

THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 10:1

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

We'll only achieve the next trait, "innocence", once we're "utterly free from all bad traits and sins", Ramchal reports. But not only free of the sort of "obvious, well-known sins" that all good people want to be free of, "but also (of) those that the heart is often seduced into believing are not sins" but which really are, that we tend not to recognize as such because our hearts are "still affected by physical desires" which we hadn't yet surmounted.

Now, a daunting and complex statement like this surely calls for explanation. First off, how could we be expected to become "utterly free from all bad traits and sins" when it's written, "There is no man that does not sin" (I Kings 8:46) and when, as Ramchal notes later on, the Talmud tells us that "all (people) succumb to some small measure of slander" (Baba Batra 165a), with the implication that there are others we succumb to as well?

The answer will come down to the idea that Ramchal's statement isn't to be taken literally; but to understand that we'd first need to preview the structure of The Path of the Just overall to follow the argument (and also because it would help us to understand the full thrust of the work).

To this point we've discussed two traits: "caution" and "enthusiasm", which are two sides of the same coin and fairly easy to come to. After all, it's certainly possible to reflect upon our ways and either change them when they're off-course or bolster them when they are on-course. But from there we start to approach the transcendental.

The trait we're coming upon now, "innocence", would have us rid ourselves of more subtle things. The next one, "abstinence" (the other side of innocence's coin) involves avoiding everything -- even things that the Torah permits -- which may cause you to do wrong (even if there's nothing wrong about it per se) which is surely hard. But then we start entering into the realm of holiness. Whereas up to now we've met with reasonable though uncommon demands, from this point on we'll touch upon the lofty and angelic, and will be focusing on acquiring traits like "purity", "piety", "humility", "fear of sin", "holiness", "Holy Inspiration", and "Resurrection of the Dead".

"Purity" concerns itself with inculcating a selfless and G-d-focused relationship to the world, which is not everyone's path. "Piety" goes further along in that vein, demanding a change of essential self. "Humility" follows that same train of thought and is the next step toward ultimate G-dliness. "Fear of sin" discusses the sort of person who intimately and engrossingly senses the presence of G-d in this world and is affected by that in all ways. And "holiness" is directed toward "those who constantly

attach themselves to G-d ... from where (one) can grow to an even higher level, 'Holy Inspiration', where (his) intellect would rise above all human capabilities" which "would allow (him) to enjoy a yet higher form of attachment to G-d", after which "the keys to the 'Resurrection of the Dead' will be passed on to (him)", which is by far the ultimate in human attainments.

So, when Ramchal tells us here, at "innocence", that we must be "utterly free from all bad traits and sins" we're not to take that literally because it's too soon for that -- there's so much more to be contended with in our journey, so we cannot be expected to be free of all sin just yet.

In any event, someone who had actually achieved "innocence" would not be "seduced into believing" wrong was right, and would clearly be beyond where we are now, though he or she would not have reached the ultimate goal either. So, let's pray that G-d grants us the wherewithal to go forward.

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