

DA'AT TEVUNOT - SECTION 6: CHAPTER 1

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

1. Ramchal is about to tread upon what many refer to as the "third-rail" of religious thought: explanations for why the righteous might suffer while the wrongful might prosper [1]. Even Moses was denied a full explanation of this phenomenon and was told to do his best to accept its reality [2].

Admitting that "there are limits to how much we can understand" when it comes to this (and so much else), Ramchal nonetheless asserts that we're still and all to search out the answer, and he counsels us that "not understanding shouldn't confound our faith" in G-d's beneficence and love, and "shouldn't confuse us". Furthermore, he asserts, we don't need to understand this to grow in our service to G-d, but it certainly helps.

Overall we'd offer that his responses to this conundrum are very cogent and fit well into his understanding of G-d's intentions for the world, and they provide us with a "big picture" explanation of things.

2. The first thing we'd need to do when exploring this topic is to reiterate the fact that G-d has indeed established a system of reward and punishment which does truly function as a system of moral checks and balances. And secondarily, that for the most part the righteous are in fact rewarded and the wrongful are punished. But there are obviously exceptions to that.

But his point is that those exceptions are rooted in a phenomenon which Ramchal refers to as G-d's "unfathomable guidance" (i.e., His hidden plans for the universe). For while G-d has the world act one way on the surface, He covertly plans and arranges things to come out as He wants them to in the end, even if things seem to go off-kilter in the process [3].

For as Ramchal indicated a number of times in this work and elsewhere, G-d's ultimate aim is for goodness to hold full sway and for all wrong and injustice to be undone, but that will only occur once His sovereignty is to be revealed. It's just that right and wrong, justice and injustice and all the moral confusion that goes with that have to fully function beforehand.

The point, though, is that there are indeed instances of injustice now, as when righteous people suffer and wrongful people flourish. But that's a temporary and purposeful albeit sad reality that will eventually come undone. Said another way, it comes to this: wrongfulness and injustice are

necessary by-products of the need for G-d's sovereignty to be hidden away and to then be revealed; we don't realize that, so we're often confounded by outcomes we don't understand.

Notes:

[1] This is commonly known as the conundrum of why "bad things happen to good people". But that seems to be a somewhat simplistic, albeit more approachable, perspective on the issue; after all, why shouldn't bad things happen to good people? Don't bad things happen to everyone in fact, given that we live in an imperfect world? The real dilemma is why the truly righteous, who are said to enjoy G-d's favor and shelter, suffer despite that. The subject is termed "Theodicy" among philosophers, and responses to it are said to be means of "justifying G-d's ways to man", to cite the poet John Milton.

For Kabbalistic references in this chapter (and much of the next) see Klallim Rishonim 34.

[2] See Menachot 29b and Berachot 7a.

[3] Thus, G-d could be said to be working off of two agendas at the same time, if you will: His immediate and more overt one of maintaining "law and order", and His ultimate and covert one of proving His sovereignty which transcends all human notions of law and order.

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.