARTH

how G-d relates to humans and their world—what He represents when He filters through an otherwise impregnable veil into the human frame of reference. What G-d does, as it were, but not what G-d is.

A further analogy: A bright spotlight shines outside a prison wall, hidden from the inmates by heavily veiled curtains. The equivalent of only forty watts of light filters through to the prison cells. When introduced to their cells after walking through a long dark corridor, prisoners are told: “Here we provide light adequate to take care of your needs.” Now, within the prison, the available light can appropriately be described as adequate for prisoners’ needs. But portraying the light source *itself* as providing this type of light would be patently inappropriate. Relative to its own frame of reference, describing a powerful spotlight as providing forty watts falls offensively short.

Something similar is true of adjectives employed by humans to describe G-d. It is not He, in and of Himself, that is addressed—indeed, that *can* be addressed—by these terms; they refer, rather, to His meaning *relative to man*—He, once colored, tainted, by the human frame of reference into which His “light” filters through. And here, unlike with the prison analogy, the “light” comes to man’s frame of reference after a “quantum gap.”

IN RELATION OR IN HIMSELF

Furthermore, it is not only the world of mundane humans, tied up as it is with carnal needs, that cannot provide adequate terms with which to describe transcendent G-d. Scripture talks of higher realities such as angels, and the Jewish mystical literature is replete with discussions of great emanations from G-d, of extraordinary spiritual worlds. Yet, even those higher realities, though more spiritual, more close to G-d, cannot pro-

THE CONCEPT

vide adequate terms with which to apprehend G-d as He is in Himself. For even at those lofty stations, what is apprehended is G-d as He filters through a thinner veil, as it were, but yet a veil. G-d is still apprehended within a frame of reference which He transcends, in terms of its deficient parameters and yardsticks. It is G-d in relation, not G-d in Himself.

BEING OR BEING SOMETHING?

Put somewhat differently: all descriptions of G-d relate to *forms* of G-d's existence, to *how* He exists—not to G-d's very existence *per se*. Let us explain this in some detail.

Among many believers in G-d, the notion of G-d's *existence* hardly earns a mention. Surely, the faithful emphasize that G-d exists or even concern themselves with proving that He exists, but only as a prelude to what appear to them to be the real issues—G-d's benevolence, omnipotence or other notable characteristics. Their notion of the Deity is of a great Being, a sublime Being, a kind Being etc.—but not of an *existent* Being; of a Being, *ipso facto*. They worship the Being that gives or withholds, Who blesses or curses, Who performs miracles and knows the thoughts of men—not a Being *Who exists*.

Now, perhaps they are right: after all, what is so special about merely existing? In truth, however, this question will be asked only so long as ultimate questions of reality are ignored.

Picture the following scene: Your friend returns from a promising function most disappointed. He wanted some excitement, he was eager for an experience, but nothing of the sort happened. "It was an absolute non-event," he says, "we sat there like dead wood."

It would obviously be of little comfort to your frustrated friend to philosophically comment that "sitting there like dead wood" ought not be described as an "absolute non-event." But in the privacy of your own mind, consider the question: Why

HEAVEN ON EARTH

is it only excitement, only an "experience," that counts as an event? Why is it, in fact, that we regard just sitting there, merely existing—as nothing, zero?

The obvious answer, of course, is that we take existence for granted, because we exist all the time. Existence is a *constant* throughout our lives. For all practical purposes, therefore, we comfortably ignore it. Only that which goes beyond this constant starting point of existence do we note as greater than zero, as significant; indeed, as there altogether.

Consider, however, the bizarre prospect of our not existing altogether, incorporate into the evaluation of what we encounter that it could not have been at all—it will then become evident that the very fact of existence is noteworthy indeed.

So long as we wish to take our existence for granted, our yardsticks will register only events, only experiences. The stronger the experience—the nobler, the more exciting, the more meaningful—the higher it will rate on our yardsticks. An exciting experience will rate as ten; sitting there "like dead wood" as zero. But once we broaden our field of inquiry, expanding our frame of reference by entertaining the possibility that we could have not existed at all, it becomes evident that the very phenomenon of existence itself is indeed worthy of mention—something greater than the absolute zero of non-existence. Indeed, in this broader context it becomes apparent that crossing the gap from the true zero of non-existence to the "one" of existence involves a greater leap than any subsequent transition from "one" to "ten," to a "hundred" or a "thousand." As it were, the very creation of the yardstick itself is of greater significance than any subsequent rating on the yardstick.

Furthermore, much as we have now come to distinguish

THE CONCEPT

between existence itself and experiences or events, a similar distinction is in order between existence itself and the qualities and significance of existence.

We search for significance, at least for meaning in everything with which we come into contact. Some things speak to our minds, others to our emotions; some to our sense of aesthetics, others to our senses of wonder or awe. But some things escape our attention entirely—we feel they have no message to convey, lacking as they are of appealing qualities and meaning. But upon further reflection, considering the possibility of total non-existence, it becomes apparent that they, too, are of considerable significance. They exist.

In short, we have found that *being*, not only being *something* is fundamentally noteworthy. Or, in other words, we have uncovered the oft-neglected substratum of *being*, upon which all experiences, qualities and meaning are superimposed. It is to this fundamental dimension of reality, namely existence itself, distinct from any particular occurrence, experience or quality—any coloring of existence that may arise once existence is there²—that we shall henceforth refer to as *essence*.

G-D'S ESSENCE

Returning now to our discussion of descriptions and perceptions of G-d, it becomes evident that we are usually guilty of a significant oversight with regard to G-d: inadequate prominence is typically given to the notion of G-d's very *existence*.

Which is in fact more notable: G-d's Omnipotence, Benevolence, Omniscience, Infinity—or the fact that He merely *exists*? In light of our previous discussion it is in fact the latter. In the broader context of the ultimate questions of reality, when pondering both existence and non-existence, it becomes clear that there is an aspect of the Divine that goes

HEAVEN ON EARTH

beyond any particular quality or attribute with which we may choose to describe Him: beyond any particular *form* of existence, lies His *Existence per se*; the Divine substratum, the *Essence*.

True, once G-d exists we note with awe the special qualities of His existence: Wisdom, Omnipotence, Omniscience, Benevolence. But above all else, G-d is to be considered not as being *something*—no matter what that “something” is, but rather as *Being* in and of itself. G-d can not only *do* great things, or even *display* wonderful characteristics—He can *be*, He *is*.

It should be noted, that unlike our earlier discussion concerning reality's existence and characteristics, where the distinction between being and attributes is philosophically correct but need not be central to everyday perception, with regard to G-d this distinction is of critical importance. For the very notion of G-d is, of course, that of a self-sufficient being, who exists from all time to all time, in and of Himself; Who, in turn, provides existence for all else that exists. (In fact, many scholars prove G-d's existence from the fact that reality exists, considering His *necessary* existence the only possible cause of reality's *contingent* existence.) Focusing on “colorings” of G-d's existence helps us ignore this most central notion of G-d, the ontological notion of G-d: the Being, the Essence.

In summary: A significant philosophical distinction pertains in relation to our reality between essence and attributes (once at the very forefront of philosophical speculation), and a similar crucial theological distinction exists between the *Essence* of G-d and His *manifestations*. The Essence, on the one hand, is the very Divine source and substratum, the Existence; whereas manifestations of G-d range from no more than human perceptions of the Divine as it filters into human real-

THE CONCEPT

ity, through G-d *in relation to* higher realities, to colorings of the Divine Essence: what G-d does, even what G-d is, but not G-d *per se*.

PHYSICAL MITZVOT

In light of all of the above, we return to Dirah Betachtonim's unique perspective on worship. Our exploration of reality and G-d have placed us in a better position to correctly evaluate various types of worship, that is, various forms of communication between reality and G-d. Particularly, we can now return to appreciate Dirah Betachtonim's view which ascribes greater spiritual value to the performance of physical mitzvot than to prayer or meditation.

At the outset, it appeared reasonable to assume in terms of our reality that experiences are of greater value than mere being, that that which is aesthetically or emotionally pleasing is superior to that which merely exists, that the wondrous surpasses that which solely is. Similarly with regard to G-d, we held that G-d's characteristics, such as His benevolence, sublime nature or infinity, are of greater significance than the fact that He exists. It is in fact a very similar attitude that lies at the root of the primacy normally ascribed to forms of worship such as prayer and meditation to physical mitzvot.

It is commonly held that the former elevate the human above his finite, corporeal existence and associate him with the Divine. But at this point in our discussion, we stop and ask: Divine in what sense? Clearly, in senses such as loftiness, sublimity, benevolence, spirituality, infinity or transcendence. But do these forms of worship relate to G-d's mere and very *being*? They do not. Here man's heart is inspired by G-d's love and awe, here his mind is captivated by Divine wisdom, here his poetic and religious soul merge with Divine transcendence. Or in other words, both on the part of the worshiper as well as

HEAVEN ON EARTH

with regard to that which is worshipped, the focus is on the experience of emotion, wisdom and transcendence—however pure and Divine—not on essence.

But on the other hand, take the performance of physical mitzvot. What religious *experience* is manifest here? Which Divine *quality* inspires the worshiper when wrapping leather straps on human arms or when sitting with the dead wood of a *succah*? None at all. Neither man's mind nor his heart are involved, neither Divine wisdom, benevolence, omnipotence, or any other sublime quality finds expression here. But it is precisely herein that the greatness of physical mitzvot lies. For the only relationship with G-d to be found in physical entities, devoid as they are of all religious *meaning*, proceeds along that often overlooked dimension we have now discovered—essence.

One cannot communicate with G-d via leather on the “wavelength” of the sublime, nor via wood on the wavelength of the emotional—nor of the “spiritual,” rational, or the poetic; since these *mundane, physical, finite entities* are devoid of all these qualities. To communicate with G-d with the physical, no channels of communication are open, save one: essence—the being of the physical entity with the Being of G-d.

Thus, when man utilizes physical, finite objects towards G-d—whereby he can cultivate no religious dimension of his soul, wherein he can enjoy no religious *experience* at all, where no religious *meaning* or *significance* is involved, and likewise no particular attribute of G-d can be related to—he relates solely to the Divine Essence, stripped bare of all attributes and colorings. Precisely due to the total absence of “religious” dimensions in the physical, man is hereby brought before the Divine *Essence*.

THE CONCEPT

Thus, maintains Dirah Betachtonim, it is specifically in the performance of physical mitzvot that man finds the acme of religious experience, the ultimate communion with G-d. Not by releasing some hidden meaning and significance latent in the physical, not by achieving the religious feat of sublimating the physical, but rather in relating to G-d as found in the physical itself—precisely in the absence of spiritual meaning and significance, specifically because it is physical and not sublime. For here the worshiper transcends the world of character, of meaning, of significance and of feats: here the *essence* of reality merges with the *Essence* of G-d.

THIS REALITY ONE WITH G-D

Before summarizing this chapter we shall note one further important concept very briefly (this matter in particular will require elaboration later in the book). Despite our strong intuition to the contrary, Chasidic teachings regard all of existence as nothing but G-d. Put in other words: the essence of all existence, its being, is in fact considered as aught but the Essence of G-d.

In this light we will find that the fact that physical reality is devoid of all Divine colorings and qualities denotes not merely that this reality can be seen to *reflect* and *relate to* the Essence of G-d, but more than this: this reality in particular is transparent to its core, which is aught but the Essence of G-d.

SUMMARY

We have taken a brief look at some of the central themes of Dirah Betachtonim theology. This thought-system turns our attention to the value of including our physical selves and our physical environment in Divine worship on two levels. First, sublimating the physical manifests the far reach of G-d, His all-encompassing compatibility, or *infinity*. Second, more

HEAVEN ON EARTH

importantly, the physical itself, because it is physical, enjoys a unique relationship with the *Essence* of G-d.

The reader may be forgiven for thinking that there are generalizations, assumptions and leaps in logical thinking in this brief presentation of the Dirah Betachtonim world-outlook. Certainly, these thoughts represent a radical departure from standard theological thinking. It is hoped, however, that matters will become further clarified as we take up some of the issues of this theology in the following chapters, probing a variety of metaphysical and religious questions, inquiring further into the nature of G-d, man and reality, and defining more clearly the role of mitzvot in this unique religious thought-system—in which the worshiper is taught to aspire for the immanent, where the metaphysical, religious and mystical arrows point sharply downward.

SECTION TWO

METAPHYSICS

REVIEWED

COSMOLOGY / A HIERARCHY OF REALITIES

DIVERSITY AND UNITY

THE G-D-WORLD RELATIONSHIP

THE DRAMA OF CREATION

THE MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE AND ASCETICISM

THE LANGUAGE OF DIRAH BETACHTONIM

THE LOGIC OF DIRAH BETACHTONIM

RELIGIOUS DEVOTION

CHAPTER THREE

COSMOLOGY / A HIERARCHY OF REALITIES

The Dirah Betachtonim system, outlined in brief in the previous section, amounts to a total revolution in religious thinking. It does not merely shed light on some difficult theological problem, nor only add extra emphasis to some particular religious issue—it leaves virtually nothing intact. Indeed, though firmly rooted in classic Chasidic teachings, though drawing its sustenance from probing the depths of Torah texts, Dirah Betachtonim does not proceed from within conventional methods of religious thinking and then depart at some significant point; but rather proceeds along its own premises and terms. It amounts to a more profound, more encompassing Torah perspective from which all details assume new light. In this section of the book we will attempt to bring to the fore the implications of this revolution, describing how many metaphysical subjects—such as cosmology, cosmic unity, the drama of Creation, the mystical experience, even theological language and basic Logic—assume totally new dimensions in this theological system.

We start with cosmology. First, we present a brief summary of the cosmology that emerges from Jewish writings in gen-

eral, drawing in particular upon the mystical literature, namely Kabbalistic and Chasidic texts, and subsequently go on to note a striking change of perspective in the Dirah Betachtonim system.

COSMOLOGY IN EARLIER JEWISH THOUGHT

Our senses make us aware of the world of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. Our minds introduce us to ideas and emotions. But according to Judaism, neither the world of sensual phenomena, nor the worlds of ideas and emotions represent all there is to reality. It is becoming increasingly evident to the modern mind that the human senses are not the final arbiter of what constitutes reality. Two hundred years ago it was universally held that in a silent room no music exists. Yet given today's technology, this paradox indeed occurs, in the everyday reality of radio waves inaudible to human ears. Moreover, contemporary science has become increasingly aware that man not only does not know the outer parameters of reality but can never know them. Thus, a popular theme of science fiction is realities other than our own which operate on totally different ground rules, within totally different "operating systems."

Jewish thinking has long proceeded along similar lines: it recognizes the existence of realities other than our own; but not physical realities—spiritual realities.

In the Bible itself we hear echoes from spheres beyond normal human access. We read of prophecy, of angels, of Heaven. In addition to all we read in Scripture, in the Sages' writings we learn in considerable detail about life after this mortal life, we hear briefs of discussions from the Heavenly Court, we learn of mystical journeys into higher worlds. Our thinkers through the ages, notably Maimonides, have repeatedly emphasized that all these otherly entities and realms mentioned by Scripture and

the Sages are not physical but spiritual. Speech, wings, eyes, as well as all other apparently human characteristics used in relation to heavenly beings, are all allegorical, metaphors. Angels, then, as well as all other similar phenomena, are beings that exist on a plane that spiritually transcends the plane of our existence.

Here an important note is in order. Stating that something is spiritual rather than physical need not detract from its reality. The fact that something is inaccessible to the human senses gives no reason to conclude it is not real (in the common sense of the term). Upon further consideration, we may realize that the opposite is in fact true. Take once again the example of radio waves—in contradistinction to audible sound. The words you utter in your room hardly travel beyond the room, and even traveling that distance takes a relatively long time. On the other hand, one can communicate with people on the moon via radio in a time period as brief as a second or so. In other words, the reality of audible sound, though readily available to the human senses, is restricted to a specific time and place, whereas the reality of inaudible radio waves persists (relatively) through the expansive reaches of time and space.

Or, take a simple abstract concept, $2 + 2 = 4$, in contradistinction to a table which can be actually touched. The table can be broken and burned, it does not exist next door, it may not have existed one hundred years ago and in a hundred years time it may well no longer exist. But $2 + 2 = 4$ existed one thousand years ago, as it will exist in a thousand years time, as it does on the moon. And it cannot be burned. In other words, the reality of the table is contingent, existing solely at the confluence of favorable conditions of temperature, space, time, etc.—vary the temperature, space or time, and the table is no longer. Whereas the reality of concepts, though imperceptible to human vision and touch, is (in a sense) absolute—existing

independently of temperature, space and time, and the changes that occur in them.

What is true of radio waves and concepts is true of the spiritual worlds of which Jewish literature speaks (with relevant differences, of course). Their not being material does not detract from their reality; to the contrary, it makes for a more encompassing and persistent reality.

SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL WORLDS

In the mystical literature, that is, in Kabbalistic and Chasidic texts, we are introduced to the topography, as it were, of the spiritual realities. We learn that, in general, all of reality is divided into four worlds. Each world, in turn, is made up of ten spheres. In greater detail, we are told, there are infinite numbers of worlds emanating from G-d.

Since these worlds are spiritual, transcending time and space, spatial boundaries are meaningless. What, then, sets one world apart from another? Much as $2 + 2 = 4$ is distinct from $3 \times 3 = 9$ in terms of their conceptual parameters, though spatial and temporal differences are immaterial, spiritual realities are similarly set apart by their respective spiritual parameters. Each world represents the embodiment of a particular spiritual characteristic. For example, one world is described as a “nest” for G-d’s wisdom, another for His emotions. The worlds are also set apart in terms of their relative proximity or distance, as it were, from G-d: each emanating world is progressively lower, less abstract and spiritual, embodying a lesser and lower manifestation of G-d; each is less G-d-aware than the former.

Where does our own reality fit into all of this? At the very bottom of the chain of worlds, where G-dliness is totally obscured—our finite, physical reality eventually emerges. Here, no Divine wisdom or love permeate the atmosphere, the

glory of G-d has now totally disappeared; indeed, G-d may appear altogether irrelevant in a world which seems to proceed independently, by its own G-dforsaken rules.

THE EMPHASIS OF JEWISH MYSTICAL COSMOLOGY

Let us stop for a moment to take in the emphasis of this multi-world cosmology. To what is attention drawn in these classic mystical descriptions of various realities? Doubtless, to the higher worlds, the worlds where the glory of G-d is truly manifest. The didactic purpose of the discussions in the mystical texts is, in fact, to impress upon the human that no matter how natural his world seems, no matter how hard, fast and immutable it may appear to him, there exist higher, nobler, spiritual, worlds; that in fact, in the broader scheme of things, the human's world with its pervasive physicality is quite an aberration. And hence, the human ought to strive to identify with those higher realities, to live a life that has meaning vis-à-vis the more spiritual, truer, worlds; even to try to transcend his own reality and tune in, as it were, to those lofty stations.

Time and again, throughout the literature, whether in the words of the Talmudic sages or of later mystics, the higher realities are lauded and our reality is played down. Time and again our world is contrasted with higher worlds to underscore the great value of those realms and the little import of our own.

As we have noted, what sets various worlds apart from each other is their relative awareness of G-d—and our reality is that to which virtually no G-dliness filters through. According to the mystical literature, a series of contractions and hidings of G-d's light occurs, as it were, as the Divine creative energy chains downwards, culminating in a major *parsa*, or “curtain,” separating this reality from all that is higher than it. This world is physical. It is finite. It is mundane. This is a world, we read, which is almost entirely bad, in which evil prospers and suffer-

ing abounds;¹ a world in which G-d can be totally overlooked. The Divine presence cries, as it were, over its imprisonment in this reality—in “this lowly world, beneath which there is no lower.”²

DIRAH BETACHTONIM COSMOLOGY

Enters Dirah Betachtonim and all this is, as it were, turned upside down. This lowly world, maintains Dirah Betachtonim, indeed specifically “this lowly world, beneath which there is no lower,” is the most remarkable of all the worlds. It is specifically here that G-d desired a *dirah*, a dwelling place. No need to transcend this world! It is here, here as nowhere else, that the human can fulfill his true spiritual potential, it is specifically here that the deepest recesses of the Divine can be reached.

True, argues Dirah Betachtonim, this world is not evidently G-dly, but the G-dliness available here is of greater quality than in all the spiritual worlds: for G-d is not merely *evident* here, here He is.

True, in the higher worlds, G-dliness is manifest. But what is the nature of the G-dliness at those lofty stations? Wisdom and Knowledge; Awe and Splendor. One world is a “nest” for G-d’s wisdom, another for His emotions; angels quiver in the love and awe of G-d. But as we have seen earlier, all of these are not the *Essence* of G-d; they are His *manifestations*, merely G-dly *qualities*. It is specifically in our world which makes no G-dly “statement,” where the *essence* prevails.

In fact, in higher realities where Divine majesty and awe are evident, where Divine qualities and characteristics—such as Wisdom, Love or Omnipotence—are manifest, the very *Being* of G-d is overlooked. As it were, the “adjectives” hide the “noun” they describe. Where Divine meaning and significance are prominent, the fact that things *exist* goes unnoticed; where superimpositions, characteristics of the essence, are at the fore-

front, the essence itself is not seen. Thus, the most fundamental dimension of reality as well as the most fundamental dimension of G-d—Essence—is ignored in the higher realms. Whereas in our physical reality which is devoid of all *manifestations* of G-d, in our mundane world which represents nothing of metaphysical *significance*, in this lowly world which is bare of all Divine expressions and characteristics—the sole relationship with G-d is that of the naked essence of reality with the unembellished, untainted Essence of G-d.

Here, then, maintains Dirah Betachtonim, yes, our “lowly world, beneath which there is no lower,” is in fact the most remarkable of all worlds—the arena in which the most profound dimension of reality relates to the deepest recesses of the Divine.

Dirah Betachtonim, then, does not ignore normative mystical cosmology. The Dirah Betachtonim literature perpetually makes explicit reference to concepts such as those outlined earlier in this chapter concerning the greatness of other realities and the lowliness of our own, and its perspectives develop conceptually within the same metaphysical mappings of reality. But it asks us to go a step further, to look not merely at appearances, expressions, characteristics or values, but to probe the essence, the very being of reality. And in that realm, where *being* is of significance, rather than being *something*, it is this reality that assumes the greatest metaphysical value.

This system continues to highlight that in terms of spiritual significance this world is the lowest, that in terms of religious meaning this world is even obnoxious. There is however, maintains Dirah Betachtonim, a plane where significance and meaning are transcended—where this world alone manifests naked being, merged with the pure Being of G-d. In higher realities it is G-d’s glory, here it is His Essence; in higher worlds G-d is *manifest*, here He *is*.

CHAPTER FOUR

DIVERSITY AND UNITY

Integral to Kabbalistic and Chasidic teachings is the belief that beneath the myriad individual and diverse entities that meet the eye lies one unifying cosmic reality. Chairs and tables, fields and meadows, oceans and mountains, animals and stars, are in essence one. For beyond the outer shell, is a Divine reality which unites all.

It appears, that this monistic perception of reality reaches its maturity specifically in the Dirah Betachtonim system. It is from the perspective of this world-outlook that the superficial plurality and diversity of reality is ultimately negated, by permitting the underlying unifying reality totally unrestricted scope.

This argument will be developed during the course of this chapter, and further clarified in the following two chapters. This chapter begins with a closer look at the notion of cosmic unity as it occurs in the Kabbalah and classic Chasidic writings,¹ and subsequently returns to Dirah Betachtonim.

UNITY IN KABBALAH

According to the Kabbalah, all of reality is studded with Divine “sparks.” At the outset of Creation, relates the

Kabbalah, a great cosmic “accident” occurred. A world was created with a measure of G-dliness too great for it to contain. Something like an explosion occurred, and sparks of holiness scattered throughout reality that was then emerging. Our mundane world too, at the furthest extreme from the Source, became implanted with holy sparks. Accordingly, the human mission in life is to redeem these Divine sparks from their fall, to free them from their imprisonment in this mundane world, and permit them to reunite with their Source. This is achieved through the fulfillment of Torah and Mitzvot. Each holy act performed with materials of this world, releases their latent Divine sparks. The ultimate goal of humankind, which will be realized at the end of time, is to effect the release of all these sparks and their return to G-d.

From a Kabbalistic perspective, then, each physical object encountered is not to be regarded as a distinct, isolated, entity. For from the perspective of the spiritual makeup and destiny of all reality, there is something beneath the surface common to all reality, namely the Divine sparks. Similarly, a mitzvah is, therefore, not an *isolated* spiritual act—a specific, personal act performed by an individual, separately ordered by G-d—but part of a cosmic project. All apparently individual entities and religious acts are part of a large mosaic; in a sense, it is all one unified cosmos.

