

THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 18:1

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

We are coming upon the hillside now, almost within touch of it; we have now begun a discussion of the trait of "piety", which Ramchal had set as the central theme of The Path of The Just (see our Introduction). There will be a lot to say about it, to be sure, (after all, the Zohar offers that the pious dwell in "the highest Courtyard" -- the one that only those who truly love G-d manage to enter [1, p. 39a]).

There is certainly a lot to be said as well about piety's profound offshoots which we will come upon later including "modesty", "fear of sin", "holiness", "Divine inspiration", and "resurrection of the dead", but the fact remains that we are on our way.

Ramchal repeats a few things here that he had said before about piety to underscore the point. He reiterates that "there are many people doing a lot of things in the name of piety that are in fact only pale, ... formless, shapeless shadows of the real thing". And that is because they haven't bothered to dwell deeply upon what they were doing to attain it, and had not "laid all the factors on the scales of wisdom", even when they had the very best of intentions.

Still and all, as a result, "they have assumed a false piety". And they have inadvertently "left a foul impression of piety" in the eyes of many, he adds. For there are a number of people who have "come to associate piety with foolishness and absurdity", and to equate it with "the incessant recital of petitions and confessions" and with "weeping, exaggerated prostrations and all sorts of odd flagellations".

(In fact, as it was worded in the Introduction, "there are all sorts of conflicting ideas on the subject of just what piety and service to G-d are all about. And they run the gamut from stark abstinence or selfless subjugation, to a rather laissez faire sort". The kind we will be discussing here, though, is different from any of that.)

The truth of the matter is that "piety is a profound thing in its own right" when it is "rooted in ... wisdom," and it contributes to "the ultimate rectification of all things" in the end.

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