

Crash Course in Basic Judasim I

Who is God?

I. Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook - *The Pangs of Cleansing*

The confusion of thought born of deficiencies in study and knowledge leads a person to focus his thought on the divine *essence*. The more he will immerse himself in the folly of this insolent and absurd preoccupation, the more he will think that he is thereby drawing closer to the exalted knowledge of God, to which he had heard that the world's leading spirits have always aspired. When this habit pattern is established over many generations various false notions are engendered, which lead to many tragic consequences. They beget a state of confusion that undermines the individual's material and spiritual vitality. The greatest impediment to the human spirit, on reaching maturity, results from the fact that the conception of God is crystallized among people in a particular form, going back to childish habit and imagination. This is an aspect of the

*The Zohar, II 85a and III 110a, identifies the two as referring respectively to a higher and lower level of prophecy, or to the written and oral Torah.

offense of making a graven image or a likeness of God, against which we must always beware, particularly in an epoch of greater intellectual enlightenment.

All the troubles of the world, especially the spiritual,

When one submits to a service of God on this empty basis, according to the confused notions that are engendered in the soul when one thinks about God without enlightenment and without Torah, we have here a lower form of piety severed from its source, which is the higher piety. The person increasingly loses the splendor of his world by orienting himself to a lower level of intellectual life. No grandeur of God is then manifest in the soul, but only the lowliness of wild imaginings, that conjure up a form of some deceptive, vague, angry deity that is dissociated from reality. It confuses everyone who believes in it, depresses his spirit, blunts his feelings, inhibits the assertion of his sensibilities, and uproots the divine glory in his soul. If such a person should repeat all day that this faith is the faith in the unity of God, his statement would be empty, and it would register nothing in his soul. Every sensitive spirit must turn his mind away from this. And this is the atheism which is due to arise prior to the messianic liberation, when the knowledge of God is due to run dry in the household of Israel—and in the entire world.

The tendency of unrefined people to see the divine *essence* as embodied in the words and in the letters alone is a source of embarrassment to humanity, and atheism arises as a pained outcry to liberate man from this narrow and alien pit, to raise him from the darkness of focusing on letters and expressions, to the light of thought and feeling, finally to place his primary focus on the realm of morals. Atheism has a temporary legitimacy, for it is needed to purge away the aberrations that attached themselves to religious faith because of a deficiency in

Moses Maimonides - The Guide to the Perplexed 1:1

Rav Yosef Soloveichik- Halachik Man p. 48

SOME HAVE BEEN OF OPINION THAT BY THE HEBREW *ZELEM*, THE SHAPE and figure of a thing is to be understood, and this explanation led men to believe in the corporeality [of the Divine Being]: for they thought that the words "Let us make man in our *zelem*" (Gen. i. 26), implied that God had the form of a human being, i.e., that He had figure and shape, and that, consequently, He was corporeal. They adhered faithfully to this view, and thought that if they were to relinquish it they would *eo ipso* reject the truth of the Bible: and further, if they did not conceive God as having a body possessed of face and limbs, similar to their own in appearance, they would have to deny even the existence of God. The sole difference which they admitted, was that He excelled in greatness and splendor, and that His substance was not flesh and blood. Thus far went their conception of the greatness and glory of God. The incorporeality of the Divine Being, and His unity, in the true sense of the word—for there is no real unity without incorporeality—will be fully proved in the course of the present treatise. (Part II, ch. i.) In this chapter it is our sole intention to explain the meaning of the words *zelem* and *demit*. I hold that the Hebrew equivalent of "form" in the ordinary acceptance of the word, viz., the figure and shape of a thing, is *to'ar*. Thus we find "[And Joseph was] beautiful in *to'ar* ('form'), and beautiful in appearance"

Infinity contracts itself; eternity concentrates itself in the fleeting and transient, the Divine Presence in dimensions and the glory of God in measurements. It is Judaism that has given the world the secret of *tzimtzum*, of "contraction," contraction of the infinite within the finite, the transcendent within the concrete, the supernal within the empirical, and the divine within the realm of reality. When the Holy One, blessed be He, descended on Mount Sinai, He set an eternally binding precedent that it is God who descends to man, not man who ascends to God. When He said to Moses, "And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (Exod. 25:8), He thereby revealed the awesome mystery that God contracts His divine presence in this world.