It does not take much to note, that despite the unity described by the Kabbalah, individual entities are still granted considerable distinctiveness and individuality, and conversely, the underlying Divine reality cannot be said to truly penetrate and permeate all.

If science were to determine that water molecules can be found in every object we see, this would break down barriers between individual objects, providing community between all

the diverse entities which comprise our reality. But the community among them would not be total. In some objects the water molecules would be a large part, in others a miniscule part—they would not represent the totality of each object. Water would be the ever-present ambassador of a universal network, as it were; a reality to be found universally, but not universal reality. Outside the common water molecules, each individual entity would retain its particular nature and identity.

Similarly, though according to Kabbalah Divine sparks are prevalent throughout reality, they do not amount to all of reality. Hence, all of reality cannot be said to be truly one.

UNITY IN CHASIDUT

According to Chasidut, the Divine is present not only by way of a specific Divine element found throughout a reality that is primarily something else, existing inherently independently of that element; but rather, because the presence of the Divine is the very basis of the existence of all of reality. Indeed, as we shall see in the following chapter, Chasidut regards all of reality—the mountains as the seas, the humans as the trees—as nothing but G-d.

Thus, the inherent unity of reality in Chasidut goes far beyond that of the Kabbalah. In this system, individual entities are granted no independence, no detached individuality, and concomitantly, the Divine unifying reality is barred from nowhere. For here, all individual entities are in fact considered as but manifestations of the same unifying reality. The chair and table do not only both contain a spark of G-dliness: the very substance of their wood, steel or plastic is G-d, the One (as will be further clarified in the next chapter).

And accordingly, mitzvot, spiritual acts, are neither distinct personal acts, nor merely a group of acts all focused upon one

common—but nevertheless distinct—entity, namely, the Divine sparks. Rather, the unifying purpose of all spiritual endeavor is to effect the revelation of the inherent all-pervasive Divine nature of reality. Performing a holy act with materials of this world represents penetrating to, and uncovering the underlying all-encompassing character of these materials—holiness, or G-dliness. The ultimate human goal, to be realized at the end of time, is to peel away the superficial diversity of all of reality and lay bare a cosmos inherently unified in the oneness of G-d.

Can this be taken any further? Indeed it can. Analogies from modern science will both provide comparisons to unity as it occurs in Chasidut as outlined above, as well as enable us to understand where this conception of unity falls short.

Modern physics reveals that all the differences we commonly note in reality are but illusionary. Wood, glass and dolphins, ice, stars and worms, trees, clouds and stones, are not in truth fundamentally distinctive entities, each with its own disparate makeup. On the surface, each may have its own different texture, form and character; its own particular finite properties that circumscribe and delineate its contours, and set it apart from other things. Each has its own sets of uses, its own ways in which it is typically viewed and related to, its own distinct categories and criteria by which it is classified and assessed. But from a more profound perspective, all of these distinctions are immaterial. For in truth, all of reality is composed of the same subatomic components and all differences amount merely to variation occurring in an inherently unitary sub-microscopic world, governed by the same rules, approachable with the same tools and yardsticks. Beneath the superficial variety and differences the true nature of all reality is one.

Why, then, do we not realize this? Why do we perceive

things as essentially diverse and inherently different and apart? Because our natural endowment of crude human senses is inefficient, unable to perceive the more sophisticated and embracing dimension of reality.

The spiritual cosmic unity described by Chasidut is quite similar: all of reality is inherently nothing but G-d; it is merely our imperfect senses that confine us to a world of plurality and diversity.

Upon closer analysis of the scientific analogy it will become evident that despite the common subatomic substratum, the unity of reality is not complete. True, it may be merely inefficiency on our part that obscures the underlying unity—but this inability on our part is itself an indication that the objective unity of reality is not total. After all is said and done, chairs and tables, dolphins and trees—not only protons and electrons—defiantly persist. Natural uncultivated perceptions may be ill informed, but they are not non-existent. And into this frame of reference of uninterpreted human reality the subatomic oneness cannot intrude. True, from a better informed vantage point this same naive (in the sense of natural, uninterpreted) world is nothing but atoms and molecules or protons and electrons; but from a parallel vantage point—an existing human vantage point—atoms and molecules are immaterial. There is, then, a dimension where specific entities retain their diversity, individuality and independence—the universality of the subatomic substratum cannot be said to be truly all-encompassing.

Similarly, modern science quantifies experience. Color as well as music are reduced to wave-lengths. All of matter, all forms of energy, all forces, are reduced to numbers and equations. But nevertheless, naive (i.e. natural, uninterpreted) realities and experiences, of color and music for example, defy

these numbers, continuing to exist independently, unexplained, unreached by the mathematician's computations. Humans can choose to adopt the enlightened vantage point where all is numbers—but at the cost of renouncing the familiar sensations of outer reality. The world of numbers itself does not penetrate the outer shell; it is not all pervasive.

The same is true concerning the Chasidic notion of unity outlined above. Despite the insistence of Chasidic teachings that from a true perspective all is but the Divine, natural human reality continues to persist. Tables and chairs continue to exist; their distinct finite contours and their mundane character not bespeaking an infinite, ephemeral all-encompassing substratum. The human is indeed told² that “would the [human] eye be permitted to see” it would actually behold an all-encompassing cosmic oneness. But we have not been granted this privilege, and where we stand, that ultimate reality does not intrude. In natural, familiar human reality, trees are not agglomerates of molecules, visual masterpieces are not fluctuations in strings of numbers—nor are tables and chairs Divine spirit. Physical, finite trees, paintings and tables continue to exist as ordinary, independent and fully differentiated entities.

Is the unity of G-d then *all* pervasive? No it is not. Yes, the human is called upon to shed his natural perceptions and adopt the enlightened Divine vantage point from which all is in fact Divine; but until one assumes that vantage point, one exists within a frame of reference wherein the Divine does not intrude with its unity.

Thus, unity as typically taught in Chasidut, though far more encompassing than that taught in the Kabbalah (the doctrine of the Divine sparks), is not all-pervasive: individual entities retain—on an existing plane—their variety and individuality; Divine omnipresence is not total.

UNITY IN DIRAH BETACHTONIM

As seen in previous chapters, the Dirah Betachtonim theological system emphasizes that our finite reality—*as we know it*—relates to G-d. G-d is not to be found only by transcending our world and its spiritual constraints. Ordinary, finite objects enjoy a relationship with the Divine. Indeed, that which is uninspiring, indifferent to G-dliness, enjoys a unique relationship with G-d, specifically in its indifference, mundaneness and finitude; for where there are no overt Divine features, no qualities of the Divine, there is Essence. In other words, natural, uninterpreted reality itself, whereby the human as human relates to tables and chairs as tables and chairs, is associated with G-d.

(As we shall find in the following chapters, when dovetailed with the general Chasidic view that all of reality is in truth nothing but G-d, this means that naive (natural, uninterpreted) reality, with all its mundaneness—indeed the very G-dforsaken nature of this reality itself—represents a world of essence that is co-essential with the Essence of G-d.)

Accordingly, one is not told in Dirah Betachtonim that one can assume a vantage point where all is Divine, that one must climb out of one's human self to be part of that frame of reference in which all is G-d. There is no overriding emphasis on the notion that "if the eye were permitted to see..." it would see the dissolution of naive multifaceted reality in an all-pervasive unified spirituality. Rather, reality as it presents naturally to human perceptions, circumscribed by mundane and finite contours as it *prima facie* is, is regarded as nothing but G-d. According to this system, performing a mitzvah with materials of this world does not aim to penetrate the cover of these materials and reach the underlying spiritual substratum—for the cover itself, physical and finite as it is, is nothing but the Essence of G-d.

As portrayed typically in Chasidic texts, natural human reality cannot be redeemed; the unifying Oneness does not reach there—for the diverse, physical and finite on the one hand and all-encompassing spiritual unity on the other, are inherently mutually exclusive. Hence the requirement to *shed* one vantage point and *assume* another; as it were, to behold subatomic structure rather than wood and steel, to understand and know mathematical equations rather than hear music and see color—to experience all-pervasive spirituality rather than finite physicality. Whereas Dirah Betachtonim is unique in the way it permits man to retain his natural reality—introducing the Divine even there. The human need not *transcend* a vantage point: this self-same reality, with its familiar finite contours and parameters, can be recognized as G-dly. For, from the vantage point of *essence*, finitude and physicality themselves and the perceptions thereof are no less Divine than infinity and spirituality. Indeed, it is specifically they that relate to the Essence of G-d.

And thus in Dirah Betachtonim the fundamental Jewish principle of the unity of G-d, much discussed, refined and elucidated in Kabbalah and Chasidut, reaches its true maturity. According to Dirah Betachtonim, not only do all phenomena share a common component, the Divine sparks (as in Kabbalah), nor only are all superficially distinct entities one beneath the surface (as in classic Chasidic thought)—but even the surface itself, in its very naive state, as well as the very perception thereof, partake of the true unified cosmic reality. Not only all parts of reality across the board horizontally, as it were, but also the entire depth of each entity from the shell inward, as it presents at all levels of perception, is embraced by the all-encompassing unity—for the naive shell too is nothing but G-d.

Natural unG-dly reality, too, is now no longer beyond the

HEAVEN ON EARTH

pale, but redeemed: the unity of all of reality in G-d's Omnipresence is complete.

All of this requires further clarification. In particular, what does it mean that reality not merely relates to or reflects G-d, but is actually nothing but G-d? We take this up in the following chapter, a chapter which should add new understanding to all we have seen in this and earlier chapters.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE G-D-WORLD RELATIONSHIP

Metaphysicians throughout the ages have labored to define the relationship between G-d and reality. Not the issue of G-d creating this reality and communicating with it, nor the question of how humans ought to relate to G-d, utilizing our reality in a manner appealing to Him. But a more profound matter: What are the respective parameters of G-d and reality? Are they two distinct entities, or do they in some mysterious way partake of each other; are they even one and the same? We are already aware that Chasidic writings, and particularly *Dirah Betachtonim*, maintain that reality is in fact fused in unity with G-d. But let us now step back and see how this issue is treated in earlier Jewish writings, and subsequently return to elaborate upon the perspectives of Chasidut and, in turn, *Dirah Betachtonim* with new insight.

THE G-D-WORLD RELATIONSHIP IN EARLIER WRITINGS

Upon a cursory reading of biblical and rabbinical literature it may well be assumed that G-d is one distinct being, and reality another. Doubtless, there is a relationship between these two beings, there is give and take; a flow moving

between them. But yet, G-d and the world remain two distinct entities in a relationship. In this respect it is much like human relationships: two beings, of distinct and exclusive parameters, interact. A similar position will emerge from an initial reading of some of the great medieval Jewish philosophical works.

In Kabbalistic and Chasidic literature, however, the borders between G-d and His Creation blur. The point at which G-d ends and reality begins is no longer distinct. As noted, and despite our strong intuition to the contrary, the mystical literature maintains that in fact all of reality is nothing but G-d; all the variety that we perceive in our world, indeed, the very notion of a world distinct from G-d, is nothing but a mirage—for nothing, but G-d, exists.

Now in an earlier chapter¹ we pointed out that classic Chasidic texts emphasize the G-dly character of higher realities and the mundane nature of our own (and that it is specifically Dirah Betachtonim that teaches us to become aware of the G-dliness of our own reality). This could have been misconstrued to mean that according to the earlier texts our own world is not G-dly at all. In truth, however, as since noted, according to those writings too, not only the upper worlds which reflect G-dly qualities, but even this world—even whilst regarded in Kabbalistic and Chasidic writings as lowly and apparently unG-dly, even whilst unredeemed as yet by the Dirah Betachtonim system—is fused in a mystical union with G-d. To return to our earlier analogies, earlier Chasidic writings also emphasize that all of reality can be viewed in terms of the unified subatomic substratum or of universal mathematical truths. The difference is merely that according to the earlier Chasidic writings, the substratum remains distinct from the naive outer shell, whereas in Dirah Betachtonim the naive arena too—of tables and chairs, of color and of music—are part of the uni-

versal unified reality. But both views agree that when looking beneath the surface this reality, too, is G-dly, that in fact all of reality is nothing but G-d.

To understand all of this clearer, let us look at a futuristic analogy. Entering a room, you are convinced that you see a person walking, gesturing with his hands—in short, a person as any other. Suddenly he disappears. Further investigation reveals that what you saw was in fact not a human person but a three dimensional hologram consisting of colored light suspended in midair, produced by skillfully arranged laser lights cleverly hidden from view. It now makes perfect sense to you that “he” could disappear—simply, the switch was turned off.

Let us understand the principle, why is it in fact that the apparition *totally* disappeared when the switch was turned off? Why in fact do laser holograms not merely decompose when their energy supply gives up, as real humans do—but completely disappear, leaving no residue behind, no clue that they were ever there? The answer is simple: such holograms are fashioned from no raw materials; thus, no materials are available to linger once the human form departs. Not only the hologram’s form is produced by light, but also its matter, its very substance. The light stops, the apparition ceases.

Chasidic literature maintains that the relationship of reality to the Creative “light” of G-d is similar. This reality, despite its seeming rigidity, despite all its apparent physical, finite properties and its seemingly unG-dly nature, is nothing but a manifestation of G-d. For with regard to reality too, there were no raw materials prior to Creation. Not even time and space. G-d not only formed the cosmos, but provided its matter as well. We humans have not been let into this truth and hence we perceive of this reality as of its own parameters. But if the coverings that cleverly hide the Creative mechanism were

HEAVEN ON EARTH

removed and the total system were to be seen, it would become evident that the very substance of reality is but a product of the Creative light. And therefore—continues Chasidic thought—though reality appears hard and fast and seems as though it could never disappear, it remains in truth thoroughly dependent on G-d for its very being—in fact, were the Creative energy to be switched off, all would cease to be.

Note, with regard to our analogy, when it is learned that the apparent human figure is only a hologram, this does not merely enable coming to terms with a person doing a disappearing trick, but rather, one's entire conception changes. Had one been previously asked how many people are in the room, one would have no doubt included the apparition. But now it is no longer a human being, but a thing; no longer "he disappeared," but "it disappeared." Indeed, if the switch was now turned back on and only it were in the room, one would say: there are no humans in the room: there is only light. As it were, a light-meter would register a presence but a "human-meter" would register zero.

So, whilst the figure when turned on again will *continue* to possess apparent human characteristics in their undiminished fullness—those self-same human traits such as hands and legs, gesture and movement, that initially convinced you that it was in fact human—it has nevertheless lost all of its humanity. It is now nothing but light.

(In mathematical terms: In an equation $x + y = z$, let x be the contribution of raw materials, y the laser light, and z the end product. Since $x = 0$, $z = y$; no less, no more. The laser apparition is nothing but light.)

Similarly, maintains Chasidic thought, with regard to reality. Normally, when we "count" we acknowledge the existence of this reality; when asked does this world exist, we answer in

the affirmative. But it is merely because we do not see the total system that we ascribe to it value and indeed an *être*, a being. Were we, however, to be privy to the total mechanism, were that which obscures the “light” that provides the form as well as the substance of reality to be removed, we would not merely realize that reality is dependent on G-d, but reality would no longer count. As it were, a “reality-meter” would register zero, only a “G-dmeter” would register a presence. When asked what there is in the room, the answer would be: only G-d, nothing else. For reality is nothing but G-d.

(In an equation $x + y = z$, let x be the contribution of raw materials, y the Divine “light,” and z the end product of reality. If $x = 0$, then $z = y$. Apart from G-d, nothing exists; reality = G-d.)

This, in fact, is the essence of the Chasidic interpretation of “*Hashem echad*,”¹² G-d is one: Whilst reality continues to exist unchanged before our eyes, possessing all its natural traits in their undiminished fullness—in truth, “in the heavens above and on the earth below there is nothing else,”¹³ literally, but G-d.

TWO UNITIES

The notion that reality is fused with G-d along the lines we have just outlined is known in the mystical literature as the *Supernal Unity*, that is, the ideal unity that exists between G-d and reality. But that literature refers also to another, lesser form of unity between G-d and reality, known as the *Lower Unity*. Put simply, the Lower Unity represents the conventional notion of unity with G-d: mystical oneness apart, the human conducts his life and utilizes his surroundings in a manner pleasing to G-d.

To place the Lower Unity in the context of our current discussion: We humans do not behold the inherent dissolution of

HEAVEN ON EARTH

reality in G-d described above (the Supernal Unity). At the end of the day, we do perceive of this reality as something very distinct from and different to G-d. Our imperfect perceptions of naive reality do exist. In fact, the very mirage itself, these imperfect perceptions themselves, were called into being by G-d in the Creative process. And in this frame of reference of ours, G-d and reality are two distinct beings, each with its own distinct and exclusive parameters and character: ours—finite, mundane, physical; His—infinite, holy, spiritual.

Within this frame of reference of our *a-priori* perceptions the Lower Unity occurs. For the fact that reality and G-d are two distinct entities in this frame of reference does not, of course, mean that there can be no mutuality, no communication and community between them. Individual humans, for example—though they retain their own identities and distinctiveness—relate to each other and often work together towards a common goal, even as one. Ontologically distinct, but one in spirit. The same is true with regard to man *vis-à-vis* G-d. Even whilst retaining his frame of reference, even whilst retaining his *a-priori* sensation of distinctiveness, regarding himself as human and his surroundings as mundane, the human can still approach G-d with respect and interest, or even make G-d the focus of his life. He can indeed be possessed of G-d, merging with Him in heart, mind and action—up to the limits possible for two distinct beings. Similarly, he can rally all with which he comes into contact into the service of G-d. Man and reality, though retaining their distinctiveness and diversity, can harmonize in a symphonic chorus, as it were, offering praise to G-d. But all of this would still be the Lower Unity—for man and his reality would still be something distinct from G-d, albeit in perfect accord with Him.

In summary, as described in the mystical literature prior to

Dirah Betachtonim, unity with G-d exists on two levels: ontological unity, and unity in deed and attitude. Or, a Supernal Unity within G-d's true frame of reference, wherein all separateness and distinctions are transcended and all is but G-d; and a Lower Unity occurring within man's imperfect frame of reference, wherein distinctiveness from G-d prevails—but with no antipathy, friction or discord, but rather with mutual-ity; ontologically distinct but one in spirit.

DIRAH BETACHTONIM / THE UNITIES UNITED

The system of Dirah Betachtonim takes Unity, the oneness of G-d and reality, further. As it were, to borrow terms from contemporary physics, the two forces to which all has been reduced are now, from a new, more profound vantage point merged in the ultimate unifying force. Dirah Betachtonim achieves unity between the Supernal Unity and the Lower Unity, fusing both frames of reference into one, removing even this last barrier to total metaphysical oneness.

To appreciate this, let us first underscore two of the features of the Unities prior to Dirah Betachtonim. First, the two Unities are regarded as not merely different but by their very nature mutually exclusive, irreconcilable. The premises upon which each Unity operates are exclusive of the premises of the other. Where the Upper Unity prevails—from G-d's point of view, as it were, or in the higher spiritual worlds—the *a-priori* notion of a finite, mundane, secular world is non-existent; rather, *a-priori* oneness of G-d is manifest. Where the Lower Unity prevails—in reality as we know it—natural human notions prevail *a-priori*; a-priori G-d-awareness does not. The two cannot be reconciled. Second, prior to Dirah Betachtonim it is the Supernal Unity that is regarded as the true, unadulterated, undistorted picture—untainted by the illusions of finitude, distinctiveness and mundaneness that afflict the Lower Unity.

But all of this is true only until *Dirah Betachtonim*. In *Dirah Betachtonim* the *a-priori* human frame of reference itself is redeemed and the two Unities are united. For in this system, the true frame of reference, the perception of reality from G-d's side, does not preclude finitude and physicality. And thus, the finite and physical, too, are incorporated into the true oneness, from G-d's point of view.

So long as one is concerned with *manifestations* of G-d, and hence with spiritual *meaning* and *significance*—then indeed, the significance of the spiritual must be seen as exclusive of the meaning of the physical, and the meaning of the infinite can only be the opposite to the meaning of finitude; and it is the spiritual and infinite that will be regarded as of metaphysical prominence and preference. But *Dirah Betachtonim* is concerned with essence—and the finite too shares in essence. Though our reality might not *manifest* particular Divine qualities, its very essence, as we have noted, relates to the Essence of G-d. In fact, as noted, specifically because it is not tainted with superimpositions of Divine qualities—the *being* of our reality relates uniquely to the being of G-d. Thus, this reality too, in terms of its *own* frame of reference, whilst remaining mundane and finite as we perceive it, is in unity with the Essence of G-d.

PARTAKING OF THE ESSENCE

The discussion earlier in this chapter about reality being nothing but the creative Divine energy, enables us to update and appreciate more deeply and clearly the relationship between the essence of our reality and the Essence of G-d. We can now put it this way: this reality in particular partakes of the Essence of G-d, is indeed co-essential with G-d.

As we have seen, all of existence is provided only and exclusively by, from, and of G-d, for prior to creation there was

nothing but G-d and the process of Creation involved no-one but G-d, and no raw materials. And since there is nothing but G-d—for if not for Him there is non-existence—Creation cannot be something else that arises *due* to G-d, but is rather something that shares in the existence of G-d (much like the hologram is solely laser light). It follows, that no matter what can be said in favor of higher realities, in terms of the fundamental relationship with G-d occurring in the Creative process, our reality cannot be deficient. This reality too, no less than the higher worlds where G-dliness is manifest and evidently all-pervasive, owes its existence to that Creative process—it too, then, partakes in existence which is aught but G-d.

So as a first step, from the Dirah Betachtonim vantage point—from which we consider the notions of not being and being, and are therefore concerned not merely with meaning and significance but with ontology, with being, with the essence of reality and the Essence of G-d—we realize that the physical relates to G-d no less than anything else, for it too is: It too partakes in the existence of G-d. Indeed, the very physical and finite features of reality themselves as naively perceived, partake in this deepest dimension of G-d, for their existence too has been provided by G-d—is G-d. The essence, the *being* (that “part” of it which puts it into contradistinction with not being) of this reality, too, and all it involves is—the Essence of G-d.

Furthermore, when concerned with mere existence, with essence, our world enjoys *unique* status. For, as we have noted earlier, essence is at the fore particularly in the absence of the disguises of religious meaning and significance—particularly in our indifferent reality rather than in higher spiritual realities, specifically through its singular absence of Divine *features*. Higher realities are *something* rather than just are, whereas in

our reality there is but pure, unadulterated, naked, essence.

Thus, recognizing that all of Creation not merely comes from G-d or relates to Him, but is indeed one with him, we update our view of the unique relationship of this reality with G-d: this reality is transparent to its true being—the *essence* of this reality is nothing but the *Essence* of G-d.

And it is thus that in Dirah Betachtonim the Supernal Unity and the Lower Unity are united—the perspectives of both simultaneously maintained. Of the Lower Unity, the perceptions of finitude are retained, not superseded; the frame of reference remains the one with which we identify *a-priori*. But this does not frustrate the Supernal Unity, the ultimate perceptual frame of reference in which there is nothing but G-d. For from the perspective of Dirah Betachtonim which is concerned with G-d's *Essence*, these two frames of reference are not mutually exclusive, but are indeed fused into one. And it is this all-encompassing unity that is the true picture: the frame of reference of reality *as we know it* merged with the frame of reference of the *Essence* of G-d.

And thus, we return once again to our remarks in the previous chapter with new insight. Kabbalah and classic Chasidic texts teach that beneath the myriad diverse entities that meet the eye lies one unifying cosmic reality. Chairs and tables, fields and meadows, oceans and mountains, animals and stars, are in essence one. But the unity of multifaceted reality in the Dirah Betachtonim system is more far reaching than any described previously.

Prior to this system, even within the Unity described by Chasidut, there exists a plane that is beyond the total unity, a plane the true reality of which is not the One—namely, the realm of the mirage of finitude and indifference to G-d. For where that mirage (which was in fact achieved at Creation)

prevails, absolute unity with G-d does not. Post creation, within our frame of reference, on its own terms, the nature of reality is not G-d. Circumscribed finite entities are not G-d; physicality is not G-d. True, according to classic Chasidic texts, were our eyes to be cured and were we to be enabled to assume the true perspective, we would become aware that the finite contours and physical texture of the countless entities we encounter are simply not there, for reality is nothing but G-d; that as it were there is no color and sound but numbers. But, according to those teachings, as long as we do not shed our human perceptions, nothing more than the Lower—imperfect—Unity can be possibly manifest, in a reality which is ontologically distinct, disparate and diverse. The Supernal Unity can be manifest only by the *rejection* of reality as it presents to our *a-priori* perceptions—thus, the external multiplicity is not one in G-d. But in Dirah Betachtonim, finitude itself, physicality itself, are one with G-d and, hence, correspondingly, G-d is all encompassing, nothing remaining outside His unity. For from this profoundest of Torah perspectives the *essence* of this lowly, finite and diverse reality is co-essential with the unadulterated *Essence* of G-d.

