

THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 10:2

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Mistaking one inclination of the soul for another is miles apart from confusing apples with oranges, for example. For, while fruits are clearly distinct from each other, most of our traits overlap. The trait of "caution" which we discussed earlier for example is a lot like the one under discussion now, "innocence", in that they both have to do with avoiding wrongdoing, but they're also subtly different.

"The person who's cautious" Ramchal says, "is guarded in his actions and sees to it that he doesn't sin where sin is clear and obvious to all", which is to say that he's sure not to fall into clearly marked pits, which is wonderful. Still and all, though, he wouldn't have reached the pinnacle. For, as Ramchal lays it out, "he still hadn't mastered himself" - - he hadn't yet learned to control his impulses. Because sometimes pits are mislabeled, so we'd need to learn how to step gingerly and deliberately wherever there's a chance of falling.

If we're ever to be "innocent" we'd have to not be "tempted by things whose bad qualities aren't so obvious" but are wrong nevertheless. And we'd do well to learn how to overcome our untoward impulses "and to go in the ways of wisdom instead".

But how are we ever to do that? By "first earnestly accustoming yourself to be so 'enthusiastic' that you're cleansed from obvious sins, then by ... strengthening your love and desire for G-d" afterwards. After all, our ultimate goal is to draw close to G-d in the first place, so we'll more likely succeed if we keep that in mind all the time.

Once you do that, we're assured, "you'll be able to acquire full 'innocence', and what would have been the fire of physical desires would be eclipsed by an increase of G-dly desire". That to say that the same rich, bold love you'd had for this or that would now serve to have you love G-d instead, measure for measure. And you will have attained a degree of actual innocence.

But don't for a moment imagine that you'll have succeeded in full. For, "in truth, only someone who has been thoroughly cleansed of all nagging remnants of sin ... would be fit to see the face of the King, G-d" in full innocence. The rest of us, who would be "abashed and embarrassed before Him" either because of our failings or because we'd have imagined that we'd succeeded when we hadn't, should remember to always go step by step.

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