

DA'AT TEVUNOT - SECTION 3: CHAPTER 7

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

1.

We'd do well to take something into consideration, Ramchal adds here. It's that just because something or someone is *imperfect* doesn't mean that it's utterly wrongful or bad; for "something could be lacking (in one positive factor or another) and thus be imperfect and not categorically good, *yet not be bad*" ¹.

. After all, even angels are imperfect beings, as lofty as they are ², since by definition no one other than G-d Almighty Himself is perfect ³. Angels differ from each, with some loftier than others to a kind of subtle and uncanny degree we can't fathom. Yet none of them are out-and-out wrongful or bad. As they never experience jealousy or hatred for example, they haven't a *yetzer harah*, and they never become ill or die.

2.

But then consider humankind. We're certainly less perfect than angels and more disposed to moral and physical weakness. Some of us are indeed wrongful and even thoroughly wicked, since we *do* have a *yetzer harah*; and we're subject to illness and death.

And there are lesser beings than us like beasts and animals that certainly have their blemishes, vulnerabilities, and repulsive sides, let alone their intellectual and spiritual restrictions. Yet they don't consciously and willfully do harm. And there are certain purely toxic non-material entities like angels of destruction, spirits of impurity and the like, spirits of "the other side" ⁴ etc. that are exemplars of pure albeit instinctive rather than intentional evil.

The important thing to realize, though, for our purposes is that actual wrong and evil are products of a long downward spiral of imperfections, one after the other in succession, which end in pure wrongfulness. That's to say that the more imperfection that's allowed to spiral downward step by step, the more wrong and evil there will be in the world ⁵.

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3.

Understand that there were no such things as imperfections or wrongfulness before G-d fashioned

the system of cause-and-effect and the like that defines reality as we know it ⁶. After all, G-d's realm is utterly and gloriously beyond all of that.

But once G-d consciously and purposefully set the system of gradations in place, though ⁷, which He decided should function to whatever degree He wanted it to, it became possible for wrong and evil to exist ⁸.

Footnotes:

¹ Ramchal is sweetening the frightening tone of the last chapter (and others, too) that speaks of imperfection leading to destruction, and the like. He'll make another point about this truism below, but many a student of *Mussar* and very many sincere souls who are driven to drawing close to G-d would do well to take this to heart. That is, just because an individual is somehow flawed doesn't mean he's tainted throughout. Each and every one of us is multifarious and incongruous; and most of us are simultaneously shameful and laudable depending on the angle from which we're looked at.

² Ramchal discusses the topic of angels (both the benevolent sort spoken of here, and the malevolent ones cited below) in a number of his works: see *Ginzei Ramchal* pp. 27, 33, 35, 41, 131-132, 153, 277; *Messilat Yesharim* Ch. 6; *Adir Bamarom* pp. 111, 195, 260; and *Derech Hashem* 1:5:2,9, 3:1:6.

³ See 3:13 below for a comparison and contrast between humankind and angels.

⁴ Something wrongful that's said to emanate from "the other side" emanates from the "side" of reality that is "other" than G-dly and holy.

⁵ That is, once the "Pandora's Box" which is chock full of all sorts of imperfections in a long row is opened, pure wrongfulness and evil will certainly manifest eventually.

⁶ See 1:15, 1:18; and 2:3 for discussions about the specific systems that G-d put into place in the world as it stands now.

⁷ See *Klach Pitchei Chochma* 30.

⁸ The point is that G-d set up a system of cause and effect that can spiral downward, which can then end in sheer evil, though it doesn't necessarily have to (which explains the existence of imperfect people who are still and all not evil as discussed at the beginning of the chapter).

See *Clallim Rishonim* 5, 3:22 below, and *Klach Pitchei Chochma* 47.