CHAPTER SIX

THE DRAMA OF CREATION

היש הנברא הוא ממש יש האמיתי¹

To gain greater insight to all of the above, we will in this chapter learn a central Kabbalistic and Chasidic concept concerning the drama of Creation, and note the relevant shift of emphasis in *Dirah Betachtonim*. But before moving on, let us restate in a nutshell two of the salient new perspectives of *Dirah Betachtonim* concerning Unity we learned in the previous chapters: First, our reality, too, is now incorporated in the all embracing Unity of G-d. Second, our reality relates to the Essence in a way unique to it alone, as the absence of religious characteristics and meaning—the absence of being *something*, merely being—is indicative of the nature of the Essence which transcends characteristics, manifestations, and solely *is*. To better understand this second point—as well as the first point in a more technical but more complete way—we introduce a new key concept from Kabbalistic and Chasidic cosmology: *tzimtzum*.

TZIMTZUM / THE CONCEPT

The concept *tzimtzum*—literally, contraction; metaphorically, a “quantum leap”—was introduced by the illustrious sixteenth century Kabbalist, Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, known as the

Arizal, to resolve a fundamental theological problem concerning Creation.² G-d is spiritual whereas this reality is physical; G-d is infinite whereas this reality is finite. What method could have been used to effect the dramatic transition from spiritual to physical in the energy flowing from G-d at Creation? It would appear that a spiritual force, no matter how many times diminished, could never result in a physical reality. To resolve this problem the *Arizal* introduced the concept of *tzimtzum*. Creation was not a process that proceeded along a continuum, he maintained. Rather, it involved a “quantum leap.” Beyond this leap, where the infinity and spirituality of G-d are no longer manifest, our finite reality could emerge. In the picturesque, metaphorical language of the Kabbalistic classic *Etz Chaim*:³

Know that before the emanated beings were emanated and the created beings were created, an undifferentiated supernal light filled all of existence and there was no empty space . . . but all was filled with that undifferentiated infinite light . . . And when it arose in His undifferentiated Will to create the worlds and emanate the emanated beings . . . He contracted Himself at the central point . . . and then was left an empty space . . .

And after the aforementioned contraction (*tzimtzum*), whereby there was left the space . . . there was already space where the emanated beings and created beings . . . could be there . . . And in that space He emanated and created and fashioned and made all the worlds . . .

In conventional Kabbalistic and Chasidic thought, the introduction of *tzimtzum* into the Creation process has served to increase and accentuate the chasm that separates G-d from this world, emphasizing the total lack of Divinity in all that is finite. In typical mystical texts, *tzimtzum* underscores the

HEAVEN ON EARTH

notion that the Divine presence, when and where present in this lowest of worlds, suffers an abysmal exile. After all, in our reality the original infinite Divine “light” has been withdrawn; our world exists post the gulf of tzimtzum, in an entirely “empty space.” Similarly, in didactic terms, the notion of tzimtzum has served to impress upon man that his mission is—through the fulfillment of his religious obligations—to aim to transcend the tzimtzum, as much as is humanly possible; to aid in the restoration of reality and the Divine presence—back to the primordial, pre-tzimtzum, undifferentiated infinite expansiveness of G-d.

(This might appear contradictory to the Kabbalistic and Chasidic emphasis described in previous chapters, not on the distance between reality and G-d but on the precise reverse—their oneness. But in truth, the mystical texts paradoxically underscore both the total unity of reality with G-d as well as the great gulf that divides them.

A rather simple way of understanding this complex matter can be gained by returning to our previous analogy of the laser apparition. Two notions are simultaneously applicable: one, the apparition is *in truth* nothing but light; two, it *appears* to be totally human. One can highlight the first idea, the inherent oneness of the apparition with light; or alternatively, one can underscore the drastic change that has occurred from the usual condition of light, how the light has—to the uninitiated onlooker—assumed solidity, form and movement. Similarly with regard to reality and G-d, Kabbalah and Chasidut emphasize both points: the *inherent* oneness of reality with G-d (the Supernal Unity), as well as the drastic change from G-dliness that has arisen in the *apparent* nature of reality (the frame of reference of the Lower Unity).

The point relevant to our current discussion is the *difference* between *apparent* reality, finite and physical as we know it, and

the nature of G-d. The mystical literature emphasizes that this difference is not merely—as some philosophers might have it—one of degree, but the product of a tzimtzum, a “quantum gap,” an absolute chasm.)

TZIMTZUM IN DIRAH BETACHTONIM

Now tzimtzum too has not been spared the reorientation of Dirah Betachtonim. To appreciate the Dirah Betachtonim attitude to tzimtzum, let us first note that the tzimtzum was a deliberate act of G-d. As such, it too was a positive act, giving expression to some Divine power and dimension. Prior to tzimtzum, as we saw, G-d’s “light” filled all, or, in other words, there was infinite manifestation of G-d—whereas tzimtzum represented a changeover to the rationing out, as it were, of *restricted* Divine energies that would in turn create finite entities. This can be put in different words: G-d, being Omnipotent, can produce both that which is infinite as well as, paradoxically, that which is finite⁴—and the drama of tzimtzum represented the bringing of G-d’s capacity for producing the finite to the forefront.

But nevertheless, though infinity receded and a finite arena emerged, Dirah Betachtonim maintains that tzimtzum should not be seen as a degeneration, as a diminishing of the Divine energy. Dirah Betachtonim in fact points out that G-d’s creating the finite roots *deeper* in the Divine Essence than the infinite—and thus, ultimately, tzimtzum represents no deterioration at all.

To explain, we must raise our sights, up towards the very core of the G-dhead, to G-d as He is on His own, as it were—above all the worlds and realities that emerged from Him, prior to and above both the finite as well as the infinite, above both tzimtzum as well as the primordial infinite light that preceded it. This will, in turn, enable us to evaluate more correctly the

HEAVEN ON EARTH

true values of all Divine dimensions that emerged from that core.

At the very core, G-d has, as it were, two options: He has the choice either to create or not to create, to do something or to do nothing at all. In other words, as described in Chasidic texts, at this level there are two Divine latencies: “to illuminate,” that is, to reach out, to manifest G-dliness; and “not to illuminate,” to remain in Himself.

Now, which of these two potentialities is closer to the very self, to the Essence of G-d? The answer, surprisingly: the potential “not to illuminate.” For the character of essence is—to exist as, and to remain, in and of itself, merely to be; unlike “illumination” or manifestation, reaching out, being *something*. At the very core of the G-dhead, then, the potential “not to illuminate” is tied in to G-d’s very Essence, whereas the potential “to illuminate” is a later, lower dimension.

When we return to study both the primordial pre-tzimtzum infinite illumination as well as tzimtzum in this light, different, deeper meanings and respective values emerge. Prior to tzimtzum, it was G-d in action, as it were—that is, surprisingly, the actualization of the *lower* potential, the potential “to illuminate,” whereby the infinite “light” shone unrestricted. Whereas tzimtzum, the restriction and constriction of the “light,” is now seen to represent the actualization of the *deeper* trend within G-d: the passive, restricted-in-the-self dimension of G-dliness; the potential “not to illuminate,” tied in with the very Essence. No longer is the potential “to illuminate”—i.e. to create, to reach out and relate, to be manifest, to be something—in focus; but the ability to *be*, in and of itself, as in the very Essence of G-d. Thus interpreted, tzimtzum is no degeneration at all but a return to the primordial mode of essence.

An important consequence of this change of perspective

from the general Kabbalistic and even Chasidic view on the Creation process is the significant shift of emphasis in Dirah Betachtonim concerning the cosmic purpose of existence and the goal of human endeavor. As noted earlier, according to Kabbalah and many Chasidic texts the general aim of existence and the thrust of spiritual endeavor is to transcend tzimtzum, to restore the world to the original all-encompassing pristine “light,” to the infinity that preceded tzimtzum. But Dirah Betachtonim is concerned with redeeming the world from even the primordial infinity—which is after all merely a manifestation, a reaching out, a relationship, “illumination”—back to the Essence of G-d. Dirah Betachtonim seeks to transcend “light” in all its forms, whatever its purity and expanse—harking back to the dark Essence.

THE UNG-DLY CHARACTERISTICS OF REALITY

If it is essence, the ultimate in G-dliness, that is to be sought by religious man, then the channel that leads him towards the Essence is in fact precisely *via* tzimtzum—and via the finitude that emerged from it. Accordingly, when man seeks the truly primordial G-dly state, he ought not try to penetrate the surface of his world, to achieve the dissolution of hard and fast reality, reaching for the underlying infinite substratum. On the contrary, he ought to seek this reality, in fact seek finitude itself. For that which is not expansive but finite, not fluid but hard and fast, that which is totally silent of any declaration of G-dliness—is in fact the non-expansive, restricted-in-itself, not telling but silent nature of Essence, that has become manifest via tzimtzum.

Thus we return once more to our earlier remarks concerning the attitude of Dirah Betachtonim; that the very naive plane of this reality, not merely its underlying substratum, is G-dly. From a more total perspective, tzimtzum does not represent a cosmic tragedy resulting in a cover-up of G-dliness—

HEAVEN ON EARTH

and the finite contours of natural reality as we naturally perceive it, that emerged from tzimtzum, are not something that must be overcome and transcended to permit G-dliness to come through. They are not an unredeemable vantage point that must be shed: they represent in fact the deepest aspect of the Divine. For tzimtzum was a positive act of G-d, providing man with finite, restrictive reality—an avenue to the deepest recess, to the restricted in-itself of the Divine.

Let us return now to the two salient features of Dirah Betachtonim identified at the beginning of the chapter and restate them afresh. First, our naive reality is united with G-d since it too exists, that is, owes its existence to G-d, partaking of the Essence, sharing in the Being of G-d. Second, the absence of G-dly features in this world is particularly suited to a relationship with G-d. We now understand this second point to mean not only that finite unG-dly reality enjoys a special relationship because its character represents the *absence* of superimpositions that cover the essence. But moreover: the unG-dly features of this reality—finitude, being hard and fast—themselves manifest the in-itself character of essence: the character of the Essence of G-d which their being truly is.

Dirah Betachtonim has thus once again, by probing Kabbalistic and Chasidic concepts deeper, achieved a striking reversal from commonly held metaphysical attitudes. In addition to its view that our reality is not metaphysically distinct, outside the Supernal Unity as commonly held, but is rather united with G-d in equal measure to the unity of higher realities—Dirah Betachtonim claims that our reality does not in truth display unG-dly features as usually maintained. Indeed, the very self-same nature of the very unG-dly qualities of this reality usually highlighted to downgrade our reality, those very traits which superficially suggest that this reality is G-d-forsaken, and the

very presentation of these qualities—are redeemed by this system, transformed rather than transcended, as from this profoundest of perspectives they reflect and root in the Essence of G-d.

INDEPENDENCE

Having learned that appearances can be deceiving, that the very traits which superficially bespeak the absence of G-d are in truth the manifestation of Essence, let us now consider what is usually deemed the most obnoxious trait of this reality from a religious point of view, namely the apparent self-substantiality and independence of this reality.

Our world appears self-sufficient, independent; it belies its creative Source, parading as a thing in and of itself. All higher realities represent some aspect of the Divine, manifest some Divine quality, or in other words, exist tellingly in a relationship with G-d—overtly dependent upon their Source. Indeed, it would appear that naturally, as it were, the sensation of dependence must occur throughout all realities, for, after all, they are all systems that are in fact dependent upon G-d. This reality therefore commonly stands condemned for appearing to deny its origins, for having somehow totally divorced itself from its Source, even to the point of rebellion. Dirah Betachtonim maintains, however, that correctly interpreted this characteristic, too, arises due to the distinction of this world.

To understand this we ask: If all ultimately comes from G-d, how in fact can this world not manifest its source? How can it apparently sever its umbilical cord, its very lifeline? The answer must be, paradoxically, that this reality has been endowed with some special power that permits it to achieve this denial. For having learned that the totality of reality emerges but from the one G-d—for without G-d there is non-existence, it follows that apparent shortcomings of reality, too,

must come from G-d; for if not, whence did they come? Let us, then, attempt to trace the specific source of this unusual endowment: where, as it were, within the G-dhead does the notion of independence root? No G-dly *attribute* or *manifestation* can provide this trait. For as we have just noted, throughout all that emerges from G-d, even—nay, especially—at the highest levels of G-dly emanations, *dependence* on G-d prevails. It is only in G-d's Essence that independence lies. G-d's very Essence is independent; self-sufficient and self-substantial. He exists in and of Himself, due to nothing outside of Himself. (This of course is central to the very notion of G-d.) And it is of this quality, maintains Dirah Betachtonim, that our reality partakes.

To summarize this and the previous two chapters: It is in Dirah Betachtonim that the notion of cosmic unity reaches its climax. All of the many, apparently diverse facets of the “laser hologram,” as it were, the arms as well as the legs, the eyes as the toes, are all one: they are all “light.” Even the very naive dimensions and perceptions of this reality themselves, are part of the great unity that permeates all existence. Indeed, when correctly interpreted, the very traits that apparently bespeak rebellion and indifference to G-d are manifestations of the unity of all in—specifically—the Essence of G-d.

Of the two types of realms, the higher worlds with their ambience of dependence upon G-d and this lowest of worlds with its atmosphere of independence, the latter paradoxically roots deeper in the Divine. Our reality specifically, naked as it is of all superimpositions, is transparent to the core: it partakes of the unadulterated Essence of G-d—the character of which is in fact in-itself, hard and fast and independent. Thus, maintains Dirah Betachtonim, specifically this, “this lowly world, beneath which there is no lower,” is the arena for the deepest relationship with G-d.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE AND ASCETICISM

Our thoughts now turn to the nature of the human worshiper as he appears in *Dirah Betachtonim*, existentially as well as in behavior. We will look at both the unusual character of the mystical experience, as well as at the place of asceticism in this system. As in earlier chapters, we shall proceed from a short review of earlier Jewish writings and subsequently return to *Dirah Betachtonim*. But first, a general description of the mystic.

THE MYSTIC

The very term mysticism conjures up notions of mystery. The aim of the mystic is for that which is mysterious and beyond—beyond the tangible, beyond that which can be seen or heard, beyond the grasp of the human senses.

The ordinary religious individual is, of course, also concerned in no small measure with the spiritual and supernatural: he prays to G-d, worships Him, follows His dictates. But the mystic goes further. He aims to peel away the mirage of this world and connect to the true underlying reality. All he sees and comes into contact with in our reality he regards as

HEAVEN ON EARTH

but a representation of something higher, something greater, something transcendent. And it is union that he seeks with that transcendence.

Those self-same metaphysical problems that trouble the theologian, such as the compatibility of the spiritual and the physical, of the one and the many, of G-d and reality, of mind and body, concern the mystic too. But whereas the theologian approaches these issues logically, mentally, the mystic approaches them emotionally, existentially. The theologian is interested in conceptual resolutions of these dichotomies; the mystic *lives* these tensions, seeking to resolve them in the bottomless depths of his soul, in his union with the metaphysical depths of his surrounding reality.

The mystic is often a tragic figure, torn by the tensions between body and soul, between the physical and the spiritual. He is tormented by his bodily chains that tie him down to this meager reality; he is drawn to the intangible, he longs for the sublime, for the ideal. He wishes to free himself, to soar far and beyond. The world around him is a dark, abysmal place. His soul sores and soars, trying to escape its worldly prison.

In practice, the mystic is often an ascetic, choosing a life of self-denial. Grudgingly, sparingly, he makes concessions to his body—in his view it is exceedingly vexing that the body makes any demands at all! The more he can free himself from the clutch of its requirements, so much the better.

THE OVED / MYSTICISM AND ASCETICISM IN CHASIDUT

Chasidut is clearly a system that advocates mystical experience. It aims to orient man to the spiritual, attributing paramount significance to intense direct experience with the spiritual. Chasidut is also clearly ascetic in that it encourages man to transcend his everyday bodily needs and move closer to G-d.

Let us note three particular aspects of classic Chasidic mysticism and asceticism and subsequently return to see these same three issues as they occur in Dirah Betachtonim.

ASCETICISM

First, asceticism, or more generally, the behavior advocated by Chasidut in relation to the body. In the Chabad Chasidic lexicon two terms are in use in discussing man's position vis-à-vis his body and the physical world: *it'kafya*, bending or subduing, and *it'hapcha*, overturning or transforming. There are two levels of effort, two possible spiritual states, which man might experience in relation to his body and his material environment. First, a state of perpetual struggle, in the endeavor to keep his physical side out of the way so that it does not interfere with his spirituality; and second, a state where the physical is transformed, becoming itself a vehicle for spiritual endeavor.

At the outset, in striving to spiritually regulate the body, to conquer its carnal desires and religious indifference, and similarly to transcend the world around oneself with its distractions and religious apathy, one must engage in a very real conflict. Man is born with a body that requires food, drink and sleep and craves close attention; he finds himself naturally attracted to the material rewards of his surrounds. In order to develop his spirituality and ultimately give it free reign, he must confront this body, this mundane world, wrestle with it, fight it, curb it, suppress its drives and wants. This ascetic state of mind and behavior is referred to as *it'kafya*, bending or subduing, the body.

Eventually, after many years of striving and struggling and if graced by G-d, man may totally vanquish his foe, totally subdue and even transform his body and natural tendencies. He may reach a state where his body no longer desires anything

HEAVEN ON EARTH

material, where his mind no longer cares for anything mundane or worldly; his total personality—his mind, interests, emotions, creative energies and drives—and all his bodily resources, not to mention his behavior, have become totally sublimated, transformed, oriented solely towards G-d. The battle is won, the foe subdued, chained and set to work for the master. The term used to designate this state of behavior, mind and attitude is *it'hapcha*, overturning or transforming.

Now *it'hapcha* is of course the level attained by saints. The average person, even after a lifetime of endeavor, finds himself still locked in conflict. Time after time, despite his greatest efforts, the body and its wants assert themselves, requiring him to continuously sustain his vigilant struggle. *It'hapcha*, the fundamental transformation of the body, remains an ideal, unattainable to the average individual.

Indeed, the average individual *must* regard *it'hapcha* as out of bounds. He dare not view his body as something religiously positive, as something that can be sublimated—for his bodily desires, temptations and diversions are indeed a formidable foe to his spirituality. He must continually, relentlessly, vie with his body as with an enemy, fighting it, containing it, repressing its wants, in a perpetual attempt to overcome and subdue it. Thus, according to Chasidut, herein, in subduing, fighting with his body, is the arena for worship for the average individual. As a great Chasidic mentor would say time and again to his students, "How precious it is to G-d when a Jew *breaks* himself!"

To quote the Chasidic classic *Tanya*:

. . . therefore no person should feel dejected, nor should his heart be exceedingly sad, even if he will be this way all his days, engaged in this war, for perhaps he was created for this and this is his service, to subdue the *sitra achara* perpetually.¹

The first point in brief: the relationship of the average individual with his body in earlier Chasidic teachings is one of constant struggle and antipathy—“the strength of the body is the weakness of the soul.”² Sublimating the body is reserved for the rare saintly exception.

THE MYSTIC’S REALITY

Upon reflection, it will become clear that we are already aware of objective corollaries in the outside world to the subjective categories of *it’kafya* and *it’hapcha*, subduing and transforming, respectively. As amply discussed in previous chapters, in the objective world too, Chasidut maintains that relationships with G-d exist on two levels—the Lower Unity and the Supernal Unity. As we have seen, on a first and lower level, the world is something distinct from G-d, and at this level relationships with G-d subsist in that reality is subdued, not in conflict with G-d, but respectful to and in accord with Him. And on a second and higher level, reality is G-d. *It’kafya*, the struggle of the worshiper to ensure that his body does not hinder, but respects his endeavors in serving G-d, corresponds to the Lower Unity—occurring in the usual human frame of reference with its inherent diversions from and indifference to G-d, where there is not ontological oneness but at best harmony between a world and G-d that are ontologically distinct. *It’hapcha*, on the other hand, is achieved by saintly individuals who succeed in transforming their bodies and personalities into vehicles for the Divine, or, in other words, who succeed to tune in to the all-pervasive Supernal Unity where all, no matter how seemingly indifferent to G-d, is inherently nothing but G-d. To them, arms and legs, emotions and thoughts, ambitions and goals are all aught but the foundational “light.”

And much as subjective *it’hapcha*, the transforming of the body, remains beyond the average individual, he similarly can-

not hope to reach that level at which objective reality around him loses its independence and merges with G-d. His focus must remain set, rather, upon raising his reality to the point where it—as something distinct from G-d—is in the highest possible accord with G-d: the Lower Unity, not the Supernal Unity.

To summarize the first and second points: In general Chasidic literature, both in himself as in the objective world outside of himself, the average person cannot aspire for transformation, for ontological oneness with G-d, but must suffice with, at most, the control of something distinct from G-d.

THE MYSTIC'S STRIVING

The third point concerns less the relationship with the body and external world than the mystic's internal orientation—his driving force, his life's striving, the longing of his soul. As generally portrayed, the mystic aims to free himself—to shed layer after layer of superficial encumbrances, to remove all “static” interfering with true unlimited expansiveness—and reach the fluid, abstract, all-embracing, expansive All. He seeks to dissolve into and merge with the ultimate *Nothing* that precedes and transcends our tangible, restrictive, finite reality.

The three points we have seen concerning mysticism in earlier Chasidic writings: 1. For the average person *it'kafya* is the norm; *it'hapcha* but an ideal; 2. The oneness in objective reality for the average person is a behavioral one (the Lower Unity), rather than an ontological one; 3. The mystic's existential aim is for the *Nothing*.

THE DIRAH BETACHTONIM MYSTIC

Once again, in Dirah Betachtonim all three matters are fundamentally different.

ASCETICISM AND THE MYSTIC'S REALITY

As for the first point, in the Dirah Betachtonim system the mystic is not primarily an ascetic. Indeed, he is quite content to eat, drink and proceed with the usual dictates of the human body. Put somewhat differently, the Dirah Betachtonim mystic is involved with *it'hapcha* right from the outset, as for him the body is immediately regarded as a vehicle for the Divine. But this requires further elaboration.

We are already well aware of the second relevant change in Dirah Betachtonim, that is, the differing attitude of this system to the Unity of *objective* reality. As we have seen, Dirah Betachtonim achieves the unification of both the Lower and the Supernal Unity, maintaining that ultimate unity can be found even, or especially, in the uninterpreted human frame of reference; for the physical world with its apparent materiality, finitude and indifference to G-dliness is indeed one with the Essence of G-d. Thus, unlike in earlier writings, in Dirah Betachtonim the mystic's interests lie from the very start in the *ontological* unity with G-d.

It follows (we return to the first point), that in this system, asceticism, the renouncing of the body and physical world, has no central place. If the Essence of G-d is to be found in the physical itself, there is no point in repressing and subduing one's bodily dictates—rather recognize them for the G-dliness they are. From the Dirah Betachtonim perspective, G-dliness is not antithetical to the physical, necessitating the overcoming of the body and the physical world as a prerequisite for mystical union; rather, the ultimate mystical union occurs specifically in the physical body itself as in the very physicality of the objective world.

True, the mystic—devoted to the G-dliness in the universe not to the gratification of his bodily senses—must not be

HEAVEN ON EARTH

blinded by the physical, his relationship with the physical must not be one of indulgence, an enterprise humans all too naturally seek. But ideal *mysticism* itself, maintains Dirah Betachtonim, is to be found specifically in the physical body. Thus, the mystic must of course overcome the *a-priori* carnality of his body, and similarly strip away the superficial illusory layers of the objective world around him, searching for the inherent G-dliness. But once he learns to transcend all that hides G-dliness, once the final layer of the mirage is stripped away and the Divine *Essence* becomes his objective—he paradoxically returns to the material world, the physical, both in himself and in objective reality, becoming the true arena for union with G-d. Not because the physical serves as a springboard for the spiritual, nor because he learns to find some redeeming feature, some transcendent dimension in the physical—no, physicality itself, *qua* physicality, provides him with the ultimate mystical encounter. For from the Dirah Betachtonim perspective, more physical, more finite, amounts to less “tainted” by Divine manifestations and meaning—greater purity and more of the character of essence.

(In fact, through this approach, the transformation of the mystic’s material self will be more complete. For the Dirah Betachtonim mystic does not reject and discard the carnal body itself and its natural tendencies, considering them beyond redemption, rescuing solely the body’s latent spiritual potential. To the contrary, for him the totality of a very material body itself comes to bespeak the Essence of G-d.)

