

DA'AT TEVUNOT - SECTION 1: CHAPTER 9

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Da'at Tevunot 1:9 (# 40 [continued])

1.

We can come to "recognize the truth ... about this world" and "draw close to G-d", Ramchal assures us, if we'd just realize this: that doing things that go against G-d's wishes are wrongful, and that G-d created wrongfulness in the first place by hiding His visage ¹.

So, rather than be attracted to wrong we'd be wise to be drawn instead toward the holy things that carry the promise of our being exposed to "the hidden, mystic light ... of the Living G-d's own visage" instead. Make that choice, we're told, and you'll "reveal G-d's sovereignty yourself" in your heart and in the world, and you'll have achieved redemption rather than have to endure the travails of exile ².

2.

In fact, this was the opportunity offered to Adam at the very beginning ³. He was faced with the reality of wrongdoing, too, in the form of the snake. But had Adam *not* been faced with that reality and had only seen G-d's presence, he wouldn't have grasped the actual extent of G-d's rule. So, G-d allowed for wrong to be manifest in the Garden of Eden so Adam could understand the difference between its rule and G-d's own, and come to fully appreciate G-d's full sovereignty ⁴.

Yet he failed. He knew that he was told not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, but he ate from it anyway, in the erroneous belief that there could be two rulers ⁵, as if what the snake said was true. Adam should have thought about the implications of what he saw and chosen right over wrong -- chosen the good that reiterated G-d's sovereignty, and rejected the wrongfulness that denied it and which was only created to test humankind.

Had he, in fact, trusted his inherent faith ⁶ until the end of the day he was tested rather than fallen for the schemes of the snake, he would have more *fully* grasped the reality of G-d's sovereignty, since he'd have seen wrongfulness for himself and known that G-d only allowed for it to exist for His own purposes. And he'd have accomplished in that one day what would subsequently take 6,000 years to do! For he'd have undone all wrongfulness right there and then.

Yet he was duped. He fell sway to his desires for the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, and descended into error. Adam was then forced to see for himself the actual makeup of wrong -- i.e., the fact that it's "temporary" and due to be replaced by goodness alone. The sad fact is that he had to be shown outright what he'd known and believed from the first.

3.

That's indeed parallel to our own situation here. For, if we'd only be willing to take the reality of G-d's sovereignty to heart and believe in it forthrightly, we will have succeeded from the start. But since we fall for the five calamitous theological errors spoken of before ⁷ G-d is forced to reveal His sovereignty to us outright in the end, and to have us experience the horrors of exile in the meanwhile which enables wrongfulness to grow exponentially.

In fact, we pay an extraordinarily high price for the reality of G-d's visage being hidden from us: our insights are skewed and our deeds are corrupt. That then brings about calamitous changes in all of reality around us to the point where life is chaotic and fraught with wrongdoing. Nonetheless, we're reassured that once G-d's Glory and sovereignty are revealed our insights and deeds will be rectified and we'll all cling on to His presence ⁸.

Footnotes:

¹ How astounding! His point is that we can come to know what's true and what's not -- and draw close to G-d at one at the same time -- if we'd only take to heart the idea that what we should do is avoid what G-d wants us to avoid, and to realize that such things only exist in the first place because G-d created them in a "back-handed" sort of way in order for us to learn from them the reality of G-d's utter sovereignty.

² Thus, Ramchal's position is that just *realizing* the truth of G-d's utter sovereignty will greatly benefit us and the world. In fact, it could be said that the whole point of *Da'at Tevunot* is to enable us to come to that realization and to take it to heart.

³ Ramchal depicted the possibilities and failures of Adam a number of times in his works: see below 2:3, 3:5 and 3:14-17; *Derech Hashem* 1:3:6-8 and 2:4:2; *Adir Bamarom* pp. 389-395 (and elsewhere there); and *Pitchei Chochma v'Da'at* 120.

⁴ That is, if he'd only seen G-d, he'd just naturally have assumed that G-d ruled the universe, but by having seen wrongfulness in the world, too, he was presented with the possibility of *it* ruling. His turning his back from wrongfulness then would have been a brave and righteous choice on his part, it would have enabled Him to have bolstered his faith in the reality of G-d's sovereignty, and it would have readied everything for sheer perfection.

⁵ That is, that G-d's command was no more imposing than the snake's.

In fact, Adam was referred to as an outright heretic by our sages (*Sanhedrin* 38a) for that, as Ramchal indicates later on in the text.

⁶ I.e., his personal knowledge of G-d's ways in the world.

⁷ See 1:5 above.

⁸ Ramchal cites a number of well known messianic-like verses to buttress his points here, including the statement that in the end G-d "will pour out (His) spirit upon all flesh" (Joel 3:1) as a consequence of which "no longer will anyone (have to) instruct his neighbor or ... his brother, saying, 'Know G-d!' for they will all know Me from their smallest to their greatest" (Jeremiah 31:33); there will be a point when "many nations will go and say, 'Let us go forth and ascend G-d's mountain. Let Him teach us His ways, and let us walk in His paths!'" (Isaiah 2:3) and "the wolf will dwell with the lamb"(Isaiah 11: 6).

Rabbi Yaakov Feldman has translated and commented upon "The Gates of Repentance", "The Path of the Just", and "The Duties of the Heart" (Jason Aronson Publishers). His works are available in bookstores and in various locations on the Web.