THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 6:3

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

The truth of the matter is that the sort of sluggishness that holds us back we've been referring to is very sly and crafty ... though it can also be silly, as when it manages to have us do and say more and more in order to do less, as we'll see.

It's sly since it "doesn't come (upon you) in one fell swoop" which would tip you off; instead it comes over you "slowly and without notice ... one bad deed after another, until you find yourself sunk" in the mire, as Ramchal terms it, too lazy to escape.

It's also sophisticated since it touches on our Torah aside from our mitzvah-observance. It encourages us to settle for surface study, when in fact Torah is endlessly deep and wide, and one could plumb as far down and dart out as far along as he'd like in his studies.

But this is where it gets silly: when, as Ramchal depicts it, it has us strain ourselves to come up with all sorts of excuses for inaction. It has us say things like, "'Let me eat a little' (first), or 'let me sleep a little'" before we'll set out to do a mitzvah. Or it has us complain that "'it's hard for me to leave my house' ... or 'it's so hot outside', or 'it's too cold', or 'it's raining out'". But in the end, as we all know, "Torah-study is left aside, Divine service is left undone, and we come to abandon our Creator".

The truth is, most of us would try to rationalize our poor choices. We'd "retort with all kinds of sayings of the Sages, scriptural passages and logical explanations to prove ... that we should have it easy and be left in our lazy ways." After all, if a cogent, well-reasoned argument for something is convincing enough, a quote from the Torah or the Talmud should do wonders!

But as King Solomon said, "A lazy man is more sagacious in his own eyes than seven people who can give sensible answers" (Proverbs 26:16). That's to say that sometimes the excuses we offer for avoiding something isn't generated by wisdom so much as by laziness itself.

And so Ramchal offers us this rather strong warning: "It's important to know ... that ... every leniency" -- every tendency to be less righteous rather than more so --"should be carefully and thoroughly thought-out beforehand. For, even though it may seem to be just and right, it's still and all very possible that it's the advice of the yetzer harah". For, you may decide that it would be "wise" not to do a particular good thing, because (for example) you might seem to be showing off by doing it. The truth would more likely be that you weren't motivated by humility so much as by lethargy.

That's not to deny the fact that we sometimes have to struggle to transcend inertia and actually do

good. So Ramchal thus offers us this. "In truth," he says, "human beings are just that-- humans, and not angels. So it's impossible for us to have the might of the angels", who quickly and effortlessly do good. Nonetheless, we'd do well to "get as close to this level as we possibly can".

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