

THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 12:2

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Studied closely and sincerely, Torah can be forever fresh and rich. The same text that was simple and clear-cut one day is often uncanny and unexpected the next. And nuances can suddenly pop up along the edges as quick ironies come out of nowhere.

There are actually two reasons for that, though: either because we're open to new light and welcome it; or (truthfully) simply because we'd forgotten yesterday's lesson and so what's actually old just seems new.

Now, while the second reason covers all areas of Torah study, it's most especially relevant when it comes to the sort of halacha and mussar study we were advised to "specialize" in -- halacha, because it's full of details and applies differently in each circumstance; and Mussar, because it touches on our characters which vary day to day and because its message comes upon us from a different angle each time we try to apply it.

That's why Ramchal warns that even when you study works of halacha and mussar seriously and regularly as we were advised to do, you'll manage to be "surprised to see what you don't know" often enough when you re-read it.

Take heart, though, because you can also wind up benefitting from that, thanks to the first reason we cited about why you might forget what you'd read: being open to new light. For as Ramchal puts it, when the moment comes when "your heart is attuned to such things, you'll ... (suddenly start to) observe everything from all angles" and catch sight of "things not mentioned in the books themselves" if you're open to them.

Now, while Ramchal's main thrust in this chapter has been to advise us to delve into halacha and mussar in order to truly internalize innocence, his final point is that there are certain things that could prevent you from acquiring it, despite your studies. They're the same traits that can prevent you from being cautious (see Ch. 5 above): over-concern for things of the world, levity, and keeping bad company. So we'd need to be aware of those, too.

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