

# THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 11:9

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

Ramchal speaks of "man's scheming heart" -- the part of it that lies hidden in the recesses and barks like a mad dog or scratches like a vicious cat -- and which often fosters the next two ugly traits: hate and revenge. He defines "revenge" as "not doing a favor for someone who didn't do you a favor (in the past) or who did you harm", and "bearing a grudge" as "reminding someone of the harm he did you (in the past) when you're about to do him a favor".

As he explains it, we might lapse into these traits since, "we're all very sensitive to insult and suffer very much because of it; and revenge, which is the best solution for it, is as sweet as honey". As a consequence, "you'd have to be extraordinarily courageous and strong to have it within you to rise above what's innate to you by bypassing this inclination and not hating someone who aroused hate in you, and by not rising up against him in revenge or bearing a grudge against (him) and forgetting it and erasing it from your heart as if it never happened (instead)."

For, "while that might be easy for the ministering angels who don't suffer from such attributes", still and all, "those who dwell in houses of clay and are founded in dust" (Job 4:19), like us, can't manage to do that easily.

Here's the phenomenon from the inside, as Ramchal depicts it (quite vividly) when you're faced with insult or defamation: "the yetzer harah waxes and infuriates the heart, and it wants to keep the memory or some trace of the incident that caused you pain" within. And so it might say to you: "If you'd like to give him what he wasn't willing to give you when you needed it, then at least don't give it to him cordially"; or, "If you won't go so far as to harm him, then at least don't do him any great favors or help him in a big way"; or, "if you do want to help him out a lot, then at least don't do it to his face"; or, "you shouldn't befriend him again -- it's enough that you've forgiven him and no longer hate him"; or, "if you want to be his friend again, at least don't be as close to him as you'd been before."

Indeed, who among us could truly claim to be free of this inclination? And yet, as Ramchal makes the point, "that's exactly what we must do", given that the Torah says quite explicitly, "Do not hate your brother in your heart" (Leviticus 19:17-18), and "Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people" (Leviticus 19:18).

The only solution it seems would be to recall and reaffirm the Torah's overarching directive to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18), and to do your utmost to live by that ideal.

(It's tempting to try a little analysis here in order to understand why Ramchal is so dramatic in his

treatment of this one trait in particular, so we'll add this insight. Ramchal himself had been terribly disparaged and censured at a certain point for reasons we now know were baseless. Yet as anyone who has ever read his correspondences with his teachers and friends at the time knows, he never once revealed any animosity against his detractors or ever did anything uncomely to them, to his great credit. As such, he served as a model for us all of rising above adversity and not drawing upon one's "scheming heart".)

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