

THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 17:1

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Trying to reassure us that the goal is possible, Ramchal offers that its actually easy for anyone who has already obtained the traits discussed to now to obtain purity, too. After all, consider what it took to train ourselves to be cautious, enthusiastic, innocent, and abstinent. Were sure to become pure just as well, he avers.

Wed only have to reflect upon the petty nature of the pleasures of the world and their supposed (but illusory) benefits and were sure to despise them and consider them to be nothing but products of the bad and defective nature of the dark and coarse state of things of this world. Then, once their very real defects and harmful effects become self-evident to you he pledges, it will certainly become easy to separate yourself from them and remove them from your heart.

In fact, he adds boldly, the more deeply and constantly you recognize the pettiness of physicality and its pleasures, the easier it will be for you to purify your thoughts and emotions, and to only be involved in worldly deeds if you absolutely have to.

Yet that just doesnt seem to ring true for the rest of us, the less-than pious. It doesnt depict our own inner lives, wed have to admit. We draw a lot of comfort from many material things, yet we want to better ourselves and to be righteous if not pious. What then can we cull from this ideal and wondrous perspective to put some of its wisdom into practice in our lives? Heres what were to do.

We too are to take notice of the pettiness of the world and its pleasures. We can do that in fact, seeing how many of the things weve craved have proven to simply not be worth much in the end, and given that they often take away more than they give. (It would also help us to remind ourselves that material things were placed in the world in the first place to enable us to grow in the face of their challenges and to overcome their allure, as Ramchal said in Derech Hashem 1:2:5 and 1:3:2.)

And we can also reflect upon the fallaciousness of honor, and train (ourselves) to flee from it seeing as how often the pursuit of honor and pride has drained our own energies when weve tried for it (though we certainly like the feelings at first).

There are other things we can do in the end to stretch ourselves as well, that involve inward, self-reflective courses of action, as well see.

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