

# THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 15:3

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

It's one thing understanding that we'd all need to abstain from something or another if we're to grow in our being, especially if we hope to be pious. But it's quite another thing knowing how to actually do it. We always want more and more (especially in our age, when so much is within reach and so many things seem to call out to us), so what practical advice can Ramchal offer?

"The best way to acquire abstinence" he says, is to "realize the crassness of the pleasures of the world and their inherent inferiority, as well as the great harm that can so easily result from them." That's to say that we're to reformulate our attitudes and priorities. If we'd only realize just how crass some of our desires are -- how beneath us, how soiled and unsavory they are and how harmful, he asserts, we'd surely come to our senses.

Now, many have tried things just like that, the truth be known, and have failed. What then is the shadowy, veiled mechanism in the mind that allows it to be fooled like that? "The seductive powers" of the things we crave, Ramchal declares. Things side up to us, if you will, whisper in our ears and charm us into hearing them out, and we succumb.

In fact, it's a primal problem that goes back to Adam and Eve (see 2:1-2 above for a lengthy discussion of that; also see Da'at Tevunot 40). "Seduction is in fact what caused the first sin to be committed" Ramchal reminds us; for as the Torah attests, "The woman saw that the tree was good to eat and that it was pleasing to the eyes ... (so) she took from its fruit and ate from it" (Genesis 3:6). (Ramchal offers several fascinating Kabbalistic insights in Adir Bamarom pp. 177, 273, and 309 into the unique role that eyes play in being tempted.)

He seems to offer that we're to actually picture ourselves as being attracted to something or another that we should avoid (when he says that the object at hand is to become "clear to you", that is, in your mind). Do that, he offers, and you'll see the foolishness of your attraction to it from what's termed a critical-distance and that will convince you of just "you how utterly false, unreal and ephemeral its pleasures are, yet how real and immanent the harm that will come from them is to you".

You'll get to the point, he says, where you'll "certainly be disgusted" and off-put by your cravings. And you'll find it far easier to abstain from them.

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