Moreover, once aware of the Dirah Betachtonim perspective that the physical world itself is G-dly, the mystic’s approach at the very outset, even before having put his physical self through the painstaking struggle and purification of *it’kafya*, need not be one of antipathy to the physical. For from

this vantage point, unlike the way it appears in Chasidut generally, the body is primarily not an enemy, but a friend. True, a friend to be handled with care, but a friend nonetheless. In this system, man's aim in confronting his physical self is not to first subdue an enemy nor to then conquer it totally, but to gradually train the body to be its true self.

Thus, both *it'kafya* and *it'hapcha* are redefined in Dirah Betachtonim. As noted, with regard to *it'kafya*, the body is primarily not an enemy to be subdued and repressed but a friend to be handled with care. And even *it'hapcha* has a categorically different meaning; it does not connote an enemy conquered and chained, but rather a friend taught to show his true colors.

And therefore, *it'hapcha*, transforming the body, is not a dangerous course, set on the distant horizon as an ideal, approachable for but a select few. It is rather at the forefront, predominant; setting the tone for the striving of the average individual, even whilst he is yet at the initial stage of *it'kafya*. Nor, in fact, is *it'kafya*, the subduing of the body, the overriding notion of the average man's relationship with his body; it may be a *method*, but not a goal. In Dirah Betachtonim the body and G-dliness are not mutually exclusive—to the contrary, the ultimate communion is in the physical body itself.³

THE MYSTIC'S STRIVING

We note once again that in Dirah Betachtonim, the realization of the G-dliness in man's body and the world around him does not come about by discovering some hitherto unnoticed hue beneath the surface, but rather by achieving that the very physical, because it is physical, should shine with its many colors. More appropriately, not shine at all. "Shine" and "colors" are appropriate metaphors for the yardstick of meaning and qualities—of manifestations—not of essence. The physical, precisely because it is spiritually colorless, even

opaque, as it were, manifests the innermost, secluded Divine recess, the *Essence* of G-d.

Thus, in this system the mystic must in fact strive not to be lured and ensnared by the romance of the *abstract*, by the shimmer of the *transcendent*. For the transcendent Love and Wisdom of G-d, even His expansive Infinity, are valuable merely in terms of metaphysical *meaning*, not in terms of essence. They are merely *attributes* of G-d, merely manifestations that emerge from the Essence. Similarly in terms of the mystic's person: intellectual and emotional apprehension of G-d or transcendental experience represent merely the attributes, the manifestations of his soul finding religious *expression* and *meaning* in merging with transcendent spiritual spheres. The mystic hereby *experiences*, rather than *is* G-d.

The Dirah Betachtonim mystic strives, rather, for the unenhanced Essence of G-d, beyond all Divine manifestations and qualities—to be found, paradoxically, specifically in the physical. His aim is for the nakedness of *being*, untainted by superimposed meaning and significance, however sublime. Existentially, he strives not for experience, nor to be anything, merely to be. Thereby, he merges with the Ultimate Being.

Thus, the Dirah Betachtonim mystic differs on the third account, too, from his conventional counterpart—his orientation, the nature and direction of his striving. This mystic strives not for **Nothing**, but for **Something**.⁴ He wishes not to dissolve, but to be. The conventional mystic is troubled by the hard and fast nature of reality, by restrictions, by definitions. He seeks therefore to rise above and dissolve into the vast expansiveness in which there are no restrictions, hence the **Nothing**. But this emphasis on expansive nothingness retains its validity only when concerned with metaphysical *meaning* and *significance*, when concerned with merely the continuum

of *manifestations* of G-d. From that perspective the mystic naturally finds the infinite superior to the finite, the expansive far more desirable than the restrictive. But all manifestations, including the infinite expansiveness of G-d (the pre-tzimtzum “light”), derive from a Source, from the Essence of G-d. And it is this Essence, the Ultimate *Something*, for which the Dirah Betachtonim mystic strives: the hard and fast core of G-d, the restrictive, non-illuminating Essence, the Being—that manifests itself, in fact, in the “hardness and fastness,” in the restrictiveness and spiritual darkness of the physical and finite world of his body.

(Put in other words, the Dirah Betachtonim mystic transcends the *a-priori* “somethingness” of this reality—its restrictive finitude, indifference and self-substantiality—referred to in the literature as “the *created* something.” But he transcends also the **Nothing**, the expansive infinity, which is merely a *manifestation* of G-d. He strives for the Essence of G-d, the very *being* of all reality—referred to as “the *true* Something.” And this Something he finds manifest in the “somethingness” of the physical rather than in the “Nothingness” of the abstract and transcendent.)

We conclude this chapter with words the Rebbe once wrote to a symposium on *mysticism* which at first might seem unsuited for the occasion:

. . . One of the aspects of Chabad is to reveal and expound the esoteric aspects of the Torah and Mitzvot so that they can be comprehended by the three intellectual faculties... and reduced to rational categories, down to the actual performance of the Mitzvot, showing how, in the final analysis, G-d can be “comprehended” better by action (the performance of Mitzvot) than by meditation...

HEAVEN ON EARTH

...gaining an ever growing measure of true freedom through the everyday experience of Torah and Mitzvot with emphasis on actual deed. . . .⁵

By this point in our discussion we appreciate that this emphasis on actual deed can be fitting indeed for a forum on mysticism. For from the vantage point of the Rebbe's *Dirah Betachtonim weltanschauung*, the essence of *mysticism* itself, the very quest for true spiritual freedom, is not vying with a hostile world, a tragic yearning to escape its physical prison, but finding union in the here and now. The ultimate mystical ideal is merging with a world which is co-essential with G-d: ordinary being one with the Being of G-d; the *a-priori* something one with the ultimate Something.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE LANGUAGE OF DIRAH BETACHTONIM

The thought system of Dirah Betachtonim has some terms and phrases peculiar to itself alone. In addition, terms and phrases used in other systems assume here new meanings and connotations. Often, precisely less obvious, more subtle changes of *connotation* that occur in a system of thought most potently reflect the breadth and pervasiveness of the change of perspectives that has occurred. We will dwell on one term and one phrase often used in Dirah Betachtonim: the former acquires a connotation drastically different to the one it has in Chabad *Chasidut* generally, and the latter would be totally absurd if not for the context of this system.

YESH

Perhaps the most derogatory of terms in Chasidic literature and one of the most offensive in colloquial Chabad Chasidic expression is the Hebrew term *yesh*. *Yesh* can be translated literally as “something that is,” and is used synonymously with the more common Hebrew term *ba'al ga'avah*, denoting an arrogant person. There is, however, a difference between the

Chasidic term *yesh* and the more widespread term *ba'al ga'avah*, indicative of a significant difference in perspective between Chasidic and conventional views of arrogance.

As we have seen earlier, it is axiomatic of Chasidic metaphysics that this world is nothing in its own right, that all that exists is aught but G-d. Accordingly, arrogance is not merely an offense towards one's fellow man, nor only one of many possible offenses towards G-d; it bespeaks rather a fundamental defect in a person's self image and his relationship with G-d. Hereby, the person is denying his essential nothingness, and asserting an existence other than that of G-d: he is a *yesh*, a something.

If not for the Chasidic perspectives on G-d and world, being a *yesh*, merely something, is in no way reprehensible—after all, everything is something. Being something normally represents, of course, the neutral starting point for everything that transpires. It is only raising oneself above this baseline, towering above the common ground shared by all in an *exaggerated* assertion or sense of self, that is regarded as offensive. But from a Chasidic perspective, where the inherent nothingness of this reality is paramount, any distortion of the *a-priori* nothingness through the mere assertion or sensation of being, is strongly censured. Thus, even very subtle levels of self-prominence are kept in check in the Chasidic community. A person, though not arrogant by any means, but merely asserting himself, assuming an *être*, is regarded most unfavorably. He might even earn that most derogatory of Chasidic epithets: *Yesh!*

Today however, with the prominence of the Dirah Betachtonim system, this highly negative connotation of *yesh* is being supplanted by a positive one (though the term is still reserved in colloquial speech for its former meaning). For example, if it is now said that G-d encounters a *yesh*, the

intended implication is no longer disparaging—that here is something that continues to retain its “somethingness,” obstinately resisting G-d’s Omnipresence. To the contrary, the contemporary implication is that the *greatest* possible religious achievement is attained. And not because through its relationship with G-d the yesh loses its *yeshut* and becomes nothing, but rather because specifically a yesh, *qua* yesh, is involved. For a something (*yesh*)—rather than a nothing (*ayin*)—roots in the Essence of G-d; specifically a yesh possesses that unique relationship with the Ultimate *Yesh*, with the Ultimate Something.

The implied connotation of the term has dramatically changed, testifying to a deep running change of overall perspective.

HALA’AT HATACHTON

And now an expression that would be totally absurd outside the system of Dirah Betachtonim, but is used time and again within this system: *hala’at hatachton*; roughly translated, the elevation of that which is lower.

Prima facie, this phrase is patently absurd, self-contradictory. Can the low be high? Moreover, this phrase is constantly used in a relative sense: to imply that that which is low is higher than that which is high—total absurdity! This expression might have been reasonable if its intention was that something low in one regard is high in another, or that lowliness provides potential for something high; for example, that poverty leads to humility. But this is not what is meant by this phrase in the Dirah Betachtonim literature. Here it means, in fact, that the low, in and of its lowliness—because it is low—is high.

In light of all the above this phrase is not absurd at all. In Dirah Betachtonim, specifically “this lowly world, beneath

HEAVEN ON EARTH

which there is no lower” roots in the very Essence of G-d; specifically the absence of higher religious significance points to the presence of unadulterated Being; specifically lowly characteristics, such as finitude or independence and self-sufficiency, root in similar characteristics peculiar to specifically the very core of the G-dhead. Thus, the phrase *hala'at hatachton* is used time and again in discussing Dirah Betachtonim—without raising an eyebrow.

CHAPTER NINE

THE LOGIC OF DIRAH BETACHTONIM

Logic provides “pigeonholes” into which concepts are placed. There exist *a-priori* logical notions such as sequence, hierarchy, cause and effect, etc., and it is by means of the *a-priori* “pigeonholes” these provide that ideas are structured, sorted and arranged. Normally, when engaging in a cognitive exercise, the overall structure of pigeonholes, or the axioms, remain intact, and it is merely the *a-posteriori* ideas which are assigned appropriate places in the system. At times during the cognitive process, and especially when rethinking an issue or moreover challenging and criticizing previously held views, a considerable reshuffling occurs—but again, the “filing system” usually remains intact.

But then there are those rarer sets of ideas that shatter the previous shelving system. The previous axioms fall away, and a new shelving system, a new set of axioms takes their place. Such is the case with Dirah Betachtonim: Dirah Betachtonim has not only its own structuring of ideas, but even its own *a-priori* logical framework by which they are structured.

Normally, when a religious work assigns primacy, even in an innovative way, to a particular form of worship, to some

HEAVEN ON EARTH

particular mitzvah, the theological axioms remain intact. In effect, the work claims that in ways which have previously not been recognized, specifically this form of worship rates at a certain high point on the normative yardstick of religious values, specifically this mitzvah fits, as it were, into the uppermost pigeonhole of the shelving system—for it, in particular, raises man to greater heights. But *Dirah Betachtonim*, as we have learned, does not stop here at all. It claims that greatness itself is of relatively less value, whereas the mundane and the lowly are of relatively greater value. The yardstick itself is overturned. Clearly, if this system is to be logical, a new set of axioms must be in place.

How is this axiomatic revolution achieved?

In a nutshell, by broadening the frame of reference, by noticing and then focusing upon a pigeonhole that previously went unnoticed. The introduction of this new pigeonhole into the logical framework forces an *a-priori* rearrangement of all the other pigeonholes.

An analogy: A number of tables are assessed for their relative values. When viewed from a distance, one particular table is considered the most valuable: it is the largest, the most tastefully crafted and colored. But when the viewers move closer, their opinion changes. In fact, the table which at first appeared to be the least valuable of all is now considered the most expensive of all. For it alone—the smallest, most tastelessly shaped and colored table—is made of bronze, rather than wood.

What was the difference between the first and second assessments? During the first assessment, it was taken for granted that all the tables were made of wood. Thus, the material of which the tables were fashioned was conveniently ignored, and the superimposed attributes, such as size, shape and color were appraised. Whereas the second assessment was

broader; another, more basic factor, was introduced to the arena. The material of the tables was no longer a constant baseline from which to proceed with evaluation; it too became subject to evaluation. Thus, the notion of a wooden table—which previously meant nothing in terms of value—now assumed meaning; and, in turn, the perception of all relative values became rearranged. Axioms change with the scope of inquiry.

(Put somewhat more in the abstract: as long as one entertained the notion that wood “must-be”—wood was regarded as “zero,” and the evaluation proceeded beyond this point (ascribing greatest value to table x). But once the possibility of there being *no* wood was recognized, the baseline moved further back, and the factor “wooden table” became of value, and ultimately the entire perception of relative values was rearranged.)

Something similar to this is what occurs in the Dirah Betachtonim system. A new “pigeonhole,” an aspect of G-d and reality hitherto not focused upon, is now brought into focus; a basic dimension previously taken for granted is now included in the evaluation—whereupon the axioms change, and consequently the entire array of ideas and concepts undergoes a comprehensive change.

Normally, when evaluating the nature of *reality*, forms of *worship* or the nature of *G-d*, there is something we tend to overlook, something we take for granted; a constant baseline only beyond which all evaluation occurs. There is one issue we regard as zero, one “pigeonhole” more or less non-existent in our evaluations: namely, existence itself.

As for *reality*, we take it for granted that we exist, and that everything around us and all we hear about exists. For our minds begin their inquiries only once they themselves exist, and begin inquiry into outside objects only once those objects

too exist (at least in potential, theory, etc.). Thus when we learn of something new, we ask: Does it move? does it grow? does it feel, or think? Is it big or small? strong or weak? pleasant or unpleasant? poetic or prosaic? But we do not ask: Does it exist? If it did not exist there would be nothing to talk about. And hence, the usual conclusions of our evaluations: that which moves is greater than that which is inert; that which feels and thinks surpasses that which is not conscious; that which is big, strong, pleasant or poetic is superior to that which is small, weak, unpleasant or prosaic.

But Dirah Betachtonim expands its field of inquiry. It takes nothing—absolutely nothing—for granted, and hence incorporates the very fact of existence itself into its equations. Dirah Betachtonim, proceeding from creation *ex nihilo*, entertains the notion of nothing—not only no qualities—existing at all, and thus its baseline moves to non existence, and existence ipso facto becomes a “pigeonhole,” worthy of note. As it were, the substance of the table, not only the superimposed forms, assumes value. And once this additional factor is included, the axioms, and in turn, the relative values of the entire array of existing entities undergo revolutionary change.

Similarly with regard to *worship*. So long as we wish to find metaphysical and religious value only in what reality *means* and *represents*, only in the religious *qualities* of reality, we will of course ascribe greater value to prayer than to wrapping *tefillin* leather on the arm, to meditation rather than to wearing woolen *tzitzit*. The former manifest greater metaphysical and religious *meaning*, the former rate higher on the yardsticks of refinement and transcendence, the former are more Divinely colored. But with this approach we are ignoring the most fundamental of religious facts. We are overlooking the fact that this reality is not only an entity that can develop a relation-

ship with G-d; that is, a self-substantial entity that can exhibit characteristics that appeal to G-d, that is able to find lines of communication with Him. In other words, an entity of equal ontological status with G-d that relates within the framework and via the possibilities available to two equally existing beings. Far more than this is the case: this reality was *created* by G-d, owes its very *being* to G-d, and, therefore, its very *being*, être, is involved in a significant relationship with G-d. Once this normally overlooked dimension is included in our assessment—the axioms change, and the relative values are rearranged: It becomes evident that specifically that which is devoid of meaning, that which in no way can be described as refined or sublime but is finite, hard and fast—those forms of behavior whose being is not tainted by superimpositions, those acts that merely are—fit into the pigeonhole at the top of the newly arranged hierarchy: being, essence.

The same is true with regard to *G-d*. In religious discussions, G-d's existence is normally taken for granted. Thus, we ask: Is it G-d's wisdom or love? Is it His omnipotence or His benevolence? Is it His infinity or His transcendence? Now taking *G-d's* existence for granted is of course appropriate. With regard to G-d, non-existence must not be entertained. But why in fact must it not be entertained? Precisely because G-d represents that which exists, in and of Himself, from all time to all time, due to nothing else outside of Himself, and of His very nature must exist and cannot not exist. This *existence* dimension of G-d is the most fundamental and important aspect of G-d. Hereby we recognize that G-d is not of one substance with man and reality, merely different in degree or kind—man knows but G-d knows *all*, or even man is finite but G-d is *infinite*—but rather G-d is of a totally different *substance*: He, unlike man or world, is not created or contingent,

but absolute, existing in and of Himself. Dirah Betachtonim gives full weight to this overriding aspect of G-d, and hence in an axiomatic shift redirects religious man away from G-d's wisdom, love or transcendence, towards His Essence, His Being—to be found specifically in the prosaic, physical and finite.

In sum, Dirah Betachtonim corrects the erroneous “zero value” given to mere existence in our “equations” concerning reality, worship and G-d. It gives full value to that first of all religious statements, “In the beginning G-d created...,”¹ acknowledging the full implications of creation *ex nihilo*: there was once non-existence, and therefore primordial non-existence is the most basic baseline beyond which all occurs, the primary frame of reference from which to evaluate all that occurs within it—including the phenomenon of existence *per se*. And once existence itself is recognized as a noteworthy “pigeonhole,” conventional religious hierarchies are drastically reshuffled.

And thus, as outlined in the previous chapters, whether it be the relative importance of various worlds, the structure of the unity of the cosmos, the nature of the G-d-world relationship, the significance of various traits of reality, or the roles of body and soul or of forms of worship—we begin to appreciate the *hala'at hatachton* (the elevation of that which is lower): the unique religious value of the physical and finite, which is both co-essential with the Divine Essence as well as particularly reflecting of its self-centered independence. And we thus come to recognize that in the performance of physical mitzvot in the here and now, as nowhere else, man reaches the highest union with G-d: here his yesh merges, realizing its co-essence, with the Ultimate and Absolute Yesh.

CHAPTER TEN

RELIGIOUS DEVOTION

Before concluding this section of the book there is a matter we must deal with, albeit briefly.

What is the place of spiritual forms of worship, such as prayer, meditation, the love and awe of G-d, in the Dirah Betachtonim system? Doubtless, prayer too is an integral part of Jewish worship; patently, intellectual contemplation of, and emotional devotion to G-d are religious ideals of the highest order—indeed, so much Chasidic literature is devoted to the momentous importance of these endeavors—but what is their role in the Dirah Betachtonim system which appears to downgrade their significance? The answer to this question will demonstrate how the role of yet another issue, namely, religious devotion in spiritual worship, has been revolutionized in this thought-system.

Until this point we have highlighted the unique significance of essence, pointing out that it addresses not only that which is within the framework of the existing, but also that which is beyond, that it is a phenomenon meaningful in the Creator's arena which straddles non-existence and existence, where the transition from non-existence to existence is

achieved; that moreover, it amounts to the very Being of G-d Himself. We concurrently played down the importance of the attributes and manifestations of G-d, whether the restricted post-tzimtzum forces and spheres or even the infinite pre-tzimtzum “light,” with significant implications for human worship. Further analysis will demonstrate however that the attributes and manifestations of G-d are in truth an indispensable component, as it were, in the conception of the G-dhead—and consequently, there is in fact a significant role for religious devotion.

First let us dwell upon a flaw in the major thrust of our arguments until this point. If G-d is truly infinite, encompassing of all possibilities—then He cannot be limited even to essence, His primary dimension. If that were the case, He would, in effect, be restricted to a particular mode, restricted to His Self, precluded from manifesting Himself. True, if we were to limit G-d to Divine qualities and attributes, such as Love and Wisdom or Omnipresence and Infinity, and overlook the Essence, we would be guilty of ignoring the very core of the G-dhead. But, on the other hand, limiting G-d to the very core would detract from an all-able G-d, as it would exclude His ability to “illuminate”—to reach out, to relate, to assume qualities. The incorporation of *manifestations*—qualities and attributes—as well as essence in the G-dhead is indispensable to the conception of a truly able, or omnipotent, G-d.

This realization concerning the nature of G-d sheds new light, in turn, on the role of spiritual worship. It should now become evident that though physical worship—concerned as it is with essence—is the primary dimension of religious endeavor, spiritual worship too, concerned with Divine qualities such as Transcendence, Infinity, Love and Wisdom, also plays an important role. If man were involved only with

essence, his worship would not be complete—as it would involve neither the entire range of G-dly dimensions nor the entire range of his own spiritual capacities. True, limiting worship to those modes that relate to Divine qualities and correspondingly to man's spiritual faculties amounts to ignoring the very core of the G-dhead as well as the very core of man, but on the other hand, limiting worship to the very core excludes other dimensions of G-d and man. Physical worship unaccompanied by religious devotion suggests that it is only on the plane of essence that man communicates with G-d, whereas the realm of spiritual manifestation and meaning—of Divine attributes and features such as Divine wisdom and love, as well as, correspondingly, man's rational and emotional faculties—are beyond this communion. It is the accompaniment of prayer and devotion to physical mitzvot that involves G-d in His totality, as well as demonstrates that G-d has reached not only man's essence but his entire person.

The about-face achieved by the profound Dirah Betachtonim Torah perspective is now complete. We started out with the assumption that prayer and meditative devotion are higher forms of worship than physical mitzvot. Indeed, mitzvot appeared of little religious value and we therefore embarked on an exploration of their role in Judaism. From there we initially proceeded to point out that there is some value in the prosaic mitzvah, for through it infinite G-d touches even the furthest reaches.

But at this point, our position is the precise reverse: we have come to recognize that physical worship is the highest form of worship, because the physical is inherently tied in with the very core of the G-dhead, with Essence. We consequently proceeded to question the significance of the *lesser* form of worship, *spiritual* worship. And we finally concluded that spir-

HEAVEN ON EARTH

itual worship is nevertheless of value—for it demonstrates G-d's far reach, as it involves even the lower dimension of the G-dhead and reaches into even the lesser side of man! A total axiomatic change has indeed occurred.

For Dirah Betachtonim, not content to evaluate things from a post-Creation perspective, but from a pre-Creation one, has brought essence into the equation and has in fact ascribed the highest logical primacy to essence, and hence all logical pigeonholes have been reshuffled and all religious values have been drastically altered.

SECTION THREE

IN FOCUS

THE NATURE OF G-D

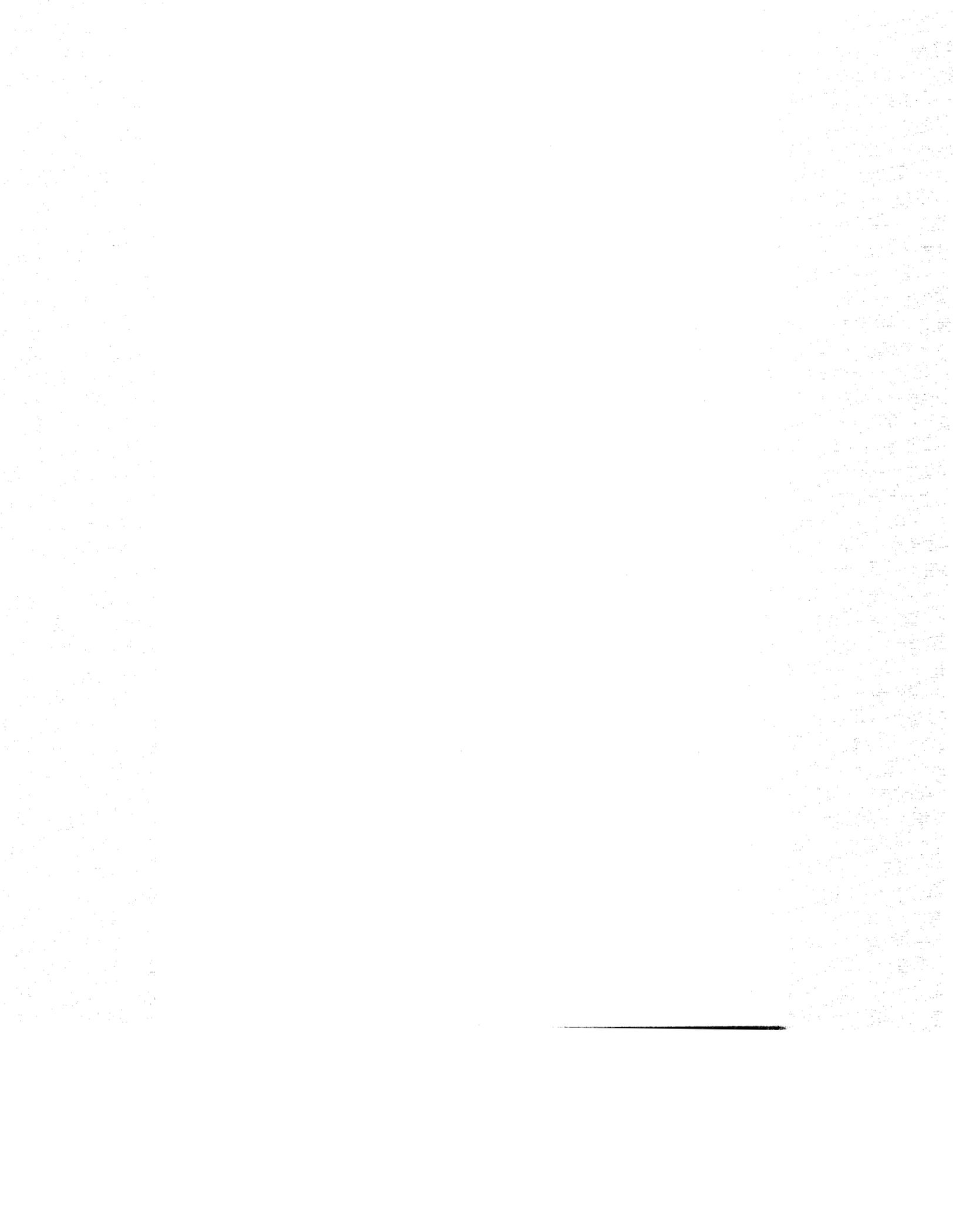
THE HUMAN / BODY AND SOUL

MITZVOT / THEIR SPIRITUAL ROLE AND FUNCTION

THE AFTERLIFE

HISTORY / A DIRAH BETACHTONIM PERSPECTIVE

SOCIOLOGY / THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF
DIRAH BETACHTONIM



CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE NATURE OF G-D

WHAT IS G-D?

