

Parallel Thinking Part 6: Our Infinite God and Finite World

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Albert Einstein wrote in his theory of relativity that 3-dimensional space and time are part of the same physical reality, called 'space-time'. Our physical bodies are bound and defined in space.

So too, we are compelled to exist in the present time, sandwiched between the inaccessible past and the unreachable, undefined future.

God however, is not bound by space or time. As the poem "*Yigdal*" (see green siddur, p. 308) states: "God has no body or form of body". By logical extension, He also exists beyond time, as we say in '*Adon Olam*': "[God is] without beginning, without end" (ibid, p. 464).

Infinity is a difficult concept to grasp. For example, mathematically there are an infinite number of whole numbers (1, 2, 3 ...). There are an equally infinite number of even whole numbers and odd whole numbers, even though intuitively there should be half the quantity!

This confusion is a direct result of trying to use our finite human minds to understand infinite concepts. It is precisely this confusion that explains why we might struggle to understand an infinite God. Yet through the Creation of Mankind, God has given us a way of beginning to comprehend Him.

The Torah speaks of God in anthropomorphic terms. For example, God has an 'arm' and a 'hand' (Devarim 4:34) and 'eyes' (ibid. 11:12). If the Torah is the expression of God's mind, then in God's infinite, spiritual reality, He really must have hands, arms and eyes. How is this so? According to everything we have said, those descriptions appear heretical. Yet it is precisely these anthropomorphisms that help us understand God.

The idea that God "created Man in His image" (Bereishit 1:27) means that He has given us physical, finite arms, hands and eyes which are the physical, finite equivalent of His spiritual, infinite arms, hands and eyes. Therefore, when we are told that God took us out of Egypt with a "strong hand and an outstretched arm", we understand what that means from our own physical experiences; the Children of Israel were embedded in the quagmire of spiritual degradation in Egypt, so a strong hand was needed to extricate them. They were distant from God, so an outstretched arm had to be used to reach them.

Our relationships with one another also teach us about our relationship with God. Parenthood teaches us what it feels like to create life and feel unconditional love. That is why our Talmudic Sages associate the commandment to honour God with the commandment to honour our parents. While our finite experiences are of a different nature to God's infinite world, we can get a taste of God's world from our own.

