

Ecology In The Divine Image Class Five: Beyond Human And Animal

Perhaps the strongest sentiment compassion beyond even animals was stated by Moshe Cordovero (1522-1570) in Tomer Devorah: “A person’s mercies should be distributed to all creatures, not despising them and destroying them, for so is the highest divine wisdom distributed to all creatures, mineral, animal, vegetable, human.”

The Alter Rebbe of Chabad, the doyen of Jewish nondual theology, wrote “The existence and being of the light of Eyn Sof [the infinite Being of YHVH] has no limit of place at all and encompasses all worlds equally, and [so it says,] “the heavens and the earth I fill” [Je 23:24] with one equal-measure/hashva'ah, and, “There is no place empty of Him” even in this material earth/arets.” Here although divine presence is affirmed in the earth, it is “even this material earth.”

Yet the Alter Rebbe also taught, in the last thing he wrote before he died, that from the earth itself shines the “or chozer” or returning light, spiritual light returning to its source. The fecundity of the earth, he wrote, reflects the power of God to bring *yesh m'ayin* (something from nothing) as the earth is continuously producing life. This power, said the Rebbe, is greater than that of angels, who do not continually give life. He says this power is “chesed chinam” (groundless love), the “one remnant of the original Chesed that created the world which we can access directly” in Rav Seidenberg’s summary of his words.

This idea complements what the Alter Rebbe says elsewhere, illustrating how the letters of creation form all things through the process of *tseruf ha'otiyot*:

Stone/even/'BN אבן, by way of example, her name points out that her root is in the exalted name whose number is B"ן 763, גיב, and a further Alef א is added to her from another name, for a reason known to the One who formed her. And behold, the name B"ן in itself is in very high worlds / `olamot `elyonim m'od, but by means of numerous and powerful contractions, from level to level, there descended from him a lifeforce concentrated very very much, until it could clothe itself in a stone. And this is the soul of the silent one /domem, which makes it live and brings it into being from nothing to something in every moment.

Returning to where we began, this is a matter of all things being, in a sense, created in the image of God. The most straightforward statement of this, Rav Seidenberg tells us, is probably in the writing of the Kabbalist Yosef Ashkenazi commenting on the Sefer Bahir:

All the existences, which all have in them the ten Sefirot, are constructed through the joining of letters, whether silent [inanimate], whether growing [plants], whether moving [animals],

whether speaking [humans], and thus each one is in the structure of the seal [i.e. image] belonging to God.

So the earth itself radiates the Or Chozer, the returning light, and is the last bastion of the *chesed chinam*, or absolute, groundless love with which the universe was created, as seen in its fecundity. All things are formed of letters, and those things which don't have individual souls (like rocks, maybe like plants) are ensouled by the divine letters of creation themselves.