Much time and effort has been devoted by Jewish thinkers to describing the nature of G-d. Often, from the writings of a given thinker, there emerges a more or less distinctive definition. For example, in Maimonides' writings, G-d is portrayed primarily as Supreme Intellect, or in the writings of Rabbi Chasdai Crescas, as Supreme Love. The Kabbalistic and Chasidic literature has also tended to highlight particular definitions of G-d—and Dirah Betachtonim has its own particular emphasis. We shall attempt to outline the way G-d appears in this thought system against the background of other viewpoints, both pre-Chasidic and Chasidic.

THE NATURE OF G-D IN EARLIER WRITINGS

The Torah states: "No man can see Me and live."¹ A great divide separates man's mind from G-d. G-d operates, as it were, on a totally different "operating system," beyond the frame of reference of human cognition.² Maimonides³ (and others) therefore emphasized that all terms employed by

HEAVEN ON EARTH

Scripture and the Sages in describing G-d are not to be understood as positive descriptions of what G-d is, but as negative representations of what He is not. For example, G-d is called "wise" not in an attempt to define G-d's character as possessing the human trait of wisdom, but rather to portray Him as free of the opposite of wisdom.

The transcendental nature of G-d—His being totally divorced from all human features, and His total unapproachability—reaches unique dimensions in the Chasidic literature. In Maimonides' writings, for example, though G-d's otherliness is accentuated, He is nevertheless predominantly viewed as Supreme Logic; in effect, He is still defined in terms meaningful within the human frame of reference, still regarded on a continuum with man. Man and G-d share the common feature of logic; the differences, however great, are a question of degree. But Chasidic writings underscore that G-d shares nothing with man. Logic itself in any form or degree is meaningless in relation to G-d Himself. Not only is it unreasonable, says *Chasidut*, to claim that the human mind *can* grasp G-d—it is likewise inappropriate to say that the human mind *cannot* grasp G-d. Much like it would be patently inappropriate to acclaim an idea as so profound it cannot be touched by hand. Touch and ideas are separated by a "quantum gap," and hence, correlating touch to ideas in any fashion, positive or even negative, is nonsensical. Similarly, G-d and the human mind are separated by an unnegotiable chasm. In fact, says *Chasidut*, a divide infinitely greater than that separating human thought from human touch.

Moreover, it is not only *human* features that *Chasidut* views as inappropriate in reference to G-d, but features altogether. For G-d is not contained by parameters, however lofty and sublime. G-d is truly infinite, infinite not only in degree—like

a mathematical infinity, which is infinite in *degree*, but yet all its components are of the same *kind*, numbers—but also infinite in kind, transcending the boundaries that set entities apart. Any *definition* is restrictive of G-d, compromising of His omnipresence. It implies that beyond the parameters of that definition He does not exist.

We have already learned of *tzimtzum*, the concept that Creation was in fact the end product of a quantum gap. This gap does not merely divide two entities which are remarkably differently defined, but rather separates the indefinable, featureless expansiveness of G-d from the emergence of features, categories and definitions altogether. *Chasidut*, as Kabbalah before it, emphasizes that even concepts such as G-d's wisdom or love, however lofty and different from human wisdom and love, emerge only post *tzimtzum*, once G-d's true infinity is no longer manifest.

Now it is true that in Chasidic literature as in Kabbalah, ten *sefirot*, that is, ten spheres each of a particular nature, are said to exist within the G-dhead. There is a sphere of Wisdom, a sphere of Kindness, a sphere of Leadership⁴ (*logos*), etc. In a sense, it is like the human personality which includes cognitive, emotional and other faculties. But nevertheless, though numerous references are indeed made to these Divine spheres and a great number of passages are spent describing their functions within the G-dhead, they are neither the totality nor the primary part of G-d. Even with the human, his cognitive and overt emotional faculties are merely *at his disposal*, not the totality nor the core of his psychological makeup. Similarly, and to a greater degree, G-d has these "faculties" at His availability, as it were, but He transcends them. Though these spheres, too, are infinite in a relative sense—infinite Wisdom, infinite Love—and though they are Divine,

part of the G-dhead, they are nevertheless not G-d as He is in His transcendent Self. For it is only tzimtzum that introduces classifications, definitions and features; even G-dly features eventuate only post-tzimtzum, only where G-d enters into a relationship with reality and man. Prior to tzimtzum, there was only the vast infinity of G-d; "an undifferentiated supernal light filled all of existence."

In short, then, according to the teachings of *Chasidut*, concerning the question of the nature of G-d we can say: G-dliness is antithetical to the finite, to the constrained and defined, not to mention the physical. More G-dly implies less finite, less constrained, less defined and definable; more spiritual, transcendent and abstract, more expansive, more infinite

Thus, a short answer to the question "What is G-d?" in light of the teachings of *Chasidut* would be—not Sovereignty, nor Wisdom as it is for Maimonides, nor Love as for Crescas—but expansiveness: Infinity; **Omniscience**, **Omnipotence**, **Omnipresence**.

G-D IN DIRAH BETACHTONIM

We have already seen above that in *Dirah Betachtonim* much of this is subject to a fundamental shift of emphasis. In the finite context of this chapter we shall elaborate upon three specific points: First, the nature of G-d is not seen in *Dirah Betachtonim* as the antithesis of the finite. Second, as for the makeup of the G-dhead, as it were, the prevalent distinction in Chasidic texts between the finite and the infinite, between features and featurelessness or pre-tzimtzum and post-tzimtzum, recedes to the background; whereas the forefront is occupied by a distinction between two other, more encompassing trends in the G-dhead. Third, the short answer to the question "What is G-d?" is quite different.

1 / THE INFINITE-FINITE DICHOTOMY

Previous chapters have spelled out that according to Dirah Betachtonim this reality enjoys a unique relationship with G-d. In this world in particular, the essence of reality relates to the Essence of G-d, and the very features of this reality such as physicality and finitude bespeak the Essence of G-d. It follows, that in Dirah Betachtonim the nature of G-d cannot be seen primarily as the antithesis of the finite.

In addition to this principal insight based on the prominence of essence in the Dirah Betachtonim system, there are other important ideas that reduce the G-d-finite dichotomy (though not to the same extent) that have their origins in Chasidic and even pre-Chasidic literature.

As we saw earlier,⁵ it is an axiom of Judaism that G-d is not confined to greatness, rather, His far reach and compatibility extend to the entire range of existing things, no matter how seemingly trivial. As it were, the rays of the spotlight shine with an unlimited range. This was referred to as G-d's infinity. (Subsequently, we went on to see that Infinity, too, is merely an attribute of G-d and our attention turned to the Essence.)

Now it is of course normally assumed that infinity and finitude are mutually exclusive, that the very notion of infinity represents the antithesis of the finite. In truth, however, it can be shown that an absolute infinity would not exclude the finite. The work *Avodat Hakodesh* states concerning G-d: "The Infinite is perfect completeness with no detracting; if you say He has power with the unrestricted, but does not have power with the restricted, you are detracting from his perfect completeness."⁶ True infinity is a state that incorporates the *complete* range of possibilities—paradoxically, including finitude. Accordingly, G-d, truly expansive, truly boundless, incorporates all states, including the finite.

HEAVEN ON EARTH

This paradox that a superior state (such as infinity as ordinarily conceived) is not necessarily the optimum state, but is in fact complemented by its inferior antipode (such as finitude), can be clarified by way of analogy.

A 4.5-volt electric source that provides just enough power to operate a small tape-recorder is evidently inferior to a standard 110 or 240 volt home outlet, and clearly incomparable to major cables emerging from a power plant where voltage is measured in the hundreds of thousands. Ironically, however, the small tape recorder will work properly only when supplied by the 4.5 volt source, whereas the superior power supply at the plant will blow its mechanisms.

In a sense, then, much as the 4.5 volt socket is constrained by its particular range, unable to provide for machines with different voltage requirements, the plant cables are also constrained by their particular range. The lowest rung, as it were, is confined to the lowest part of the ladder unable to relate to the highest part; but the highest part is also confined to its own position at the top of the ladder—unable to relate to the lower rungs. An ultimate power source would be one which provides a single outlet fit for the provision of both hundreds of thousands of volts as well as a meager 4.5 volts for puny appliances.

There are, then, three levels to our electrical hierarchy: inferior sockets that provide but a few volts; middle level sources—that is, paradoxically, *superior* blow-away power supplies providing hundreds of thousands of volts; and the optimum source—that can cater for the high as well as for the low.

Or, consider on the one hand a kindergarten assistant playing with blocks with his charges on the kindergarten floor, and on the other hand, a professor lecturing to post-graduate students on educational theory. Many would consider the profes-

sor and his lecture far superior to the kindergarten assistant and his games. Indeed, the professor had to climb the numerous rungs of the educational ladder, further and further away from his first days in kindergarten, and even from the days he would have considered himself fit for playing with kindergarten children, to reach his position. And not only are kindergarten children unable to grasp the profundity of this professor's scholarship, but also high school graduates and indeed senior university students could not entertain following his classes.

But this illustrious scholar has his shortcomings too. He might, in fact, be so absentminded that he cannot carry on a conversation with his wife, never mind the kindergarten children. In his rarefied lecture theater with his postgraduate students he performs unapproachably—but hardly anywhere else, certainly not in a kindergarten room. The kindergarten children cannot rise up to understand his lectures, but neither can he and his ideas stoop to relate to them.

But then there is the prime expert in educational theory who has succeeded in translating his profoundest thoughts, the most innovative and subtle educational theories, into a game of blocks. This scholar then actually goes to the kindergarten and plays with the children.

Again, there are three levels: the kindergarten aide, the superior “absentminded” professor, and the optimum scholar who can relate to the entire “ladder,” to post-graduate students as well as to small children.

The optimum state, then, is not necessarily the superior state, but rather one which is in fact complemented by the inferior antipode.

Avodat Hakodesh made a similar point concerning the Divine—and all the more applicable in his context of infinity.

G-d's infinity is not merely superior, but optimum: His infinite ability is totally versatile, all-encompassing. As it were, He is a power source supplying both vast quantities of energy as well as minute handouts; He both commands subtle theory as well as relates to child's play. G-d is able to relate to the infinite but also to the finite—if you say otherwise, “you are detracting from his perfect completeness.”

Thus, to return to our previous discussion on the question of the nature of G-d, it follows, that even if the defining feature of G-d is indeed infinity, He is not antithetical to, not in a dichotomy with, the finite. He can relate to the finite, and the finite can relate to Him—for true infinity incorporates all possibilities, including the finite.

Put more technically, even prior to tzimtzum where the primordial light “filled all of existence,” i.e. where G-d's expansive infinity was manifest, the finite was nevertheless compatible with G-d as part of true infinity. Tzimtzum, then, was not in truth the *creation* of finitude, but the articulation of finitude at the fore.

To understand this let us return to our second analogy. Upon entering the kindergarten, you find two seemingly similar individuals sitting on the floor playing blocks with the children. You are inclined to group them together, as both participating in a rather simple and ordinary activity. But what a difference there is between them! What a difference in what the game means to each of them. The kindergarten assistant is indeed no more than playing blocks, but the educational scholar is in fact engaged in the sophisticated intellectual world of his most subtle theories, in the context of his vast resources of knowledge and highly perceptive insight. Indeed, for him, the blocks are “transparent”; all the subtleties of his advanced educational theories flow through them, though he plays appropriately in the simplest of ways.

The ordinary game, then, whilst remaining ordinary, can be of two meanings: an ordinary game, or part of the “infinity,” the unlimited reach of the professor’s theories.

The difference between pre-and post-tzimtzum is analogous to the difference between the scholar and the kindergarten assistant. Much as the educational scholar’s playing with blocks is an expression of his far reach, remaining in fact transparent to the intellectual world of his sublime theories, the place of finitude pre-tzimtzum was similarly an expression of the perfection, the total reach of G-d’s infinity, remaining transparent to that infinity. And much as the kindergarten assistant’s playing does not go beyond the limited context of an ordinary game of blocks, post-tzimtzum there is similarly nothing but the restrictions of finitude. Post-tzimtzum it is finitude *qua* finitude—but the finite was there before too.

Imagine what it would be like to perceive the entire electromagnetic spectrum. Visible human light would be part of that experience, but overwhelmed. Shutting out most of the spectrum permits the context of human vision whereby visible light emerges, with the restrictions, definitions and parameters of visible light. At tzimtzum, the infinite “light” of G-d was removed and the finite emerged in its distinctiveness—but it was there before as part of the original infinity.

Thus, to return once again to our original inquiry concerning the infinite-finite dichotomy, even without consideration for essence, but merely in terms of infinity, the notion that more G-dly represents more abstract and transcendent does not, paradoxically, mean that it represents the exclusion of, and the incompatibility with, finitude and restrictedness. The finite, too, is part of infinite G-d Himself.

But, of course, the notion that finitude is subsumed within G-d becomes reinforced from the vantage point of G-d’s

Essence. Here, this reality, as this reality, is not something inherently different from but *nevertheless* within the far reach of infinite G-d—but is rather *co-essential* with G-d. And in fact, the very unG-dly feature of finitude, rather than the infinite, roots in the core, the restricted in-itself, of the essence.

In short: In the Dirah Betachtonim system the nature of G-d is not the antithesis of the finite, restricted and defined.

2 / TWO TRENDS—ESSENCE AND MANIFESTATIONS

We now turn to the second point, to Dirah Betachtonim perceptions of the makeup, as it were, of the G-dhead. We have spoken of the distinction between the finite and the infinite, of pre-tzimtzum and post-tzimtzum. It is in fact very common in advanced Chasidic texts to classify various aspects and spheres of the G-dhead by these two broad categories, describing them as part of either the infinite or the “finite” dimension of the G-dhead. Dirah Betachtonim also divides the G-dhead (as well as reality) into two broad trends. But here the distinction between the finite and the infinite recedes: both of these become in fact subsumed under but one of Dirah Betachtonim’s categories. In Dirah Betachtonim, essence is brought into sharp focus and accordingly, the G-dhead is divided primarily into Essence on the one hand and all else—including Infinity—on the other.

Both characteristics of G-d, the finite and the infinite—the post-tzimtzum concentration of the Divine flow into specific defined features, spheres and forces, as well as the pre-tzimtzum expansiveness—are both but *manifestations* of G-d. And then there is G-d’s Essence, the Being, the substratum from which these *features* emanate. Even expansive infinity is merely an attribute, a feature of G-d. Beyond it lies G-d, whose feature this is. In fact, much like this finite world was produced by a creative act, a reaching out from G-d, and much like Divine attributes,

such as Wisdom and Love, are the product of a creative act of G-d—the same is true, in a subtle sense, even for Divine expansiveness. This dimension of G-d, it is true, has not lost the indefinable, transcendent character of G-d, has not moved away from featurelessness to assume some specific definition, to be constrained by specific parameters; but it too is a reaching out—not the self, the Essence. There is G-d in Himself, as He stands prior to *all* emanations, and subsequently there is “illumination,” emanations of various sorts—including Infinity.

Accordingly, we realize that in a sense the greatest transition in the G-dhead, the greatest divide in the entire hierarchy of G-dliness—greater yet than the gulf that separates the infinite from the finite, i.e. the quantum leap of *tzimtzum*—is the line between G-d's Essence and His manifestations, including the first and most subtle of these, the pre-*tzimtzum* expansiveness, the “undifferentiated supernal light” that filled all. Below this divide it is attributes, manifestations, emanations, creations; some infinite and some finite. G-d no longer in Himself but G-d in relation. Above this gulf is the Essence of G-d, G-d in Himself. These therefore are the two terms that are prominent in *Dirah Betachtonim* texts for classifying various dimensions of the G-dhead and reality: *essence* and *manifestations*—rather than infinite and finite.

Considering the two broader categories of *essence* and *manifestations*, rather than the two narrower categories of infinite and finite (both subsumed under *manifestations*), the evaluation and classification of various specific aspects of G-d and reality is drastically altered. From this vantage point, whenever two entities or activities are evaluated and it is noted that one is Divine in quality and the other not—this implies that the former is but of the *manifestations* trend in the Divine and the latter of the *essence* trend. Some spheres *manifest* the Divine, pro-

claim G-d, whereas some are self-contained, in themselves. These latter entities are, as it were, not radiant but blackhole-like, indicating their association with the non-radiant self-centeredness of the core of G-d. (In truth, more than blackhole-like: the darkness of black holes is relative to the outside; here there is "blackness" throughout—*in-itself*.)

This shift of classification in *Dirah Betachtonim* affects a number of Divine aspects, at a variety of stages of the G-dhead.⁷ As we have already noted in chapter six, when considering matters in terms of essence, *tzimtzum* is no longer a degeneration but rather a *return* to the character of containment and concealment, of being *in-itself* (or, of *being*, *in-itself*). Similarly, this physical reality which parades as self-substantial, which is not tellingly Divine but finite, constrained by defining contours and hard and fast, represents now a reality in which G-dliness (which is responsible for its existence) is in the restrictive *in-itself*, essence mode. And a similar change of classification applies to the performance of physical mitzvot in contrast to meditation or emotional devotion.

In short, in *Dirah Betachtonim* too, as in previous texts, the G-dhead is made up, as it were, of two trends, and there are two consistent classifications of cosmic reality, but here they are broader: one includes reaching out, radiating, processes and attributes—or *manifestations*; another involves passive, *in-itself*, *essences*.

And upon consideration it becomes clear that in fact not only have the two trends of the infinite and finite been supplanted in *Dirah Betachtonim*, but even the relative meanings of the infinite and finite categories themselves have been reversed. From this perspective, that which is finite rather than infinite, self-contained rather than expansive, roots deeper in G-d.⁸

3 / WHAT IS G-D?

Now to the short question “What is G-d?” In Dirah Betachtonim, G-d is not Wisdom nor Love; not Infinity, transcendence or featurelessness.⁹ In this system, in a word: G-d is Essence.¹⁰

What features are G-dly in Dirah Betachtonim? Those associated with essence—not in-relation-to, but in-itself; being. Not expansiveness but self-centeredness; not abstractness nor transcendence but “hardness and fastness”; not infinite but “finite.”

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE HUMAN / BODY AND SOUL

In this chapter we will look at Dirah Betachtonim's distinctive outlook on the human; particularly, the relative importance of body and soul, and briefly, perspectives on man and woman.

THE BODY AND SOUL IN EARLIER WRITINGS

The purpose of Torah obligations and the general message of Judaism are generally represented in Jewish writings as aiming to increase man's dedication to matters that enhance his spirit and downgrade the significance of his body. As phrased in the Chasidic classic *Tanya*, "the foundation and root of the entire Torah is to raise up and elevate the soul over the body, higher and higher. . . ."¹

The notion of the superiority of the soul and the consequent importance of transcending the body and its needs, and concentrating one's energies on matters of the soul, has been given considerable attention by both rational and mystical thinkers. Throughout their writings runs an antipathy towards the body and the strong emphasis that it is the soul which is the primary part of man.

Man is comprised of two qualitatively different parts,

declare these thought systems; one—carnal, mundane, requiring food, drink, sleep and a livelihood; another, spiritual, sublime, self-sufficient and transcendent. The body feels pain, is contingent, suffering with changes of climate and health, and is temporary; the soul is absolute and permanent. Clearly, it is the soul that ought to attract man's interest.

In terms echoed by numerous writers (of different schools) with no more than shifts of nuance, Maimonides writes:

It is therefore clear that all corruption, destruction, or defect comes from matter . . . Man's shortcomings and sins are all due to the substance of the body and not to its form; while all his merits are exclusively due to his form . . . According to the wisdom of G-d . . . it was necessary that the very noble form of man, which is the image and likeness of G-d, as has been shown by us, should be joined to the substance of dust and darkness, the source of all defect and loss. For these reasons the Creator gave to the form of man power, rule, and dominion over the substance;—the form can subdue the substance, refuse the fulfillment of its desires, and reduce them, as far as possible, to a just and proper measure. The station of man varies according to the exercise of this power. Some persons constantly strive to choose that which is noble . . . Whenever they are led by the wants of the body to that which is low and avowedly disgraceful, they are grieved at their position, they feel ashamed and confounded at their situation. They try with all their might to diminish this disgrace, and to guard against it in every possible way. They feel like a person whom the king in his anger ordered to remove refuse from one place to another in order to put him to shame... Some consider, as we just said, all wants of the body as shame, disgrace, and defect to which they are compelled to attend . . .²

CHASIDIC PERSPECTIVES ON BODY AND SOUL

As discussed in Chapter Seven, though primarily interested in man's soul, *Chasidut* does attribute great significance to the involvement of the body in worship, or more correctly, to the eventual transformation of the body and its negative drives, as opposed to merely ignoring and repressing them. Chasidic literature frequently quotes the Sages' comment on the biblical command "Love G-d with *all* your heart"³³—"with both your *yetsarim* (drives)."³⁴ That is, love G-d with both the *yetser tov* (positive drive) as well as the *yetser hara* (negative drive, or "evil inclination").

Now in *Chasidut*, the terms and concepts *yetser tov* and *yetser hara*—very commonly used in Jewish literature to refer to the human's desirable and undesirable parts, respectively—are generally superseded by two broader terms: *nefesh haElokit*, the Divine soul, and *nefesh habehamit*, the animal soul. This latter soul is not necessarily man's evil part; it represents, rather, a notion very similar to the modern conception of man. A wide variety of today's sciences as well as the common current perception regard man as on a continuum, part of the same tree, with animals. Man is *Homo Sapiens*: an animal like any other, made of similar biological matter, requiring the common needs of sustenance and reproduction, driven by the same mechanisms such as flight or fight, merely with some additional gray matter. Animals vary: monkeys climb trees, cows moo and humans cogitate. In turn, all animal behavior is increasingly viewed as determined by biological makeup. Even colloquially, "a surge of adrenaline" is often substituted for "a surge of fear," for example. This attitude to man is in fact affirmed by *Chasidut*: It terms this dimension of man, that is, his biological and "psychosomatic," dimension, or natural (= of nature) self, the *nefesh habehamit*, or animal soul.

But then, according to *Chasidut*, there is another part of man, a Divine soul, which is part of G-d. Man includes a dimension that is inherently transcendent, inherently above the order of this world. Though he might not be conscious of it, there is a part of man that has no desire for things of this world, that is not governed nor influenced by its accidents, that is in fact blind to all its perspectives, oblivious to the very frame of reference of this reality. Being part of G-d, its “operating system,” as it were, is G-dly. Its desires and perspectives are those of G-d. When this part of man encounters natural phenomena, they are regarded purely in terms of their spiritual potential. This soul wants man to act in G-dly ways, to be G-dly.

In light of these Chasidic teachings, the religious goal of man encapsulated in “Love G-d with all your heart,” implying the totality of the human being, denotes loving G-d not only with the Divine soul, but also with the animal soul. That is, the goal is not to employ solely the Divine soul in turning to G-d whilst ignoring the natural, Homo Sapiens self, but rather to transform the biological self too. Love G-d and worship Him body as well as soul.

