

THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 16:4

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Now, while we less-than-pious but good souls very often set out to do some good things for good reasons, we still and all end up doing it for a self-serving one. Were our actions all in vain? Would we have been better off not doing the good deed from the first because we're more likely than not to do it wrongfully?

Not at all, Ramchal says. "G-d doesn't deprive anyone of his just rewards", which is to say that even when we do good things ignobly, we still and all do good things and we'll be rewarded for that indeed, since some good was accomplished. (After all, if all our deeds needed to be pure, spotless, and selfless to matter, almost nothing we'd do would count in the end, and the world would have imploded upon itself long ago.)

But recall that Ramchal is focusing here on "the sort of perfect service that befits those who truly love G-d", those who do everything purely, "and for no other motive than for the sake of G-d". Such rare and pious souls would be sure not to act out of a personal agenda. In fact, we'd expect no less of them, since individuals who "truly serve G-d" as they do would just naturally be pulled to act that way.

We'll conclude this chapter with a statement we'd cited at its beginning to the effect that "one who doesn't cling onto G-d with true love will find this (whole) process ... a great burden". The truth be known, those of us who can't be selfless don't truly love G-d (though we care for Him and would like to love Him). But isn't that self-evident, given how much more we concentrate on satisfying ourselves than Him!

We can still draw inspiration from the selfless service of these higher souls, and indeed we should. For if, as Ramchal indicates, the most significant factor differentiating one person from another spiritually is "the degree to which he purifies his feelings" and acts altruistically, then it behooves us to know our own heart and to set it right by being inspired by the deeds of the pious.

For at bottom, "G-d doesn't only want our actions to be involved in mitzvot. His main concern is that our heart be pure and set on performing our true duty", as "the heart is the king and commander of the rest of the body", so "if it doesn't bring itself to serve G-d, the service of the rest of the organs is for naught". As such, we'd do well to set our hearts aflame with the fever of the pious as best as we can, and to be moved to spiritual excellence by their example.

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