

THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 19:11

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

"Happiness" Ramchal asserts, "is a major element of (our) Divine service". For without it one really can't love G-d as we're supposed to.

And so for example we're told that "your heart should be happy when you pray, since you're praying to ... G-d" (Midrash Shochar Tov). That's to say, it should thrill and touch you to realize that you're actually standing before G-d Almighty and offering your heart to Him. It's the sort of happiness, Ramchal adds, that would come upon anyone who suddenly realizes "the fact that he's worthy to serve, and to be engaged in the Torah and mitzvot of G-d (Himself)".

He actually terms that "the truest, most precious and eternal degree of wholeness one can obtain" in this lifetime, since it touches on the realization that G-d is this close, and that we're right here with Him. How stunning and overarching a moment; how fulfilling and joyous!

This sort of quest for intimacy with the Creator is depicted as a moment in which it really seems as if "The King has brought me to his chamber" (Song of Songs 1:4), which Ramchal characterizes as a moment of great elation and endearment.

Now, the pious among us enjoy more moments like these than we could ever know -- times when "happiness so overpowers (them) that (their) lips move by themselves and (they) are thrilled to be engaged in ... a great incandescence of joy".

But, what about the rest of us who don't know the joy of sensing G-d's presence often, if ever? Are we to abandon all hope? Wasn't G-d once "furious with Israel when they lacked this (degree of joy) in their worship" Ramchal offers, when we didn't "serve G-d (our) L-rd with joy and a good-natured heart" (Deuteronomy 28:47)? Have we lesser souls always been derelict in that?

In point of fact there was a time when we did manage to feel this great inner glee in G-d's presence: that period of time when our ancestors were "so generous in the building of the Holy Temple" and King David "prayed that (this ability) would be fixed in the people and would never leave" us; when he exclaimed "O G-d, (our) L-rd ... keep this (trait) forever in the inclinations of Your people's hearts and (forever) direct their hearts to You" that way (I Chronicles 29:17-18). Apparently then something of this has laid dormant in each and every Jewish heart for millennia, and we need only cull from it so that we too can exult in G-d's presence and worship Him in joy.

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