What is to be gained by the transformation of the body? Chasidic literature frequently quotes the verse “*verav tevuot bekoach shor,*”⁵—“many harvests by the power of the ox.” Much like man harnesses the ox to achieve more than human power can achieve alone, the soul similarly harnesses the body, as it were, to gain additional energies. Physical drives are particularly powerful, motivated and energetic, and their transformation introduces new powers, new energies, into the soul’s arsenal.

Note, that according to this view the body is merely a tool, it is the soul that is both subject and object of spiritual endeavor. The soul, the true player in this drama, “hijacks” the body’s energies and puts them towards its own uses, enhancing its own self.

Now in *Chasidut*, the gain for the soul through the transformation of the body is seen as the very purpose of life in this world. Why do souls come down to this world? asks *Chasidut* time and again. Prior to their descent, souls existed in a world of pure spirit, basking in the presence of G-d—why do they come down to this mundane existence? The standard answer: “The descent is for purposes of ascent.”⁶ That is, the soul’s temporary confrontation with, and eventual victory over the body enable it to move on thereafter to unprecedented heights. The challenges of this existence provide it with opportunities to obtain new capabilities, new spiritual powers, enhancing its spirituality ever after.

The soul, again, is the focus of religious endeavor. Its existence in the body is transient. This life is valuable merely in that it provides the soul with an opportunity to plunder the powers available here on this trivial, lowly earth, and subsequently soar back victorious with renewed vigor to its ideal and permanent home.

THE SOUL AND BODY IN DIRAH BETACHTONIM

According to *Dirah Betachtonim*, however, the transformation of the body is of value not because it provides the soul with new energies, but as an end in itself. In fact, not the soul is the religious object in this system, but rather the body and its physical surroundings. The soul comes down to this world, not as a necessary evil, as a prelude to greater heights in its spiritual, G-dly *home*, but because the ideal home for the soul is specifically here—the arena for union with the *Essence* of G-d. The descent of the soul is not “for purposes of” a *later* ascent when it will eventually return to its Maker, rather the descent itself—from the higher worlds where G-dliness is manifest to this G-dforsaken reality—is an ascent: away from *manifestations* of G-d towards His *Essence*.

(In this light, a distinction comes to the fore between two distinct classes in the sublimated state of the body (both beyond *it'kafya*, subjugation of the body, see above Chapter 7), that may well go unnoticed to the student of conventional Chasidic literature. In *Chasidut* in general the notions of *bechol levavecha*, worship with the *entire* heart, i.e. with both parts of the personality including the animal soul, is used seemingly interchangeably with the notion of the *demise* of the animal soul—"My heart is killed within me."⁷ Many references are made to both concepts in the context of *it'hapcha*, the sublimated state of the body, conceptually virtually as one. In *Dirah Betachtonim* however, they emerge as two distinct stages: a first stage where all bodily drives have merely been killed, as it were; a second stage where they are converted towards positive use. For especially in this system the body is not something to overcome, whereby the difference between its demise and transformation into a positive entity could be marginal. Here the object of religious endeavor is specifically transformation, discovering the positive in the body: killing it would be totally missing the point. The "demise" of the body is at most a perhaps necessary intermediate stage.)⁸

THE VALUE OF THE BODY

We have noted in earlier chapters that metaphysical value lies in the "lower realms" of the finite and physical primarily in the context of *essence*, but also in the less significant context of *manifestations* because the communion of physical reality with G-d demonstrates G-d's all encompassing *infinity*. Let us elaborate on this in relation to the human specifically, seeing first the potentially greater religious value of the body in terms of *manifestations* and subsequently in terms of *essence*.

MANIFESTATIONS

As noted in the book's second and previous chapters, the

HEAVEN ON EARTH

compatibility of G-d with this reality is expressive of G-d's true *infinity*, His all-encompassing reach. Were it true that G-d is compatible solely with the spiritual, "you would detract from His perfection": His infinity would not be total, as there would remain the physical from which G-d would be barred, paradoxically, specifically because He would be too lofty. Something similar to this is true with regard to the human's connection with G-d—in terms of the human. If man's relationship with G-d were to be only with affairs of the soul such as prayer and meditation, his relationship would be limited in scope. It would be confined to his higher dimensions, where a relationship with G-d is easier achieved and where some community with G-d might be expected. It is specifically when man involves his physical body in the performance of *mitzvot* that he gives expression to an all-encompassing communion with G-d.

The further reach of this type of relationship with G-d can also be measured in terms of time and circumstances. Where man's relationship with G-d is intellectual, emotional or even transcendental, circumstances that are not conducive or are hostile to these forms of involvement with G-d will jeopardize the relationship. As it were, when there is "static" on the mind and heart "frequencies" where these types of relationships occur, or when these are not in operation entirely, no connection will exist. In fact, simply on an "off-day," when intellectual, emotional and spiritual levels are at a low, the entire relationship with G-d might wane or even rupture. Whereas when in community with G-d via the body, through actions meaningless in terms of intellectual or emotional relationships, the connection evidently exists beyond the mind and heart "frequencies," and hence may well endure through emotional and intellectual adversities. Paradoxically, the communion via the body "transcends" the world of heart and mind; it specifically

is in a sense absolute, remaining in place even where the emotional and intellectual wavelengths are not in operation.

In short, the far reach of man's relationship with G-d—in addition to the concomitant manifestation of G-d's far reach and compatibility—is fully realized specifically via the body, as hereby it is thoroughly encompassing, both in terms of the number and types of human faculties involved as well as in terms of time and circumstance.

ESSENCE

Most important of all, man's body is of religious value because it is the vehicle of essence. As we have seen at length in earlier chapters, in the higher worlds where Divine qualities are manifest, the relationship or "communication" with G-d proceeds along the limited "wavelengths" of these qualities, and consequently the *essential* (=of essence) connection between reality and G-d is not manifest. But in our G-dforsaken world, the absence of "higher" modes of communication points to the involvement of essence; devoid as it is of all higher features, the deeper and broader connection with G-d—the *essential* connection—which must be in operation throughout G-d's all encompassing domain, comes to the fore. (And indeed, the being of this reality is ontologically the Being of G-d and furthermore, the very external character of this reality itself bespeaks essence: it is finite, hard and fast, non-expansive, merely is.)

The same is true concerning the human. Where the mind and heart are in a manifest relationship with G-d, the co-essence of man with G-d is not manifest. Relationships involving man's soul involve that dimension of man that is manifestly Divine—manifestly, not essentially. Whereas on the other hand, in communication with G-d through the performance of physical mitzvot via the hard and fast, indifferent,

finite body, involving that part of man that is *manifestly* unG-dly—man's relationship is via essence, declaring in fact that he is co-essential with G-d.

In summary, Dirah Betachtonim's view of religious man is in stark contrast to that of other thought systems. Where lies the greatest potential for religious experience, how does man reach his most sublime relationship with G-d? Through his body, not his soul.

THE BODY AT THE END OF TIME

A later chapter will dwell on the Dirah Betachtonim view of the end of time. We will but briefly note here that according to Chabad *Chasidut* and particularly Dirah Betachtonim the state of existence at that final and ultimate time will not be spiritual, but physical; man will then comprise body as well as soul. This position follows naturally from the general thrust of the Dirah Betachtonim system. A "utopian" state is one which represents the total realization of that which is *generally* perceived as ideal. As we have amply seen, according to Dirah Betachtonim, ignoring and escaping the body is far from ideal. To the contrary, the much sought after religiosity, the ultimate union with G-d, is to be found specifically through and in man's body. Clearly, therefore, at the end of time, in the ideal "utopian" world, this greatest of metaphysical states must exist—bodies as well as souls.

Chasidic writings in fact state that unlike now when the soul is the source of animation in man, at the end of time the reverse will be true: the soul will derive its vitality from the body. For then will be a time when that ultimate dimension, the *Essence* of G-d, will be manifest, and it will hence become evident that all derives from essence. Accordingly, the soul, merely *manifestation* (its evident spirituality pointing to its

belonging to the *manifestations* trend) will derive its source from the body which is *co-essential* with G-d.

MAN AND WOMAN

A metaphor used in this context brings us to one last point concerning humanity. In expressing the idea that the body will be superior to the soul in the World to Come, it is often said, drawing on a Scriptural verse,⁹ that the “woman of valor” will then be “her husband’s crown.” Often, in Kabbalah and *Chasidut*, when discussing spiritual spheres which are in a *provider-recipient* relationship, “man” is used as a metaphor for the providing sphere and “woman” for the recipient. In this vein, the soul is referred to as “man” and the body as “woman,” since the former provides life for the latter. But in the future the “woman” will be the “crown” of her husband—the body will be greater than, and will provide for, the soul.

In *Dirah Betachtonim* the overall connotations of the “man” and “woman” metaphors change markedly. That which is metaphorically “woman,” a receiver, not active but passive, here represents that which is devoid of *active* Divinity, i.e. of spiritual *manifestations*: its spiritual role is, rather, passive—*essential*. And hence, all metaphorical references to spiritual realms as “woman” in Kabbalistic and Chasidic texts¹⁰ undergo a significant change of overtone when read from the vantage point of *Dirah Betachtonim*: these spheres are now, primarily, no longer receivers but essences.¹¹ And it is for this reason that at the end of time, when the ultimate perspective of essence will be manifest, that “woman,” the body, rather than “man,” the soul, will reign supreme.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

MITZVOT / THEIR SPIRITUAL ROLE AND FUNCTION

It is now time to devote a chapter to bring the central role and spiritual function of physical mitzvot into sharper relief. We first step back to look at the views of previous thought systems.

MITZVOT IN CLASSIC JEWISH WRITINGS

Various classic scholars have provided insight into the question of the role of physical mitzvot within Judaism. Maimonides¹ understands mitzvot as a type of springboard designed to aid the masses to overcome their carnality, to free their minds from their bodies towards true spiritual endeavor. That is, the true arena for religious endeavor is indeed the mind. According to Maimonides, man's highest goal in life is metaphysical speculation. G-d is Supreme Logic and in the human too, logic reigns supreme. Thus, religious experience, or communication between man and G-d, is achieved specifically by way of a rational interchange: man's mind contemplates Divine ideas. It is only as a type of necessary evil as it were, to provide a cure to help get the body out of the way, that mitzvot enter the picture.

Sefer HaChinuch, a classic medieval compilation, generally offers some philosophical insight into the six hundred and thirteen mitzvot collated in the work. Generally, it might be said that *Chinuch* regards mitzvot as performing a pedagogic, conditioning role.² Man's heart is influenced by his actions. Accordingly, each mitzvah aims to have a particular positive effect on the person performing it, refining him, elevating him. In this system then, too, mitzvot are not the primary arena for religious endeavor, not man's ultimate mode for relating to G-d, rather a vehicle by which to enhance man's true religious standing.

Chasidic literature, too, stresses the value inherent in refining man through the performance of mitzvot (as discussed in chapter ten). It has been in fact erroneously portrayed as anti-legal, as a system that somewhat disregards the externalities of Judaism, in search of the core.

In fact, there is much in Chasidic theology, however, that serves to establish a most significant religious role for mitzvot (subsequently receiving particular emphasis and focus in the *Dirah Betachtonim* system). Indeed, a very basic argument from general Chasidic literature aims to emphasize the importance of the strict adherence to the minutae of physical mitzvot.

THE PHYSICAL IS NO FURTHER FROM G-D

Let us return once again to the very start, to the prevalent notion that meditation rather than physical mitzvot—activities of the mind rather than of the hand, the abstract rather than the concrete, the transcendent rather than the real—are closer to G-d. Upon analysis, apart from all we have said till this point, this attitude is based in part on an erroneous extrapolation from what is common in the human world.

A freshman, for example, would attempt to display noth-

ing but his highest intellectual acumen when speaking to a world authority on his subject. An ordinary person would attempt to display nothing but his best behavior in the presence of a saint. Such is the nature of much of our experience: the knowing, not the ignorant, consult meaningfully with the expert; the talented, rather than the mediocre, can collaborate with the truly gifted; the strong, not the feeble, can spar with the mighty; the bright, rather than the dull, can converse with the brilliant; the noble, rather than the ordinary, can approach the sublime. Extrapolating from this, it is assumed that, if anything, for communicating with transcendent G-d Himself, only man's most sublime features—only his spiritual faculties—can be of use, whereas his more mundane dimensions must be suppressed and hidden. As it were, if only rungs eight and nine of the ladder are appropriate for communicating with rung ten, it is certainly they that are appropriate for communicating with rung one hundred.

But all of this assumes that man and G-d are in fact on the same ladder, that G-d is at the loftier end of the same continuum as man. But as we have seen earlier,³ a great divide separates all of man's faculties, including his heart and mind, from G-d. It is, as we have seen, even inappropriate to say that G-d cannot be comprehended by the human mind. G-d is separated from man by a chasm, a "quantum leap." Moreover, a great divide separates G-d Himself from even *Divine* wisdom, and kindness—that is, from the very "operating systems" of wisdom and kindness. For all specific features and defined entities, however lofty, are meaningless to G-d Himself as He stands prior to *tzimtzum*.⁴ It follows, that the notion that man's mental and emotional endeavors enjoy a *natural* relationship with G-d is mistaken. Human capabilities and G-d are not on the same ladder. Man's loftiest ideas and most sub-

lime sentiments are incomparably further removed from G-d than are a child's intellectual displays from a world authority's thinking, his most refined behavior is further removed than is a crude person's behavior from a saint—for indeed, in the latter cases the distance is relative, in the former it is absolute.

Moreover, upon reflection it can be seen that man's lower and higher faculties are in fact, inherently, equidistant from G-d. Where two arenas exist as totally detached frames of references, the highs and lows in one arena are meaningless in the other. By way of analogy, to a deaf person, there is no difference between particularly pleasing and uplifting harmony, or particularly dissonant and irritating cacophony. An outstanding musical symphony and particularly unpleasant noise will elicit precisely the same response—the same lack of response. Unlike the hard of hearing, the deaf have no access to the world of sound at all, their exclusion is not relative but absolute, excluded by an unnegotiable chasm; hence, the intense differences the hearing discern and insist on affirming in the world of sound, not only lose their prominence with regard to the deaf, but lose their values altogether. Similarly (though in reverse), since man is removed from G-d by an *absolute* chasm, since G-d operates on an “operating system” which has no relationship, no channels of discourse with man's “operating system,” the human's loftier side and mundane side are equidistant from G-d—they are equally irrelevant and meaningless.

But if man, by his very nature, has no faculties which relate meaningfully to G-d—does this mean that all religious activities lose their inherent value? If man is separated from G-d as the deaf are from sound, if man's lofty side elicits the same response in G-d as does his mundane side—zero—then what is the value of religious endeavor on his part?

Chasidut maintains that, indeed, it is solely the fact that G-d's inscrutable Will calls for a certain form of behavior that imbues this behavior with significance. If not for G-d's command, no form of human behavior would, in fact, be meaningful at all to Him.⁵

It follows, then, that though the criteria of the human frame of reference judge prayer and meditation more lofty and spiritual than physical mitzvot, there is no such preference in terms of G-d. *Prima facie*—if not for G-d's command—both are equally meaningless; if G-d chooses, he can will either, and thereby imbue His desired choice with meaning.

The analogy of the deaf, used differently, further elucidates our position in relation to mitzvot.

A deaf person enters your room where an audio system is blaring out of control. You motion to him to improve it. He goes over, studies the dial and turns it—all the way up! He argues that he's fixed the stereo—the dial *looks* better this way! From his unfortunate point of view he cannot discern the values and preferences at the other side of the chasm. So his attempts to bring satisfaction to the hearing, using the criteria of vision available to him, result in the precise reverse.

Nevertheless, the deaf are in truth able to satisfy the criteria of those fortunate to have access to the world of sound. The hearing can prescribe to them how to act. If the instructions are followed correctly, the deaf will perform in a way that is of value to the world of sound.

In similar fashion, though man's activities cannot relate to G-d along the terms of his own frame of reference, they can be of value to G-d along lines plotted out by Him, on terms man can never apprehend.

This insight, in turn, reinforces the notion that we ought not assert that physical mitzvot are inherently inferior to

prayer or meditation. Since G-d's instructions are our only clue to meaningful communication with Him, if G-d declares that physical mitzvot are meaningful to Him, we must acquiesce, as we have no faculties with which to make an alternative assessment. Indeed, if we insist upon offering G-d a prayer when He has requested wearing woolen strings (*tzitzit*), we might be acting no more appropriately than the deaf person who turns the stereo all the way up.

In sum, in light of general Chasidic teachings we dismiss the *a-priori* inferiority of physical mitzvot and set them on an inherently equal footing with man's spiritual activities as possible candidates for G-d's instructions. But these insights themselves do not yet ascribe *positive* qualities specific to physical mitzvot. We now return to Dirah Betachtonim where, in a final fleshing out of the basic ideas of the Dirah Betachtonim system, we elaborate upon the dimension of physical mitzvot which in fact justifies and warrants their predominance within Judaism.

PHYSICAL MITZVOT AND THE ESSENCE OF G-D

As amply dwelt upon in previous chapters, in addition to the notion that physical mitzvot uniquely express the infinity of G-d and the "infinity" of man's connection with Him (*manifestations*), more importantly, it is in particular they that provide an avenue to the Essence of G-d; whereas prayer and meditation, as lofty as they may seem, give expression only to *manifestations* of man and similarly relate merely to *manifestations* of G-d, but do not touch the essence, the *être*, of man or the Essence of G-d.

Put somewhat differently, more profoundly as well as more radically, "spiritual" religious activities are in a very subtle sense almost an insult to G-d. For they seem to ignore the fact that G-d is greater than humans *absolutely*, as they focus on

areas in which man and G-d share. The types of *difference* between the worshiper and He who is worshipped that are at the fore during such forms of worship, as well as the modes of *communication* between the worshiper and the Worshipped that are involved, are not unique to the man-G-d relationship. Take prayer for example. This experience highlights that, unlike man, G-d is "Great, Powerful and Awesome," and that man is the mere beneficiary of all good that emanates from G-d the provider. But amongst human beings too there are differences in terms of greatness, power and awe, as well as benefactor-recipient relationships. Similarly with regard to the mode of communication involved, forms of praise similar to prayer can be utilized in communication even amongst humans, as was, for example, the case with serfs and monarchs of old. Moreover, similar forms of expression, such as passionate, humble or poetic statements, may be suitable in relation to awesome natural wonders or aesthetically overwhelming scenes. Neither the character of the highlighted differences nor the communication experience is uniquely man-G-d oriented.

Thus, these forms of worship are in a subtle sense almost an affront to G-d.⁶ For communicating with G-d (only) on wavelengths that are appropriate for non-Divine beings regards Him, by implication, as belonging within the same framework.

More profoundly, it is true that once existence is a fact, there is a continuum of character and quality, ranging, for example, from the lowly to the great, or from the powerless to the mighty. "Spiritual" forms of worship occur along this continuum. Man at the lower end of the continuum of greatness, power and awe communicates with G-d who is at its apex. But this means that here is communication *within* the frame of reference of the existing, addressing *qualities* of things that exist—concerned with *manifestations* of existence—whilst the

fact that things exist is taken for granted. This is in fact the reason why this experience can be enjoyed by even two non-Divine entities, two *created* beings: the experience is not created-Creator oriented, as it addresses issues that arise once existence is a fact.

Here lies the difficulty in confining man's communication with G-d through a spiritual medium. G-d is implicitly experienced as within the framework of the existing, whereas the deepest mystery of all, the deepest Divinity of all—the plane *unique* to G-d that stands outside this frame of reference, i.e. essence, *being*—is overlooked. It is forgotten here that G-d straddles reality's non-existence and existence, that G-d is the Master of being, that He called all into being (catered for the being of all)—including the frame of reference, existence itself. Relating to G-d's *qualities*, however sublime, with heart and mind via prayer and meditation is a rejection, as it were, of the Being of G-d that lies beyond.

But worship through physical mitzvot is different. Unlike the mind and heart, the hands, or moreover pieces of leather (*tefillin*), are not vehicles one would naturally choose for prayerful expression or for other forms of devotional experience. Nor are they appealing to the Love or Wisdom of G-d. No emotional quality, no logical idea, is expressed by mere hands or hide. Or, in other words, within the frame of reference of the rational, emotional and devotional these are totally unresponsive, meaningless, zero. Indeed, even the humility felt in prayer before the greatness, power and awesomeness of G-d is not applicable here, as that too is experiential, meaningless in the world of indifferent, hard and fast objects. Thus, when the worshiper does in fact take a piece of leather in his hand proposing to make it a vehicle for communicating with G-d—no intellectual, emotional or other religiously *meaningful* channels are available. But yet, even this religiously opaque

HEAVEN ON EARTH

object is part of G-d's world. In which way? Its being, and nothing else. Its being was catered for by G-d, it partakes in the Divine Being, and moreover, its very spiritual indifference represents transparency to and oneness with its core, the in-itself of the Divine *Being*. Hence, when the worshiper attempts to make a connection with G-d—it occurs on the wavelength of Being.

The introduction of physical entities into worship, then, forces the worshiper beyond the continuum, beyond the frame of reference of qualities or features, to that plane unique to G-d—to the mystery of existence itself. Here, as it were, the very frame itself communicates with G-d: essence to Essence. In the absence of meaning and significance man is brought before the Essence of G-d.

True, then, as it appeared at the very outset, leather, wool or food appear uninspiring; certainly, an initial evaluation of Judaism may find it bogged down with minutiae and restrictions—but it is specifically the dark, finite, restrictive nature of physical mitzvot, maintains *Dirah Betachtonim*, that frees worship of the qualities that color existence, enabling man's essence as well as the essence of the physical objects involved to be bare of coverings, superimpositions and taintings, and be at one with the Essence of G-d, as it stands uncompromised beyond His most sublime qualities.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE AFTERLIFE

It is a basic tenet of Judaism that the death of the body does not represent man's final demise: after this worldly life he moves on to another, eternal life.

Of course, Jewish literature states time and again that the afterlife is the better life. The soul, now free from the body, lives in eternal bliss. Consisting solely of pure spirit and basking in the glory of G-d the soul finds its eternal rest.

Life in this world is trivial, we read, it is but for a few fleeting years. It is nevertheless of value—specifically in that it enables man to fulfill his duties concerning Torah and Mitzvot, and thereby earn his share in the World to Come. This life, states the Mishnah,¹ is but an antechamber, a place where man may prepare himself for the palace.

Life after death has the additional dimension that it provides the arena for ultimate reward and punishment. It is there and then that man faces the heavenly tribunal to account for his acts, and to experience reward or punishment accordingly.

Now, it is true that a casual reading of the Torah would suggest that reward and punishment occur primarily not in the next world but in relation to material well-being in *this* life, in

the proverbial “children, health and livelihood.”² Scripture states, to quote one of numerous examples: “If you will follow my decrees I will provide your rains in their time.”³ Several times a day we say in the *Shema*: “And it will come to pass if you shall surely listen to my commandments . . . And I shall give the rains . . . Beware, lest your hearts turn . . . And G-d’s anger shall be aroused . . . and He shall bar the heavens. . . .”⁴ Nevertheless, Torah giants throughout the ages have repeatedly emphasized that material comfort or its absence are neither ultimate reward nor ultimate punishment, respectively; these occur primarily in the afterlife.

What then is the function of material reward and punishment promised in Scripture? To paraphrase Maimonides’ explication⁵ of the roles of material and spiritual reward and punishment, i.e. reward in this life and in the afterlife, respectively: This life is merely corporeal, and the body is but contingent and temporary, eventually disintegrating. The soul is the eternal part of man. It has the capacity to merge with G-d. By sublimating itself, by elevating itself above the body and the mundane character of this world during the time it is moored here to this physical reality, the soul frees itself from the life-death cycle and assumes eternity as G-d Himself. If it fails to merge with the Divine whilst in this life, it is lost forever along with the body. Accordingly, ultimate reward amounts to spiritually merging with G-d in the afterlife; ultimate punishment, being cut off from this greatest of opportunities. What then is the role of material reward and punishment as promised by the Torah? These are, as it were, merely “working conditions.” If man is found worthy, G-d improves his working conditions by granting him material comfort, thereby enabling him to continue along the good path and eventually reach that which is truly good for him—in the

afterlife. If he is found wanting, the reverse occurs.

True good, then, does not occur in this fleeting, temporary and mundane life, but in the subsequent eternal, spiritual life, unhindered by the wants and limitations of the contingent body. The afterlife is the ultimate reward, the ultimate life.

THE AFTERLIFE IN DIRAH BETACHTONIM

How all this changes in Dirah Betachtonim !

