

THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 16:1

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Near the end of this chapter Ramchal remarks that "one who doesn't cling onto G-d with true love will find this process ... a great burden" -- the process of acquiring our next lofty trait, "purity". And why would it be a "great burden"? Because it requires a lot from us both inside and out, as we'll see.

The other point though is that just as worldly love overcomes all sorts of impediments, your love of G-d and yearning to cling to Him closely will surmount a lot of resistance here, too. Let's see now just what's required to be "pure".

It comes down to "correcting all your emotions and thoughts" and in "not allowing your yetzer harah to interfere with your actions", but "acting (instead) through wisdom and reverence, rather than through sin and desire" as a result. But all that calls for an explanation.

The idea of having to "correct" our emotions and thoughts -- which is to say, our inner beings -- is rooted in the idea that each one of us has run off-course to a degree and have to be set aright. It's Ramchal's contention in fact that it's our having run off-course that has had us "act ... through sin and desire" rather than "through wisdom and reverence". He's asking us then to review our hearts and tinker with them till they're true, honest, and well-aimed.

He goes on to say that this even touches upon things "you might involve yourself in after you'd have become accustomed to be abstinent", not the clearly excessive or unholy. Even then "you'll need to purify your emotions and thoughts" to an even higher degree.

You'd want to be sure that "even that small bit of pleasure you'd take from the world wouldn't be taken with the intent of (merely) deriving (personal) pleasure", but rather "with the intent of doing it for the good that will result from it" for others or for your soul's station.

It needs to be said again that those of us who aren't yet equipped to be pious aren't being told here to do without wholesome pleasures (any more than the righteous are). Both we and they are asked, though, to temper our appetites and to keep our relationship to G-d in mind. As King Solomon put it, "Know Him in all of your ways and He will right your paths" (Proverbs 3:6) meaning, if you allow G-d's presence to hover somewhere within the things you do you'll make better choices, you'll love what you've chosen, and you'll tend to be more altruistic.

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