



Ask The Rabbi...



January 22, 1994 Issue #7

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1. Does being created in G-d's image mean G-d is Physical?
2. How to submit questions
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Mikhael at Mcgill writes:

Dear Rabbi,

In the Bible we are told that man was created in G-d's image, but in the prayer "Yigdal" we sing: "He has no semblance of a body nor is He corporeal". Which one is right?

Dear Mikhael,

Let's start with the second idea, that G-d is not physical. The prayer Yigdal is actually a poetic rendering of Maimonides' Thirteen Principles of Faith. In principle number three, Maimonides states:

"The third principle is the negation of any physical characteristics from Him. We are to believe that this above mentioned one being is neither a body nor potentially of a body and cannot be conceived of as having the attributes of a body such as movement, resting...anything mentioned in scriptures that describes him in physical terms such as walking, standing...all of these are metaphors..."

That means that when the Bible tells us that G-d took us out of Egypt with an outstretched arm there wasn't really an outstretched arm, but the sensation of G-d's might and protection as we watched him deal with our enemies. So if that's the case what do we mean when we say that man was created in G-d's image?

In the first creation chapter we read: "G-d said, 'Let us make man with our image and likeness.'" The Hebrew words used are "Tzelem" and "Dmut." Both of these words are carefully scrutinized by the commentaries. Essentially they all agree that these terms describe a metaphysical similarity. Some point to man's Free Will as the specific likeness. The kabbalists have mapped out a spiritual mechanism for G-d's interaction with the physical creation using man as the archetype. One thing is clear after even a cursory study of what the commentaries have to say, Man does not have a physical counterpart in G-d.

Sources:

- Maimonides, Commentary of the Mishna - Tractate Sanhedrin, chapter 11
- The Prayer Book, Yigdal Elokim Chai
- The Torah, Genesis, chapter 1, verse 26
- Maimonides, The Guide for the Perplexed, Chapter 1
- Maimonides, The Codes, The Laws of Teshuva, ch. 5,law 1
- Rabbi Chaim Volohzin, Nefesh Hachaim Chapter 1

Questions are welcomed from ALL readers at ALL levels for inclusion in the Ask the Rabbi column. Questions of interest to our general readership may be answered in this column; for those of a more personal nature, we will try to answer personally via e-mail.

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