

DA'AT TEVUNOT - SECTION 3: CHAPTER 3

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Paragraphs 103-115

1.

It seems logical, doesn't it, that goodness would be a product of something that emanates goodness while wrongfulness would be a product of some other thing that emanates wrongfulness¹? But it's not that simple, since it's G-d alone who's the source of all emanations², and He never emanates wrongfulness as He's the consummate source of goodness.

But, where then does wrongfulness come from? Isn't G-d depicted as "making peace and *creating wrong*"? (Isaiah 45:7).

2.

For one thing it's written "*creating wrong*" rather than "*bringing about wrong*"; as while G-d certainly brought wrongfulness into existence -- otherwise it would never exist -- He nonetheless never actually brings about wrongfulness Himself³.

But there are a few other vexing verses that touch on G-d's interactions with the world, including, "O L-rd, ... You hid Your countenance and I became frightened" (Psalms 30:8), "You hide Your countenance and they are frightened" (Psalms 104:29) and, "I will abandon them and hide My countenance from them, and they will be consumed" (Deuteronomy 31:17)⁴. What those verses allude to is the fact that while G-d brings about goodness through His emanations, to be sure, wrongfulness is a consequence of His *withdrawing* His emanation to one degree or another -- or even *annulling* it by hiding His "countenance"⁵.

3.

In point of fact, G-d's emanations are always meant to bring about what's ultimately best for their intended recipient, though they're sometimes withheld. If they're *completely* withheld from someone, then that individual would experience a complete and utter loss of some sort, whereas if it would only be withheld *somewhat* from him then he'd suffer a degree of loss, but no more⁶.

And so, for example, when G-d's emanation is in full force, its recipient is alive and vibrant, whereas

he'd die if it were completely withheld from him, and become sick or made to suffer if it would only be partially withheld.

So there aren't two separate sources of emanations, one for goodness and the other for wrongfulness. *Everything* is a product of one degree or another of G-d's own emanation or His withholding of it. As such, wrong is simply the lack of some degree or another of goodness.

4.

In fact, were we to somehow observe all of the instances of right and wrong in the world and truly comprehend their circumstances, we'd see for ourselves that all instances of wrongfulness are a consequence of a lack of righteousness ⁷. So there's simply no logical reason to claim that there are two sources of emanation. Instead, there's one single ⁸ emanation that either functions fully, partially, or not at all, as we'd said.

Indeed, the world is clearly intricate and complex, and full of instances of right and wrong. And everything that's right and just is a direct result of G-d's emanation while everything wrong and unjust is a consequence of His withdrawing of it to one degree or another, given that -- even if we don't perceive it as such -- absolutely everything is ultimately from G-d.

5.

Now, you might wonder, though, how anything can come about at all if there's some sort of a withdrawal of Divine emanation. And you might then assert that G-d must have created wrongfulness in fact, otherwise it simply couldn't come about.

But it comes to this ⁹: when we refer to G-d's having created the universe we need to realize that He first created the whole of nature and reality itself in broad strokes, and then their specific elements.

And then He decided to create the elements of right and wrong in the mix. He emitted an ¹⁰ emanation to do that which was all good ¹¹. But *some* of it was withheld, which was an innovation ¹² and a contradiction of G-d's pristine and all good emanation, and an aberration. And that was all for the allowance of wrongfulness.

Certain consequences just naturally came about once that happened of course, some of which are good and others bad. But even the bad consequences ultimately derived from G-d's ¹³ emanations, given that absolutely everything does. Thus admixtures of right and wrong came about and continue to exist in the world.

So, the original emanation was never utterly withheld or else the world would cease to exist. It is only true that it was *partially* withheld.

That also explains why some people become ill rather than die from one thing or another -- because

they were to have been inflicted by the withholding of G-d's emanation, but only to a particular degree rather than completely. Thus diseases and the like are innovations, if you will, on the original fact of whole-hearted emanations.

Thus we see that G-d in fact does nothing wrongful Himself, but He sometimes withholds His emanations which result in wrongfulness¹⁴. But there's a lot more to be said about this, as we'll see.

Footnotes:

¹ This is a continuation of the discussion begun in the previous chapter, 3:2.

² Ultimately, as there are many intercedents like *sephirot*, angels, and more.

³ See Ramchal's discussion of human free will and our own subsequent ability to bring wrongfulness about in 1:11 above.

⁴ See 3:8 below for a discussion of G-d hiding His "countenance".

⁵ That is, while G-d ordinarily brings about goodness proactively by emanating it full-forcedly, He nevertheless *passively* allows for wrongfulness by hiding His "countenance" -- i.e., His immanent attention -- to one degree or another from something or someone.

⁶ The idea of G-d withholding His goodness from someone for his or her own good is complex and often fraught with misunderstanding. In short it comes down to the idea of allowing someone to suffer to a small degree to prevent great suffering later on (much the way surgery, which is inherently dangerous and painful, is often utilized to prevent far greater danger and pain, which is alluded to below).

⁷ This seems to be a broad and unsubstantiated statement, but isn't it true for example that we suffer harm when others aren't kind to us? And aren't crimes and acts of violence rooted in meanness and callousness?

⁸ Essential and primal.

⁹ See *Clallim Rishonim* 11 for a discussion of what's to follow.

¹⁰ Single essential and primal.

¹¹ It was all good because that's the inherent nature of G-d's pristine emanation.

¹² That is, this phenomenon was created anew to serve its specific purposes in the created world.

¹³ Still-and-all inherently good.

¹⁴ In the end it comes to this. Acts of true and full goodness, justice, and righteousness are directly and vigorously nourished by G-d's emanations, to be sure; but when it comes to acts of evil, injustice, and wrongfulness, G-d only enables those sorts of things to come about *back-handedly*, if you will, *reluctantly*, by reducing or undoing His emanations to them to one degree or another.