The motto of this system is a different Mishnaic dictum: “Better one hour of repentance and good deeds in this world than all the life of the World to Come.”⁶ True, in the afterlife the soul basks in the glory of G-d—but that is, precisely, the *glory* of G-d. There the soul enjoys the experience of G-dly character, G-dly attributes or qualities—*manifestations* of the essence, but not the Essence itself. It is specifically in this world, in performing very human, very bodily good deeds that the essence of G-d is reached. This world is not an antechamber: it is the palace itself.

But did not an earlier Mishnah state the reverse? Which, in fact, is this world, is it an “antechamber” or “better... than all life in the world to come”?⁷ Says Dirah Betachtonim: it is both, depending on perspective—which Divine trend is in focus. In terms of the *manifestations* trend, this world where no Divine features are evident, where no G-dly qualities are experienced, can only be an antechamber; whereas the afterlife is the sublime realm, where the soul enjoys an eternal haven of spirituality and G-dliness. But in other words, the afterlife is a realm resplendent with G-dly *character*—not the Divine Essence. Hence, conversely, in terms of the *essential* trend, it is in this world where man enjoys his best hours. For it is only here, by performing specifically mundane, bodily and finite acts that the Essence is reached.

The relative roles of the two lives in terms of reward and

punishment undergo a similar change in *Dirah Betachtonim*. Where is the ultimate reward for mitzvot? Clearly in this, the ultimate world. Evidently, not in material gain, but in the very performance of physical mitzvot themselves—whereby the human merges with the Essence of G-d. Basking in the *glory* of G-d in the spiritual afterlife is merely a “fringe benefit” for the deserving person. The mainstay, the “salary,” is gained in terms of the unity of man’s essence with the Essence of G-d in this world, in the very performing of mitzvot. To quote from Mishnah again: “The reward for a mitzvah is a mitzvah.”⁸

(Towards the end of the following chapter we will return to the theme of ultimate reward in the context of the end of time. Once again, we will find *Dirah Betachtonim*’s particular this-life orientation.)

THE Yahrzeit IN DIRAH BETACHTONIM

The change of perspective on the relative values of this life and the afterlife becomes evident in a most striking way from the Rebbe’s observance of a forebear’s *yahrzeit*. A *tzaddik*’s *yahrzeit* has typically been celebrated as an occasion for a spiritual uplift—by drawing sustenance from the *tzaddik*’s soul on high. The *tzaddik*’s soul reaches new heights on his *yahrzeit*, and it is from that lofty station that those close to him seek to draw spirit on this special day into their mundane, lowly, this-worldly existence.

But at one particular *yahrzeit*, the Rebbe highlighted the very reverse: What is it, in fact, that grants the deceased the ability to reach new heights in the afterlife? Is it not the recital of *Kaddish*, the study of *mishnayot* and similar procedures associated with *yahrzeit* observance on the part of those close to him—down here? The deceased *tzaddik*, at the loftiest of stations, requires acts performed in this mundane physical world if he is to rise from height to height. By this point in our dis-

IN FOCUS

cussion this comes as no surprise: for it is specifically acts in this world that relate to the Essence of G-d.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

HISTORY / A DIRAH BETACHTONIM PERSPECTIVE

If the realization of Dirah Betachtonim—a this-worldly dwelling place for the Essence of G-d—is the goal of our existence and the direction in which reality ought to proceed, it follows that this must be reflected in the way history charts its course through the seas of Time. Triumphant, heroic and happy periods in Jewish history must in some way represent a climax in Dirah Betachtonim; tragic, traumatic and unfortunate times, a decline in the fulfillment of this goal. Similarly with regard to the future, the great hopes held by Judaism for the end of time must revolve around the ultimate fulfillment of this ideal. Indeed, this thought-system does interpret much of history as rises and falls in the realization of the Dirah Betachtonim goal. In some cases, Dirah Betachtonim sheds new light on apparently sad events, asserting that they too are part of the fulfillment of this ultimate purpose of history. Dirah Betachtonim perspectives on a number of historical events follow.

THE TEMPLES

In times of old, the focal point of religious activity was at

the Temple in Jerusalem. It was to that edifice that Jews thronged three times annually to “be seen” by G-d as well as “to see” G-d.¹ Jewish law, lore and liturgy abound with laudatory references to the exemplary perfection of service at the Temple; decrying the inefficiency of our worship today, expressing longing for a period when the Temple will be restored and service will return once more to its ideal.

And because of our sins we were exiled from our land . . . and we cannot go up . . . and perform our duties in Your chosen house . . . May it be Your will, Merciful King, that You once again have mercy upon us and upon Your Sanctuary in Your abundant mercy, and rebuild it speedily.²

What was it about the Jerusalem Temple that made it so distinguished, rendering it the consummate focal point for Jewish worship when it stood, and the longed-for-ideal since its destruction, to this day? The answer from this system’s viewpoint: the Temple was a unique manifestation of *Dirah Betachtonim*. Firstly, the Temple was quite literally a *Dirah Betachtonim*, a dwelling place for G-d on this earth. At that site G-d was, as it were, attendant in a building of stone. But moreover, it was in fact the very Essence of G-d, the important dimension for *Dirah Betachtonim*, that was manifest there, predominantly in its most sacred of chambers.

The Sages relate that the Ark took up no space in the Holy of Holies where it was located. That is, though the ark measured two and a half cubits by one and a half cubits, and the Holy of Holies measured but ten cubits across and ten abreast,³ it was nevertheless possible to measure five cubits from each wall to the outer edges of the ark. Put in other words, here was a representation of the unrestricted ability of G-d in the face of which no impossibilities exist.

Now, the ark had to be made to specific measurements and

HEAVEN ON EARTH

only if complied with, would it assume its holiness. In effect, then, the ark was on the one hand constrained by specific dimensions, yet these constraints were simultaneously transcended. That is, constraints and the absence of constraints—or the finite and the infinite—coexisted at the ark in perfect harmony. Indeed, were the ark not to be made to specifications and therefore not possess its special sanctity it would not manifest its defiance of spatial boundaries. Specifically because it was made to specific measurements could it lose these measurements. The normally exclusive parameters of finite and infinite were transcended alike—for here G-d, as He transcends and therefore incorporates both the finite and the infinite, was manifest in physical space.

Now the Jerusalem Temple was preceded by the Sanctuary in the desert. It is generally accepted that the permanent Jerusalem Temple was spiritually greater than the temporary desert Sanctuary. If the aim of these sacred sites was in fact to manifest *Dirah Betachtonim*, it follows that these two edifices represented progressive stages in the manifestation of *Dirah Betachtonim*.

The very materials of which each edifice was formed symbolize this progression. As explained, the community between G-d and the physical represents a climax in union with the Divine on two levels: first, it manifests G-d's infinity—that He can stoop so low, that His infinity is not barred from the finite; second, and of greater significance, it involves the essence of reality and the Essence of G-d. These two aspects were manifest in the Sanctuary and the Temple, respectively: the Sanctuary represented G-d's infinite reach; the Temple manifested that the physical is co-essential with G-d. This progression is reflected in the material structure of these edifices.

The Sanctuary was "roofed" by animal skins, its walls were of wood and its floor was of earth. That is, its physically high-

est part was fashioned of *animal* material, its middle part of *vegetable* matter, and its lowest part of *inanimate* matter. In other words, it was fashioned of metaphysically higher as well as lower materials, progressively from higher to lower. The Temple, on the other hand, was primarily and virtually entirely fashioned of stone—inanimate material. The reason: The Sanctuary represented the far reach of G-d, how He extends outward over all distinctions, reaching downward from the greatest heights down to the lowest depths. The Temple, on the other hand, was concerned with essence, to be found *specifically* in the lowest realm.

GALUT (EXILE)

Nothing happens by chance, as history follows a course pre-charted by G-d. Thus, even the most unfortunate events in our history did not just happen, but, on some level, were deliberately brought about—in order to bring reality further along the road towards its ultimate goal, towards *Dirah Betachtonim*. Even evidently tortuous events, even occurrences referred to as punishment for sins, are part of this odyssey towards the realization of this goal.

For close to two thousand years, we have been in *galut*, an exile materially as well as spiritually turbulent, painful and debasing. Gone is the Temple in Jerusalem with its manifest spirituality, along with the comforts we are told existed in the Temple times. Jews have to struggle to maintain their spirit, and all too often, to save their very skins. The purpose of this too, according to this thought-system, is to bring about the ultimate in *Dirah Betachtonim*.

As indicated above, the more lowly, the more indifferent to G-d, the more G-dforsaken, the greater the potential for *Dirah Betachtonim*. For hereby, entities totally devoid of spirituality, thoroughly alien to G-dliness, respond to G-d—solely because

they are *co-essential* with G-d. This is most fully realized through the hardships of *galut*.

True, the Sanctuary and Temple represented the union of G-d with the physical, even with mere stones, but that union occurred in a milieu that was essentially harmonious with G-d: an ideal time, an ideal place and an ideal society for a relationship with Him. Whereas the ultimate in Dirah Betachtonim—the ultimate union of G-d with that which is inherently unG-dly—was to be realized only by engaging the most alien and hindering of circumstances, only through encounter with the most remote corners of the globe, with extreme social realities and with harsh, unG-dly circumstances. It is specifically through sustaining the will of G-d during these circumstances, through introducing sanctity into these adverse situations, that true Dirah Betachtonim is achieved. First, hereby a victory is achieved for G-dliness, demonstrating the *infinity*, the far reach, of G-d, how He is compatible with even the most G-dforsaken of circumstances. But more important than the *display of victory*, of greater significance than the *manifestation of infinity*—is the realization through *galut* of the communion of G-d with a reality which is, in all its overt dimensions (*manifestly*), thoroughly different to Him: for it, too, is *co-essential* with G-d.

Furthermore, when circumstances are ideal, it is these positive circumstances themselves that contribute towards the producing of Dirah Betachtonim. The realization of Dirah Betachtonim is, therefore, in a sense, a state granted by the grace of G-d. This is especially true of the Divine presence manifest in the Sanctuary and Jerusalem Temple, for there G-d was manifest, after all, by His own decision. Hence, the true objective of Dirah Betachtonim is short-circuited: it is not indifferent reality in union with G-d, but a reality upon which G-d shines that is in unison with Him.

More deeply: Even to the degree that the physical and finite themselves are in fact involved in the relationship, where Dirah Betachtonim emanates from G-d, the compatibility is, in a sense, imposed from the outside. As it were, it is an external force acting upon reality rendering it compatible, not reality itself involved in a relationship. It is *accidental* (in the philosophical sense), rather than *essential*. Hence, it cannot be truly said that indifferent reality is in communion with G-d: reality *itself*, its essence—the being of reality, its être—has not been reached.

Under the conditions of *galut*, on the other hand, Dirah Betachtonim can only be reached by purely human endeavor, whilst challenged by the most adverse conditions: The human himself works through the most negative of circumstances themselves, producing a Dirah Betachtonim. Thus, the very essence of the human being as well as the very essence of these negative circumstances disclose a compatibility with G-d.

This is not only cause for celebrating “victory,” something meaningful in terms of *manifestations*—here lies something more significant: where reality reaches communion with G-d by its own endeavors, by working through itself, with nothing, not even ideal conditions, provided by G-d, then it itself, not its pliable features—the *essence*, the être, of lowly reality—has reached communion with G-d. Dirah Betachtonim—*essence one with Essence*—has now been truly realized.

THE SPIES

The Torah relates that as the Jewish people were poised for their conquest of the Promised Land, they sent twelve spies on a reconnaissance mission. These men, as stated in the Torah and especially as interpreted by the Sages, were all exemplary pious Jews, leaders of their people. Yet, upon arriving in Canaan they were completely overcome and upon their return

HEAVEN ON EARTH

led their people in revolt, decrying entering the Land.

What came over them? Leaders of the Jews, men of faith, people who had encountered Divine intervention and miracles repeatedly in their own lives; G-d told them to conquer the land, why should they be overwhelmed by fear of mere flesh and blood? "These come with chariots, and these with horses, but we raise the banner of G-d our Lord!"⁴

This episode assumes a uniquely illuminated character in Dirah Betachtonim. The spies were indeed men of faith; their refusal to enter the land was in fact motivated by deeply felt religious convictions. Their conflict with Moses was a theological one, a disagreement on a central religious issue.

In the desert, the Jews enjoyed an idyllic existence. Manna rained daily from Heaven, the people's clothes, according to the Sages,⁵ were miraculously cleaned and pressed and even grew with them, and the Clouds of Glory provided protection from all who attempted to disturb them. Free from material concerns, they could devote their time and energies to matters of the spirit. They could pray, meditate and study Torah, reaching the greatest spiritual heights. But now they were to enter Canaan. Food would have to be sown and harvested, clothes spun and woven—what would become of their saintly existence! Perhaps they would be overwhelmed by physical demands and would lose their carefully cultivated spiritual sensibilities. Proclaimed the spies: "It is a land that devours its inhabitants!"⁶

But Moses, in the name of G-d, was of a different opinion. Prior to descending into this world, the human soul enjoys just such an idyllic existence desired by the spies. Similarly, angels in otherly spiritual worlds continually bask in the spiritual presence of G-d. But man has a greater calling. Man's peculiar greatness lies in engaging, not escaping, the indifferent physi-

cal world into which he is created, and transforming it into a Dirah Betachtonim. “We shall surely go up and conquer it!”⁷

THE MESSIAH

At the end of time, at the culmination of human existence, at the ultimate finale of our people’s odyssey through history, the Messianic era will arise. It is the period of which the prophets spoke, our poets sang, for which Jews have longed throughout the ages. But what is the attraction of that era? In which way is it worthy of such longing and anticipation?

Prophetic and *Aggadic* statements abound describing that epoch in glowing terms. Isaiah states famously: “They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.”⁸ And the Sages state, for example, that food ready to be eaten and clothes fit for wearing will grow on trees.⁹

Maimonides has cautioned not to be sidetracked by such promises of physical delight whilst ignoring the essence of the messianic times:

The scholars and prophets did not long for *Mashiach’s* days—so that they should rule over the entire world, nor that they should subjugate the pagans, nor that the nations shall elevate them, nor in order to eat and drink and make merry—but so that they shall be free for Torah and its wisdom without oppressor or hinderer, in order to merit the life of the World-to-Come . . . at that time the business of the entire world will be aught but knowing G-d alone, and therefore the Jews will be great scholars and knowledgeable of the hidden matters and they will apprehend the knowledge of their Creator, to the degree man is able, as is written¹⁰ “for the earth is filled with knowing G-d as water covers the sea.”¹¹

The Messianic era is, then, primarily a *spiritual* “utopia,” a time when man’s spiritual acumen and activity will reach

unprecedented heights, indeed, their ultimate zenith.

Now the Dirah Betachtonim system, too, attaches significance to the spiritual value of the Messianic era, it too talks of this time as one in which the earth will be filled with G-dliness—but, as we have learned to expect, with a striking difference in nuance. To elucidate, we look at another of Maimonides' views regarding the end of time and the Dirah Betachtonim perspective on that matter.

It is a principle of faith that there will come a time when G-d will resurrect the dead. Maimonides insists,¹² however, that this will be but a temporary period. Eventually, the physical body must disintegrate. Ultimately, the soul will free itself from the body's grip and live a free spiritual existence. At the end of all time, resurrection too will be in the past, for the ultimate end will be spiritual rather than physical.

We have already noted briefly in a previous chapter that Dirah Betachtonim is of a different view. Siding with Nachmanides in his classic debate with Maimonides on this matter,¹³ Dirah Betachtonim maintains that the final state, the one in which the ultimate nature of reality will be realized, is in fact the state of resurrection. A spiritual reality does exist, even today, for souls after they pass on from this life—but it is that reality that is temporary: once the dead will be resurrected, that will be the way things will remain.

Now, a "utopian" state represents the total realization of that which one *generally* views as ideal. On a light note, for a person whose greatest enjoyment is eating chocolate ice-cream, utopia is a world filled with this culinary delight; for one whose greatest thrill is high speed driving, it is a world filled with breakneck sports cars. Something similar (given of course the evident differences) might be said of the two views regarding the end of time: the views of Dirah Betachtonim and

Maimonides diverge on the final utopian state—in parallel to their differing views on the ideal direction for man until that time.

In Maimonides' writings the ideal which man ought to pursue during his life is to escape the transient contingent body and physical world, enjoying transcendent spirit. Accordingly, for Maimonides the end of time will be a transcendent state. If the general overriding objective is to escape the body, if the body is at best a tolerated evil—can it still persevere at the end of time when all will be good?

But according to *Dirah Betachtonim* where transcendence itself is regarded as a light that blinds, hiding the essence, where escaping the body into a spiritual state amounts to being lured by the brilliant luminosity of Divine features (*manifestations*) at the expense of that which is truly rewarding, namely, a relationship with the Essence of G-d in the physical—the ultimate state of reality at the end of days must be a physical reality, souls resurrected in bodies. Can utopia be mere *manifestations* and not *essence*?

We have seen several examples of the way history is seen from the *Dirah Betachtonim* vantage point. Some negative historical episodes such as the mission of the spies represent a deficiency in realizing the latent spiritual potential of this reality; others, such as *galut* are interpreted as opportunities to engage G-dforsaken reality. Positive chapters of history amount to high points in the realization of the *Dirah Betachtonim* goal—culminating with the ultimate realization of *Dirah Betachtonim* at the end of all time, when the co-essence of this finite physical reality with the Essence of G-d will be manifest to all.¹⁴

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

SOCIOLOGY / THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF DIRAH BETACHTONIM

The far-reaching social programs of the Lubavitcher Rebbe need no introduction. He has established a worldwide network of thousands of Jewish institutions, addressing the entire range of Jewish activities from cradle to old age, in thousands of towns throughout the world. What is less well known is that it is the Dirah Betachtonim theological system that provides the conceptual framework within which the Rebbe has seen his endeavors, and within which he has related their significance to his followers, and in which, in turn, they see their role and are motivated to act upon his directives. As they see it, the Rebbe's followers are involved in a cosmic project, in the realization of Dirah Betachtonim.

The Rebbe pleads with anyone who will listen, to go out of his own corner and seek out Jews wherever they might be, even in the most remote corners of the world, to impress upon them the message of Judaism.

Now, in the past, the pervasive sentiment in religious circles was that to the extent possible one ought to remain with-

in the confines of one's *shul*, house of learning, and community. Here one is safe as a Jew. Here one is away from the turbulence of the alien world that can be distracting to the committed Jew. Here one can safely devote oneself to one's Maker.

But in the eyes of Dirah Betachtonim all of this is misplaced. Firstly, the outside world is not viewed as a religious threat; to the contrary, precisely the world outside is the most fertile ground for spiritual activity. The more indifferent it is, the more G-d forsaken (though of course not the more evil)—the greater the potential for Dirah Betachtonim. Metaphysically, not a greater absence of Divinity, but a greater purity of the Divine Essence, is to be found there. Nor are the *shul* and house of learning particular havens for spirituality. They are Divine solely in character, in quality—*manifestations*, not *essence*. Their primary value in the broader scheme of things is, in fact, as regrouping grounds, spiritual feeding and fueling stations, as it were, for a return to where the action really lies.

When the great Flood was about to begin, G-d commanded Noah "Come in . . . to the ark!"¹ The Hebrew word for ark, *tevah*, can also be translated as *word*. The Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of Chasidism, commented:² In order to avoid the turbulent "floodwaters" of life and society that threaten Jewish life, a Jew should heed G-d's command to Noah: he should enter into the *word*—absorb and engross himself in words of Torah and prayer. Now, later in the episode after the Flood had ended, we read that G-d told Noah, "Go out of the *tevah!*"³ It is in fact specifically *this* command in its figurative sense that has been noted and particularly stressed by the Rebbe: Go out of the confines of the *shul* and house of learning and confront reality outside, and convert it into a dwelling place for G-d.

On occasion, the Rebbe declared: "...go out!" To the uninitiated this seemed almost sacrilegious: Can one advocate leaving the arena of spiritual endeavor and going out to a spiritually adverse world? The considerate uninitiated might rationalize that this is a necessary evil, as it were, a call of the hour. The great upheavals of our times—philosophical, technological, social, the Holocaust—have left the future of Jewish life hanging precariously in the balance. Jews have scattered far and wide, and all too many have hardly the ability, or for that matter the interest, to establish those institutions which have guaranteed our continuity to this day. It is an *et la'asot Lashem*, a time demanding emergency measures! Emissaries must be sent out to reach geographically and spiritually remote Jews if Judaism is to survive. And in retrospect, after several decades of the Rebbe's spiritual leadership, it can indeed be seen that countless Jewish institutions have been established thanks to precisely such endeavors; numerous towns and cities which would have fallen into total oblivion to the Jewish world now boast vibrant Jewish life.

This, in fact, was the way the Rebbe's social programs were viewed by many, who naturally respected the Rebbe's work but had not yet caught up with the conceptual shift of emphasis of the Rebbe's profound Torah *weltanschauung*. For though the above portrayal of the Rebbe's call is valid on a certain level, it becomes clear in light of all we have seen in this book, that from within the Rebbe's own conceptual framework, reaching out is not just *et la'asot Lashem* but rather the zenith of man's spiritual endeavor—the reaching towards Essence.

In this system, the traditional Chabad-Chasidic motto *pnimiyut!*, "inwardness!" is complemented by the pervasive motto *Ufaratsta!* "Spread out!" For ultimately of what value is inwardness? In the interior of one's own spiritual person,

IN FOCUS

whilst in the warm environment of *shul* or house of learning, one might cultivate great spiritual heights; one might meditate, pray, illuminate one's soul with the splendor of G-d. But all of this, as we now know, is *merely* splendor, not essence. Essence is to be sought specifically beyond man's spiritual self, specifically at the furthest reaches.

Thus, as the Rebbe portrays it, the more geographically removed from religious centers, the more spiritually alienated a person may be—reaching him represents a greater height in Divine worship, more *Dirah Betachtonim*. Though what is involved is not deep Torah study, nor fervent prayer—as could have been the case inside the “ark”—nay, precisely because it is merely the performance of a physical mitzvah, such as binding leather hide to the arm⁴—herein lies man's greatest spiritual endeavor, the acme of his communion with G-d.

And it is inspired by this encompassing goal that thousands of young men and women have left the “ark,” traveled far and wide, away from the spiritual centers of Judaism, enduring material and spiritual hardship—to make numerous dark indifferent corners of the world a *Dirah Betachtonim*. Thus, leading up to the ultimate global realization of *Dirah Betachtonim* at the end of time.

APPENDIX

THE MEANING OF THE HEBREW TERMS עצמות AND עצם

APPENDIX

עצם AND עצמות

I wish to confess to imposing a specific nuance upon the ideas associated with Dirah Betachtonim through much of this book. I do so both to caution the person who has not read any of the original literature, as well as to acknowledge to those familiar with it that it may not be unfair to reject my interpretation.

In the original texts the Hebrew terms עצם and עצמות are widely used. I have translated them as essence (or Essence) and often interpreted them as *being*. I will state here in brief why I have given this interpretation. Should the reader refuse to accept *being* and the related ideas in the book as the crucial part of the meaning of עצם and עצמות, I think these are at least helpful in rounding out the concepts denoted by these terms.

Let us begin by attempting to define the terms עצם and עצמות in ways that appear readily acceptable to all. It appears readily acceptable to regard (albeit not to define) עצמות as that which is *at the top of the G-dhead*. Accordingly, when it is said, for example, that a particular activity or sphere relates to עצמות, this connotes that it relates to the very top, rather

than to lower parts of the G-dhead. (Similar to this would be the notion that *עצמות* is the center or *core* of the G-dhead.)

It also appears that *עצמות* is regarded, at least by some, as *that which always was* in the G-dhead (akin to *קדמון*), that which is unchanging, absolute, as distinct to those spheres which were produced, which came into being at some stage. Accordingly, when it is said that a particular activity or sphere relates to *עצמות*, this connotes that it relates to specifically that which always was, always is, in the G-dhead, as distinct from that which came into being at some stage.

Does *עצמות* denote source? Clearly *עצמות* is the source, the Ultimate Source, the *מאור*, and hence when referring to *עצמות* the notion of source will be somewhere in the background; but it appears reasonable to say that this is not the connotation of the term and notion *עצמות* itself. *מקור* or *מאור* would be more in place for this concept (though *מאור*, in turn, is often used in relation to the ideas related to the notion of *עצמות*.)

There is another notion that many may associate with *עצמות*, as distinct from *גילויים*, namely being hard and fast (compare: *נעלם* [not *העלם*], *אוכם*, *לא ידע*) rather than dynamic. *עצמות* is also associated with *פשיטות* (simplicity [not being complex], featurelessness). It both exists prior to the arising of specific features (a product of *tzimtzum* of one type or another), and incorporates them all.¹

To sum up, *עצמות* is that which is the top of the G-dhead, always was, is a hard and fast core, and is simple, that is, undifferentiated and free of specific qualities and colorings.

