

THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 12:1

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

"The best way to actually acquire innocence" -- to really take to heart the trait we've spent so much time on till now, which touches on so many of our most fundamental human needs and spiritual aspirations -- Ramchal asserts, "is to constantly study the teachings of our sages in matters of halacha and mussar".

That's to say, we'd need to read and re-read these basic religious texts with the end in mind of digesting their wisdom and committing ourselves to their instruction. And we'd need both halacha and mussar because while halachic works lay out just what we're to actually do to be free of all error, books of mussar (i.e., of traditional Jewish ethics and spiritual motivation) lay out the attitudes and traits we'd need to instill if we're to follow the halacha wholeheartedly.

Do that sincerely, thoroughly, dedicatedly, and regularly, Ramchal avers, and "nothing will keep you back from (acquiring) innocence".

The truth of the matter, though, is that you'd need to review halachic works again and again in order to refresh your memory. Since it's easy enough to forget some of the more subtle things cited. And you'd also need to review mussar works since "even after a person will have established in his heart that he wants to be exacting when it comes to matters of innocence, it's still possible that he can be guilty of a minor infraction simply because he never got to grasp it" on the sort of emotional, inspirational level that mussar books allow us to.

Ramchal makes the point in several of his other works, though, that we're not to concentrate on halacha and mussar alone. We're to broaden our Torah tastes and allow ourselves to swim in the breathtaking array of realms open to the true student of Torah.

He reminds us at one point that since we're bidden to repair the world that is so broken, we'd obviously need to delve into each of the corners of the Torah that teach us how to do just that (see Derech Hashem 4:2:4), much the way we'd need to delve into and master each chapter of a repair manual if we're to complete the task at hand.

In fact, he points out elsewhere, that we should especially concentrate on the more esoteric aspects of Torah, not only because of the inherent worth in doing that, but also because our doing it leads to human growth and perfection (see Derech Chochma).

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