

Sparks

by Rabbi David Aaron
*Founder and Dean, Isralight
Rosh Yeshiva, Orayta*

Is G-d Beyond Us or Within Us?

The Torah recounts that G-d instructed the Israelites to build a sanctuary, telling Moses, “Let them build a sanctuary and I will dwell in them.” Note that G-d did not say, “I will dwell in the sanctuary.” G-d said, “*in them.*”

Is G-d beyond us or within us?

One day my son Ananiel and my two daughters, Leyadya and Ne’ema, burst into my study. They had obviously been fighting over something and were very upset. I could see that I was chosen to be the lucky arbitrator to resolve another case of sibling rivalry. They shouted at each other, “You go, you ask Daddy.” “No, no! You go, you go.” Finally Ananiel, who was age five at that time, took the challenge and said, “O.K., O.K. Daddy, isn’t it true that G-d is a boy?” Ne’ema and Leyadya, ages eight and nine, had tears in their eyes. I could hear them silently pleading with me, “Please no, please no. Tell us it’s not true. It’s bad enough our brother is a boy. Surely, G-d is really a girl.” I said to them, “G-d is not a boy and G-d is not a girl. G-d is beyond that. We may talk about G-d as if He is a boy. But we really don’t mean it literally.” They all looked at me in shock and confusion. There was this awkward silence, and then suddenly my son blurted out, “You’re wrong! He’s a boy.” And he stomped out of the room.

Unfortunately, many adults actually believe that G-d is male. And it seems from a first glance at the Book of Genesis that the Torah would agree. Throughout G-d is referred to as “He.” Although in much of Jewish tradition we find G-d described as a father and king, there are references to G-d also as a “She,” as mother or queen. However, those of us who are in the know understand that all this is metaphor.

According to Kabbalah, G-d is beyond descriptions that use neat and easy logical categories of either/or.

Most people think that G-d is infinite. But that is incorrect. The infinite is that which goes on and on in space. However, G-d created space and is therefore not bound to the laws and limitation of space. If we describe G-d as infinite, what we really mean is that G-d is spaceless. *Infinite* is the opposite of *finite*, while *spaceless* means “free from the limitations of space.” The One who is spaceless is free to be both beyond space and within space simultaneously. Therefore, G-d is beyond this finite world and yet G-d completely inheres every inch of the earth.

Most people think that G-d is eternal. But that is incorrect. Eternity would be that which goes on and on in time. But G-d created time and is therefore not confined to the limitations of time. If we describe G-d as eternal, what we really mean is that G-d is timeless. The eternal is the opposite of the temporal, while *timeless* means “free of the limitations of time.” The One who is timeless is free to be both beyond time and within time at the same time. Therefore, G-d is both beyond time and yet within every moment, completely filling it with His entire presence.

And when we say that G-d is One, we really mean that G-d is non-dual. One is limited; it is the opposite of many. But non-duality is free of the confines of one or many. Non-duality is free to be beyond the

many and within the many. Therefore, G-d is beyond you, me, and everyone else in this world, and yet also within us.

How can the unlimited be expressed within the limited? How can the unlimited G-d be expressed within time, space, and finite beings?

If the unlimited could not be expressed within the limited, then that would be a limitation. Ultimate freedom must include the freedom to choose to be restricted. Otherwise freedom wouldn't be free; it would imply a limitation of choices—you could not choose to be restricted and limited.

Therefore, according to Kabbalah, G-d is free to be both beyond time and within each moment, beyond space and within every inch, beyond multiplicity and within billions of finite human beings. G-d is free to be manifest as one hundred percent transcendent and yet also one hundred percent immanent.

Of course, this is a contradiction and is not logical. However, we have to always be reminded that all this is from our limited point of view. From G-d's perspective there are not two aspects to the Divine. It is only when we describe the divine truth with our limited language that we need to speak in this paradoxical way. As one sage put it, Kabbalah is not the path to paradise but to paradox.

Kabbalah explains that the manifestation of divine transcendence is identified with the power of masculinity. However, the manifestation of divine immanence is identified with the power of femininity.

In Kabbalah, masculinity is the power of rational detachment, the ability to see from outside as an objective observer. Femininity is the power to empathize, to be intimate, the ability to feel a situation from the inside, as a participant.

The Torah teaches that the first human being was created in the image of G-d. However, the verse that expresses this in Genesis is very strange. Here is the translation from the Soncino Press version, chapter 1, verse 27: "And G-d created man in His own image, in the image of G-d He created him; male and female He created them."

Was the first human being a "him" or a "them"? The answer is yes! The first human being was a single whole entity that included two sexes. The first human was not really male but actually beyond genders—including both male and female.

At a Jewish wedding ceremony, a blessing is recited that might seem puzzling: "Blessed are You, G-d, King of the universe, who created the human being in Your image." It might seem that this blessing would be more appropriately recited at the birth of a child than at a wedding. However, when a child is born you really do not see the full image of G-d. The full image of G-d is only manifest when the male and female unite.

The manifestation of G-d as *outside* of time, space, and finite beings is described as masculine. The manifestation of G-d as *within* time, space, and finite beings is described as feminine.

Therefore, G-d is not male or female. G-d is not beyond us or within us. G-d is beyond the either/or.

It is up to us to become a living sanctuary; to think, speak and act in ways that empower us to experience G-d's joyous truth.

Rabbi David Aaron

Author of Endless Light, Seeing G-d, The Secret Life of G-d, Inviting G-d In, Love is My Religion, Soul Powered Prayer, Living A Joyous Life, and The G-d-Powered Life