

# THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 5:4

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

A couple of other things we'd need to avoid if we're to be cautious -- in the sense of being serious about our spiritual standing and caring about our relationship to G-d -- would be sarcasm and mockery. For when we deride others, we cast all caution to the wind and do or say whatever it will take to prove our point, and we don't care at the time about the other person's feelings or sensibilities. After all, we reason, they're wrong and everyone should know.

As Ramchal puts it, "mockery is ruinous to the heart" and spirit. For "all sense and reason is gone when it's around", and the mocker "is like a drunkard or an idiot" -- so obsessed is he with his point -- that "it's impossible to give (him) counsel or direction", since "he wouldn't take it". For he's so all agog with wisdom, or so he thinks, and there'd simply be no stopping him.

But that attitude is the very antithesis of caution. Since being cautious entails "consciously taking stock" of your emotions, motives, and of the consequences of your actions, while sarcasm comes to "diverting your attention from all noble and profound thoughts" and simply doing your best to say what you want to say well, hit your target spot-on, and look good. After all, if revenge is sweet, sarcasm is especially sweet, well-roasted, aromatic, and rich.

You'd rebuff anything that anyone could say to bring you back to caution and good sense, and your psyche would function like "an oil-covered shield that resists and repels" criticism, and any good advice would fall to the ground and not touch you.

Ramchal's final point is most touching, though. He asserts that a sensitive soul -- one who "occupies himself with self-analysis", reflection; one who hones his character all the time and yearns to grow closer to G-d and to humankind -- would not only tend to be cautious from the first, but he'd enjoy a certain distinct spiritual advantage. For while most of us have to learn our spiritual lessons the hard way by wronging others, seeing how much harm that does, and by suffering the consequences of that in our own beings (either emotionally, physically, financially, or otherwise), the sensitive soul come to those lessons another way.

The very act of delving into their motivations and actions would sensitize their beings, and they wouldn't need anything else. They'd thus avoid a lot of the anguish and sorrow most of us suffer because of our inconsideration of others' feelings simply because they'd worked at regularly honing their souls from within. They wouldn't need external prods or effects to grow, since they would have grown as a matter of course day after day.

How could a single sarcastic word ever emanate from their mouths, when all along they'd mouthed words of self-criticism in their drive for betterment, to be sure, but never a word of criticism of another.

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