

THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 11:10

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

There's something in the human heart that loves honesty. We admire icons who sacrifice fame and fortune in the name of integrity, we forgive whoever wronged us if he owns up to it in contrition, and we're most proud of ourselves when we do our best to be open and above-board. And yet, sad to say, we indeed lapse into dishonesty when the temptation is just too great (and sit crestfallen once our dishonesty dawns on us, and we set out to make emends).

Now, there are two areas of honesty which we tend to falter in, as Ramchal sees it. We either take vain oaths, and swear in G-d's name that so-and-so is true when it's simply not. Or (on a more subtle level) we sometimes assert something's true in a robust and full-throated way when it's actually not, which is as bad as vowing that it's so. Or we simply lie about things outright.

Ramchal points out that there are different degrees of lying (which he terms a "malady" since it's so widespread). There are people who lie so consistently that Ramchal depicts them as "professional liars", given that "they go about concocting utter lies, either for laughs, or to be considered wise or knowledgeable" all the time.

There are others who "aren't 'professional' story-tellers" like those others, still and20all though they "make up stories and give false reports" all the time, "add on whatever (details) occurs to them", and they do that so often that "it becomes second nature to them", which makes it "impossible to believe anything they say".

The final sort (which describes most of us), "whose malady is less serious" than the others, and who "aren't quite as accustomed to lying (as they), but who'd nonetheless not think of separating themselves from it" since they'd imagine they're not really liars after all, would still lapse this way. "If the opportunity for a lie would come their way" somehow, "they'd take advantage of it" without a thought. Oh, they might do it "for the sake of a joke, or for some other reason, with no particular malice intended", but they'd tell the lie nonetheless.

All lying, no matter how innocent or unintentional, would need to be worked on, for "truth is G-d's seal" (Shabbat 55a) we're taught, and its opposite is simply unacceptable. And as we'd been taught, truth is one of the very foundations upon which the world stands (Pirkei Avot 1:18). So, "when you speak falsely," Ramchal offers, "it's as if you were nudging at the world's foundation", while on the other hand, "when you're careful about truth, you're like someone who upholds it", it's that vital.

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