But there appears to be more to the notion of *עצמות*. Moreover, the term *עצם* has a tradition; it has meaning associated with it prior to *Dirah Betachtonim*, indeed long before *Chasidut*, as today outside of *Chasidut* or even philosophical disciplines altogether, such as in the works of the Rogatchover

APPENDIX

Gaon and others. The terms **עצם** and **עצמות** in *Chasidut* and *Dirah Betachtonim* appear associated with the sets of ideas generally denoted by the term **עצם** (**עצמות** denoting that part of the G-dhead which has the nature of **עצם**.)

Simply put, **עצמות** denotes G-d as He is in Himself, not as He is when in relation to other entities. Or, more profoundly, G-d in Himself, not G-d in relation. (Compare: **בעצמו**.)

To explain this more deeply we might look at the classic distinction between the **עצם** and the nine **מקרים**, accidents: quantity, quality, influence etc.²

To paraphrase this classic distinction between **עצם** and **מקרה**—take the example of a table. It has a particular color, size etc. But these are **מקרי**, accidental: there are tables of other colors and sizes, or, in other words, a table can exist with other colors and sizes, and conversely, other things can have this same color and size. Thus, this color and size have no inherent connection with table, they are incidental. But there is another dimension of the table perceived by the mind, one or some of its features, without which it will always not be a table and with which it always will be a table, irrespective of the presence or absence of other dimensions, the accidents. Let us, for simplicity of presentation, define this dimension of table: the ability of the object to support something else and its having some support by way of legs. Where this is, there is a table, without it—even in the presence of color, size, wood etc.—there is no table. Once this is, superimposed on it there are color, size etc. These, by way of other entities, other parts of reality acting upon it, as it were.

What, then, are the notions included in the **עצם** of table? Substratum, upon which the accidents are superimposed. Aloneness: this dimension is not shared by anything else; it exists ontologically apart from everything else. But also: it is

with this dimension that table comes into being, and with its removal or absence that table ceases to be. This dimension is the being, the “is” of the table. The other dimensions are what it does, how it is, the state of its “is”, but not its “is” itself, its being. **עצם** denotes the being. Thus though **עצם** does denote aloneness, constantness, substratum, primary, core, hard and fast, simple (if you will, constancy and nakedness of being) relative to features, to accidents (even aloneness is relative to the frame of reference of accidents)—it is perhaps primarily *being*.

With regard to G-d in particular, the **עצם** of G-d, **עצמות**, is yet more closely related to the notion of being. A number of considerations are relevant. First, with regard to the Creator, the frame of reference includes non-existence and hence entities are not to be defined solely in terms applicable once they exist. Thus, **עצם** is not solely substratum, or a similar notion, which is relative to accidents, a definition assuming it already is, but being: a definition relative to non-being (see also above, particularly chapters 9 and 13).

Furthermore, the notion of G-d relative to us, to reality, is primarily provider of being. Furthermore, the notion of G-d Himself is being: something which is because it is. In fact, some prove the existence of G-d this way, maintaining that all contingent beings must trace their ontology back to an absolute, necessary being.³

Thus though **עצמות** may include a variety of notions, being is a, perhaps *the*, fundamental one.⁴

And being is indeed non-expressive, hard and fast, constant and simple etc.

As for the term **גילויים** used in *Chasidut* and particularly *Dirah Betachtonim*, though it may have special nuances, it appears that the term’s connotations aim to add to, but not subtract from, the classical notion of **מקרה**.

APPENDIX

These are, perhaps, termed גילויים rather than מקרה: to denote that they are not there by accident, but as a purposeful production; to denote their dynamic nature, as opposed to a state (or conversely, that they are merely manifestations, not something else); to denote that they are produced by the עצם not just are, that is, not of equal ontological reality to עצמות and that their substance emerges from the עצם, not as an independent ontological source and being. That is, the term גילויים does not only denote features, or the lower, created, dynamic part of the G-dhead, but also that which is not עצם, with all the relevant implications, including that the גילויים are not the is, the being.

NOTES

NOTES

CHAPTER ONE

1. *Midrash Tanchuma*, *Nasso* 16, as commonly quoted in Chasidic literature.

CHAPTER TWO

1. *Milot Hahigayon* Chapter 11
2. See Appendix.

CHAPTER THREE

1. See *Tanya*, chapters 6 and 7.
2. A common expression in Chasidic literature, based on *Tanya* Chapter 36.

CHAPTER FOUR

1. The presentation here is evidently brief and not without generalizations. In particular, the borders between the Kabbalistic and Chasidic systems are described in somewhat overly rigid terms for purposes of presentation.
2. *Tanya / Shaar Hayichud Veba'emunah*, 3.

CHAPTER FIVE

1. Chapter 3.
2. Deuteronomy 4,6; recited daily in the *Shema* prayer, and the foundation for the second Principle of Faith.
3. Deuteronomy 4, 39.

CHAPTER SIX

1. "The created something is verily the True Something"; a most significant phrase in *Dirah Betachtonim*. See *Biurei Hazohar* by Rabbi Dovber of Lubavitch, *Beshalach*, page 43, column 3.

2. As indicated in the previous chapter, according to Chasidic teachings Creation is a perpetual process, not a one-time event in the past: If the 'laser lights' would not perpetually produce reality, all of reality would automatically revert back to the primordial nonexistence. I nevertheless use the past tense in the discussion of Creation in this chapter and in most of the book in order to facilitate presentation.

3. *Hechal* 1, *Shaar* 1, Chapter 2.

4. This paradox will be addressed in detail in Chapter 11

CHAPTER SEVEN

1. *Tanya*, Chapter 27

2. See *Zohar* 1, page 180, 2 and *ibid.* 140, 2.

3. Thus, the predominant term in the vocabulary of the Rebbe's talks appears to be *it'hapcha*, rather than *it'kafya*.

4. Not for *ayin* but for *yesh*, see also below Chapter 8.

5. Correspondence dated *Nissan* 10, 5741 to Symposium on Jewish Mysticism, London and Provinces, May 22-26 1981.

CHAPTER NINE

1. Genesis 1, 1.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

1. Exodus 33, 20.

2. This is not seen as precluding all speculation on the nature of G-d, for though what G-d truly is can never be apprehended by humans and must remain forever unknown, humans are able to embark upon a circumscription of the parameters of that unknown entity, to the limits of human comprehension. In a sense, it is like a blind person studying the delights of visual aesthetics: he will never apprehend visual phenomena, never enjoy the visual experience, but yet might know some reflection of its features in terms of experiences available to him. Moreover, when Torah writings describe G-d, it is not merely human speculation on what inherently lies beyond the pale of human inquiry, but it is, rather, revealed information, coming from the other side as it were, as to the true nature of G-d, formulated in a manner accessible to the mere human mind.

NOTES

3. Guide for the Perplexed I, 58.

4. *Leadership* might be a convenient term for *Malchut*: It connotes two important features of *Malchut*—elevation (*hitnas'ut*), as well as the influencing of the affairs of other, lower, beings.

5. Chapter 2.

6. Part 1, beginning of Chapter 8.

7. Those familiar with Kabbalistic concepts may note, for example, that this is true of *kelim* relative to *or*.

8. From this discussion it becomes evident that the Creating relationship between G-d and our reality (unlike with higher spiritual worlds) is of a peculiar character. Maimonides states at the very beginning of his Code (*Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah I, 1*): *Vechol hanimtsa'im . . . lo nimtseu ela me'amitit himats'o*: "All existing things . . . exist only through His true existence" (or, "the truth of His existence"). Two terms are of significance to Dirah Batachtonim in this phrase: 1. "*amitit*," His true existence—that is, the statement is concerned with reality as it relates to specifically the Essence of G-d, not to any other aspect of the G-dhead; 2. "*nimtseu*," a passive form of exist (literally, *are found existing*), rather than *are made to exist*—i.e. not an act, a reaching out.

For the production of this reality by G-d (at the outset as well as the notion of the perpetual Divine flow that gives it its existence, the 'laser lights' that continually produce the apparition as it were [see above Chapter Six, note 1]), is Essence to essence. It is not active, manifestation, becoming in relation to, a process, a descent, a reaching out; but a passive, *essential* phenomenon. Creation itself assumes here a new complexion: it is reality assuming a co-essence with G-d (however incomprehensible) and continuing thereafter to partake of the essence.

9. See Appendix.

10. It must be emphasized however that also in terms of *being*, G-d is dissimilar to reality as we know it. G-d is *ontologically* different. *Chasidut* uses the term *nimtsa vebiliti metsiut nimtsa*, or as the Rebbe, R. Shalom Dovber once put it in Yiddish (as I heard from the late Reb Yisroel Noach Belinitzki): *Faran. Vi faran veis men nit, ober Faran*. That is, G-d exists but not with that existence with which reality even exists. I wonder whether the very common designation in *Chasidut*, *Atsmut Umahut* does not intend to reflect (also) something similar: *Atsmut* = Essence, the feature predominantly emphasized, but this must be qualified by *Mahut*, i.e. *what* G-d is—not in terms of drawing attention to His features (*manifestations*), but—to preclude reducing G-d merely to the uni-

versal category of essence, however sublime this category is.
See also Appendix.

CHAPTER TWELVE

1. *Tanya*, Chapter 32
2. Guide for the Perplexed III, 8; M. Friedlander's translation, 1956 edition.
3. Deuteronomy 6, 5; recited in the *Shema*.
4. Talmud, *Berachot* 54a.
5. Proverbs 14, 4.
6. See, inter alia, Index to *Likutei Torah* s.v. *Yerida Tsorech Aliyah* and *Neshamot: Yerida Tsorech Aliyah*.
7. Psalms 109, 22. See *Tanya*, Chapter 1.
8. See also *Shiurim Besefer Hatanya*, Chapter 13, note 9.
9. Proverbs 12, 4.
10. For example, *kelim*, and especially *Malchut*.
11. This naturally has implications concerning the metaphysical values and roles of literal man and woman.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

1. In, for example, Guide for the Perplexed III, 51 and III, 27.
2. See, inter alia, *Mitzvah* 545.
3. Chapters 2, 6 and 11.
4. Though, as we have seen, the 'laser apparition,' despite its *manifest* great difference from light, is *inherently* light. See above, Chapter 6.
5. Put differently: *Mitzvot* are an expression of the Will of G-d. The Will of G-d transcends both human logic and even Divine logic, as it were. And in this transcendence, the *a priori* notion of material *mitzvot* being inferior to man's spiritual self, or even totally immaterial to G-d, which is ultimately the product of a rational assessment, loses itself. Thus, human acts that are inherently meaningless to G-d assume value—due to His Will. As explained at length in *Chasidut*, human experience provides an analogy: humans too can, in a limited way, will things that have no meaning for them when a purely rational or emotional assessment is undertaken—whereupon they assume meaning for them.
6. See *Megillah* 25:a.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

1. *Avot* IV, 16.
2. A common phrase in *Zohar* (e.g. *Bereshit* page 24a) and elsewhere.
3. Leviticus 26,4.
4. Deuteronomy 11, 13-17.
5. *Yad Hachazakah*, *Hilchot Teshuvah* 9, 1.
6. *Avot* IV, 17.
7. This question applies of course similarly to the two apparently contradictory statements in *Mishnah Avot* themselves
8. *Avot* IV, 2.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

1. See Talmud, *Chagigah* 2a, based on Exodus 23, 17.
2. From the *Mussaf* prayer.
3. These are the measurements of the earlier Sanctuary; there were different measurements but with the same effect in the Temple.
4. Psalms 20, 8.
5. *Midrash Rabbah*, *Devarim* 7, 11.
6. Numbers 13, 32.
7. *Ibid* 13, 30.
8. Isaiah 2, 4.
9. Talmud, *Shabbat* 30,b.
10. Isaiah 11, 9.
11. *Mishneh Torah*, *Shoftim* XII, 4.
12. See, in particular, Maimonides' Treatise on Resurrection.
13. See the disagreement between Maimonides and Nachmanides in *Derech Mitzvotecha* p. 28.
14. We can now summarize four consistent differences we have noted in this and previous chapters between Maimonides' views and those of *Chasidut*, particularly in *Dirah Betachtonim*. Maimonides maintains that:—
 - ♦ The arena for true reward today is the afterlife, not this transient, inferior life (Chapter 14);
 - ♦ The final stage of reality, the realization of the sought after ideal, will be the reversal, after temporary resurrection, to a spiritual state (this chapter);
 - ♦ The general ideal to be sought after by man is not this finite, mundane, restrictive world, but spirituality and freedom of the spirit (Chapter 12);

HEAVEN ON EARTH

- ♦ G-d is the transcendence of Supreme Logic (Chapter 11).

On the other hand, Dirah Betachtonim maintains that:—

- ♦ Ultimate reward is found in this life;
- ♦ The ultimate end of days will be a physical existence;
- ♦ Man's goal is to realize the religious potential in the very finitude and restrictiveness of this reality;
- ♦ G-d transcends transcendence as well as features, His greatest and most important dimension is Essence.

It should be noted, however, that the Rebbe has interpreted Maimonides' texts as expressing the ideas of *Chasidut*. See for example *hadran* on Maimonides' Code, published for Nissan 11, 5745 as well as later *hadranim*.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

1. Genesis 7, 1.
2. See addenda to *Keter Shem Tov* (Kehot Publication Society editions), 10.
3. Genesis 7, 16.
4. Compare / the Rebbe's *Tefillin Campaign*

APPENDIX

1. This in itself, besides what follows, is adequate to point out that the definition of *עצמות* as being, distinct from a *process*, is inadequate; being rather than being *something*, an interpretation used in the book, is preferable.
2. See for example *Milot Hahigayon*, by Maimonides, chapter 10.
3. Accordingly, not only the *עצם* of G-d but also His *מהות* is associated with being. On the other hand, as pointed out in the final note to chapter 11, G-d must not be reduced to the universal category of being, and in fact He is not in essence being as we know it but *מציאות נמצא* ובלתי נמצא ובלתי.
4. It remains perpetually possible to subtly subdivide the notion of being (or *עצם*) into three progressive parts:
 1. the transition from nothing to something;
 2. a feature of this reality within the broader frame of reference that includes the proceeding nothingness.
 3. the features, *תכונות*, of being or *עצם*.The unique relationship of this reality with *עצמות* occurs in relation to all three as implied above in the book.

INDEX

INDEX

A

Angels, 16, 28-29, 32, 134

Animal Soul, 106, 109
see also Soul, *Nefesh*

Arizal, see *Luria*

Ark

Holy, 129-130
Noah's, 139
spiritual, 139-141

Arrogance, 75-76
see also *Yesh*

Asceticism,

in Chasidic thought, 65-68
in *Dirah Betachtonim*, 69-71

Average person (*benoni*)
struggle of, 65-71

Avodat Hakodesh, 95-97

Ayin, 77

B

Baal Ga'avah, 75

Baal Shem Tov, 139

Benoni, see *Average person*

Blackhole, analogy of, 102

Blindness, analogy of, 15, ch.11
n.2

Body, physical,
at end of time, 112

in Chasidic thought, 65-68,
106-108

in *Dirah Betachtonim*, 69-71,
108-109, 111

Body (continued)

inability to perceive spiritual-
ity, 38

relating to Essence, 70-71, 112

relating to the soul, 9, 64, 72,
104, 108-109, 112

subduing of, 65-66

sublimating of, 67-68, 106-
108

vehicle for the Divine, 69, 111,
112

C

Clouds of Glory, 134

Color, analogy of, 38

Cosmic unity, 27, 34, 84

Cosmology

in *Dirah Betachtonim*, 32-33

in Jewish writing, 27-30

in *Kabbalah & Chasidut*, 30-
31

Creation, 11, 27

constant process, 45-46, ch. 6
n.2, ch.11 n.8

HEAVEN ON EARTH

- equality of all worlds relative to, 51
 ex-nihilo, 50, 82, 84
Crescas, Rabbi Chasdai, 91, 94
Curtain (*parsa*), see *Veil*
- D**
- Dead wood**, analogy of, 17
Deafness, analogy of, 117-118
Death
 in *Dirah Betachtonim*, 125, 136
 in Judaism, 123-125, 136
Descent, of soul, 108
 see also *Soul*
Dirah Betachtonim
 The phrase, 5, 32
 As basis for Chabad
 Outreach, 138
Divine sparks, 35, 41
- E**
- Electromagnetic spectrum**, analogy of, 99
Etz Chaim, 55
Evil inclination, 106
Evil, 31
Exile, of Divine Presence, 31, 56
Exile, 131-133
Existence
 of man, 17-19
 purpose of, 59
- F**
- Flood**, the Great, 140
- G**
- G-dhead**, 57, 58, 62, 78, 86, 88
 in Kabbalah, 93-94
 in Chasidut, 100-102, 145-149
- G-d** (continued)
G-d-meter, 47
Galut, 131-133
G-d
 anguish of, 31
 ascribing human characteristics to, 14, 92
 communication with, 22, 110, 114, 120-122
 concealment of, 30, 31
 see also *Parsa*
 dirah (dwelling) of, 32, 129
 emotions of, 30
 Essence and attributes, 13, 14, 62, 84, 86, 100-101
 Essence of all existence, 23, 36, 47, 50-51
 Essence relative to manifestations, 20, 32, 33, 50, 72, 73, 86, 101, 100-102, 109-112, 119, 125, 137, 139
 existence of, 17, 19, 83, ch. 11 n. 10
 inaccessibility of, 14-15,
 infinity of, 11-12, 23, 57, 73, 86, 92, 95, 98, 100, 110, 130
 love for, 107
 Love of, 30, 72, 87, 94, 101, 103, 121
 man's awareness of, 49-50
 (see also *Lower and Supernal Unity*)
 qualities, attributes, 12, 14, 19-20
 relating to good and evil, 12
 relating to physical, 13, 43-53, 55, 57, 60, 82-83, 94, 102, 129-130, ch. 11 n. 8
 relationship with man, 10, 12, 15-16, 48, 92, 110-111, 114, 117
 relationship with world, 67

INDEX

- in Chasidut, 44-49
in Dirah Betachtonim, 49-53
Wisdom of, 30, 72, 87, 94, 101, 103, 121
- H**
- Hala'at Hatachton**, 77-78, 84
Hashem, 47
Heart
naturally more spiritual, 8, 117
influenced by *mitzvot*, 115
worship with, 110-112
relating to manifestations, 113-114
Heavenly Court, 28
Holocaust, 140
Hologram, analogy of, 45, 56, 62
Holy of Holies, 129
Homo Sapiens, 106-107
Human-meter, 46
- I**
- Indulgence**, 70
It'hapcha
in Chasidut, 65-68
in Dirah Betachtonim, 69-71
relating to Supernal Unity, 67
It'kafya
in Chasidut, 65-68
in Dirah Betachtonim, 69-71
relating to Lower Unity, 67
- K**
- Kabbalah**
and attributes of G-d, 93
and *Sefirot*, 93
cosmic unity in, 34-36, 52, 56
and man-woman metaphor, 113
and purpose of existence, 59
- Kaddish**, 126
Kindergarten, analogy of, 96-99
Kindness, sphere of, 93
- L**
- Ladder**, analogy of, 14-15, 96, 116-117
Leadership, sphere of, 93, ch. 2 n. 4
Light, Creative, of G-d, 45, 86, 99
potential to give or with hold, 58
withdrawal of, 56
(see also *Tzimtzum*)
Light-meter, 46
Logic, 79-81, 114
Lower Unity, 47-49, 52, 56, 67-68
Luria, Rabbi Itzhak (known as the *Arizal*), 55
- M**
- Maimonides**, 14, 28, 91, 92, 94, 105, 114, 124, 135-137, ch. 11 n. 8, ch. 15 notes 12, 14
Material world
apparent independence of, 61, 102
lowest in Creation, 30
physicality of, 31, 39, 44
relating to Essence, 33, 40, 45, 51, 53, 54, 62, 77, 95, 108, 111, 129-130, ch. 11 n. 8
Material
lack of spirituality in, 11, 47-48, 53, (see also *Lower Unity*)
antithesis of the Divine, 13,

HEAVEN ON EARTH

- 94
 Divine substratum of, 47
 relating to Essence, 23, 41,
 50, 60, 70, 130
 transition from spiritual to,
 55
- Meditation**, 5, 9, 10, 11, 85, 102,
 104, 110, 115, 118, 119-121
- Messianic era**, 136
- Metaphysics**, 3
- Mind**
 naturally more sublime, 8,
 115
 arena for spirituality, 116
 relating to manifestations,
 113-114
- Mishnayot**, 126
- Mitzvot**, 5, 6-9, 12-13, 20-24, 35,
 36, 40, 73-74, 102, 104, 110,
 114-122, 125-126, 141
 highest union with G-d, 85,
 88, 114, ch. 13 n. 4
- Monism**, 34
- Moses**, 134
- Music**, analogy of, 28, 38
- Mystic**, 3,
 goal of, 68, 72
 in Dirah Betachtonim, 68-74
 leaving the physical, 4, 63-64
- N**
- Nachmanides**, 136, ch. 15 n. 13
- Nefesh HaBehamit**, 106
 struggle with, 67
- Nefesh HaElokit**, 106
- Noah**, 139
- O**
- Oved**, 64
- Ox**, analogy of, 107
- P**
- Parsa**, 16-17, 31
- Physical**, the,
 see Material
- Pnimityut**, 140
- Power source**, analogy of, 96
- Prayer**, 5, 7-9, 10, 11, 21, 82,
 85, 87, 110, 115, 118-119,
 120-122, 139
- Professor**, analogy of, 96-97, 99
- Prophecy**, 28
- Provider-recipient**, relationship
 between, 113, 120
- Q**
- Quantum Leap**
 from G-d to man, 116
 of Creation, see *Tzimtzum*
- R**
- Radio waves**, analogy of, 28-29
- Reality-meter**, 47
- Rebbe**, Lubavitcher, vii-ix, 5, 73,
 74, 126, 138-140, ch. 7 n. 3,
 ch. 11 n. 10, ch. 15 n. 14
- Resurrection**, 136-137, ch. 15
 n. 12
- Reward and punishment**, 123-
 126
- S**
- Samach Vav**, x
- Sefer haChinuch**, 115
- Sefirot**, (see *spheres*), 93
- Senses**, relationship to reality, 28
- Shema**, 47, ch. 5 n. 2, ch. 12 n. 3,
 124
- Sitra Achara**, 66
- Soul**, 10, 105, 113
 after death, 123-127, 136
 descent of, 108, 134

INDEX

- relationship with body, 64-65,
104-109
(see also *Nefesh*)
- Space**
creation of, 45
transcendence of, 129
- Sparks**, see Divine sparks
- Spheres**, spiritual, 30, 86, 93
see *Sefirot*
- Spies**, twelve, 133-134
- Spiritual worlds** / beings, existence of, 28-30
- Spotlight**, analogy of, 9, 16, 95
- Student**, analogy of, 116
- Succah**, 22
- Supernal Unity**, 47-50, 52, 56,
60, 67
- Supreme Intellect**, 91
- Supreme Logic**, 92, 114
- Supreme Love**, 91
- T**
- Tables**, analogy of, 29, 80-81,
147
- Tanya**, xi, 66, 104
- Tefillin**, 5-7, 9, 21, 82, 121-122,
141, 158
- Temple**, 128-133
- Time**, creation of, 45
- Torah**, 6, 27, 53, 87, 91, 104,
123-4, 133, 140
study of, 35, 73-4, 134, 135,
139, 141
- Tzaddik**, 126
- Tzimtzum**, 54-56, 95, 96, 100
in Dirah Betachtonim, 57-59
- manifesting Essence, 59
- Tzitzit**, 6, 7, 82, 121, 124
- U**
- Ufaratsta**, 140
- Unity** (of all creation)
in Chasidut, 36-39
in Dirah Betachtonim, 39-42
in Kabbalah, 34-36
- Upper Unity**, 49, see *Supernal Unity*
- V**
- Veil** (*parsa*), 16-17, 31
- W**
- Water molecules**, analogy of, 35-
36
- Wisdom**, sphere of, 93
- Woman**, role of, 113
- Worlds**, spiritual, 16, 134
- World-to-Come**, 123-127
- Worship**, physical, 10, 13, 82-83,
86
reaching higher in G-dhead,
13
- Worship**, spiritual, 85-88
- Y**
- Yahrtzeit**, 126
- Yesh**, 75-77, 84
- Yetser Hara**, 106
- Yetser Tov**, 106

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A SAMPLING OF SOURCES

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Further sources can be obtained from the indices to *Likkutei Sichot*, under the heading "Dirah Betachtonim," and the cross references provided there.