

DA'AT TEVUNOT - SECTION 3: CHAPTER 8

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

1.

We'll first sum-up what's behind the existence of wrong and injustice in the world in general [1], then we'll touch on the equally vexing issue of the existence of human wrong and injustice, which is so much closer to home [2].

The underlying impetus behind all instances of wrongdoing, evil, and injustice in the world is G-d's hiddenness. That's not to say that G-d purposefully hides His presence so as to allow for all that [3]. It's just that when G-d's presence can't be perceived in the world, that very fact "grants license", if you will, to wrong and injustice to be active and to take advantage of the situation and do what it will [4].

Recall that G-d's being hidden from the world is also the mechanism behind our physicality [5]. Given that, and given also that it's the mechanism behind our own and the world's imperfections which then allows for out-and-out wrongdoing, evil, and injustice to appear in the world, we see just how monumental the fact of G-d's hiddenness is to the makeup of the world as we know it [6].

But we're once again assured that while there is wrong and the like in this world, and the wrongful are to be penalized, it's nevertheless true that "G-d's anger only lasts a moment," and that He only expresses wrath (for now) so as to allow the wrongful to be chastised and cleansed rather than be annihilated (in the end) as they very well could be had He wanted them to be [7].

2.

We'll repent of our transgressions once G-d's presence is manifest to us; that is, once we catch sight of it either in our lives or in the lives of those we admire, or when we study about His presence in the writings of the righteous. We'll then catch inklings of His full sovereignty.

G-d's full manifestation won't come about just then, though. As G-d will only manifest His full presence when it's time to allow for the sort of fully perfected and immortal beings destined to enjoy His being up close. Then G-d's "great, mighty, and awesome Light will shine", all wrong and injustice will "vanish from the earth", and "each and every individual will realize that G-d been benevolent to us ... from the first" even if we didn't grasp it.

For now, though, only we very mortal, very flawed people alone function in this world [8]. So, let's explore our capacity for both righteousness and wrongfulness. Notes: [1] See Klallim Rishonim

11(v'hinei ad) for the Kabbalistic themes referred to in this chapter. Also see R' Goldblatt's extensive and far-reaching Kabbalistic comments in his notes 2-12,19 and notes 48-50 on pp. 282-283 of his edition; and R' Shriki's note 75.

[2] R' Friedlander considers this chapter the end of Section 3 and starts a new section after this which he titles "Man's Nature and (the Makeup of) His Divine Service", but we've decided not to follow his model.

The truth is that Section 3 will indeed be the longest section of Da'at Tevunot if we don't follow R' Friedlander's advice, and we might thus serve the reader better if we were to end it here rather than elongate it. Besides, this chapter also seems to present itself as the conclusion of a section, given that Ramchal offers us a synopsis of the section (see below), he has Reason (one of the book's "characters", as you'll recall; see section 3 to the Prologue) indicate what's to follow and then he has the Soul (the other character) indicate that he's eagerly awaiting to hear what Reason will be saying next, all of which seems to indicate that a "curtain" of sorts is being lowered that will be followed by the rising of another one for the onset of the next scene.

But we've decided to follow R' Shriki's lay-out of the book, instead, and to simply go on with Section 3. For, as we indicated at the very beginning of this section (3:2:1), we're concerned here with "why there's evil, injustice, and wrongdoing in a world created by a good and benevolent G-d who expects and enables us to be good and just.", and that's still the subject at hand in the chapters to follow, until Section 4. For, as R' Shriki makes the point quite cogently, while these first eight chapters of Section 3 have focused on the function and causes of wrong and injustice in general, the rest of the section will discuss an equally compelling subject: human wrong and injustice (see R' Shriki's note 77). And while the latter should logically call for a prolonged separate treatment of its own, it's still and all a part of the discussion of the place and need for wrong in G-d's world en toto, so we'll treat it as the next part of Section 3.

[3] The way a horrific parent might conceal his loving-care for a child in order to allow someone to harm him or her.

[4] The way a perfectly loving parent's absence would unwittingly allow for harm against his children.

[5] That is, as opposed to our spirituality which is a product of G-d's revelation. See 2:5:3, 2:6:1-2, and 2:10:3. Also see 1:15.

[6] That is, we may lament the fact that G-d isn't manifest, and long vigorously for Him to be, so that we might revel in His Being at last, nevertheless we still and all don't quite appreciate the stark fact that G-d's apparent absence from our midst is the cause of all our troubles, all our infirmities and limitations, and of all the world's wrack and ruin. One interesting and ironic point Ramchal adds here in the text is that the same opportunity for injustice and wrong in the world also makes justice possible. As he puts it, it allows for the existence of courts and judgment "so as to bring ... the

wrongful to justice". That is, instances of injustice allow for justice to triumph, much the way the existence of disease allows for healing and well-being, poverty allows for wealth and satisfaction, and the like -- much the way our having a body allows for both sins which contribute to G-d's hiddenness as well as for our ability to perform mitzvot that allow for G-d's presence to manifest itself.

[7] Ramchal words the concept rather starkly here in the original. He says that G-d "allows the snakes and (punishing) seraphim that had been set aside and made ready from the first in Gehenom (to do what they do) to strike wrongdoers measure for measure". That seems to mitigate the whole idea of the temporality of His anger and to allude to a vindictive sort of retribution which, however short-lived, seems to argue against G-d's underlying loving intentions.

But the answer seems to lie in the horribleness of the sort of spiritual "disease" that wrong and evil would be a sign of. Treat it with the strongest "chemotherapy" you could as you'd need to in order to eradicate it, and though you might face being termed "cruel" you'd nonetheless be doing everything you could to eradicate the disease and are to be lauded.

[8] Ramchal lays out the following synopsis of the whole theme here: "Since G-d wanted to create a world that would be comprised of good and bad, and whose inhabitants would be a combination of the two, He (first) brought about an emanation that would allow for good. He then withheld some of this goodly emanation by hiding His fully benevolent countenance, which then allowed for all the imperfections (in the universe). He then shined His countenance once again and brought about an emanation that produced beings who'd be comprised of both good and bad, and who'd exist in the situation they are in now in which they're predisposed to imperfections and they're mortal. In the end, though, G-d will shine His countenance mightily which will eliminate all undoing in a world in which only immortal and perfect individuals will exist."

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