

THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 19:2

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

When it comes to doing favors for others, the pious go out of their way to do as much as they can for as many as possible. We'd often find them "bearing a friend's yoke with him" (Pirkei Avot 6:6), meaning to say, empathizing with someone in anguish, and helping him through the dilemma to the end.

(Don't think for a moment that any of that is easy. As anyone with a family, career, personal needs, and ambitions knows, it is hard enough being honest, sensitive, and productive in one's role in life; it is doubly hard sitting by another's side in the throes of that person's dilemma and expending emotional and physical energy on him besides! The lesson that we can derive from so lofty a stance, though, is that once in a while we too need to expand our sphere beyond ourselves, and to reach a few feet farther than usual.)

The pious would likewise do all they could to avoid harming anyone themselves, and to foil anyone else's plans to do harm as well if they can. And they'd be sure not to defraud anyone monetarily, to be sure, and to make quick and thorough amends if they somehow did deceive by mistake, quite literally seeing to it that their "friend's money (becomes) as dear to (them) as (their) own" (Pirkei Avot 2:12).

(That goes for institutions and society-at-large as well: the pious wouldn't cheat on their taxes, abuse privileges, take unfair or unethical advantages of loop-holes, or the like.)

And they would do all they could to make others happy, content, and satisfied, as well as to honor them and pay homage to them when that's possible. For, as Ramchal words it, "it's a mitzvah in the realm of piety to do all you know will bring satisfaction to your friend".

That is to say while it is always commendable for us all to make others happy and content, it is an out and out imperative to do that if one is to be pious. That is a truly important distinction to understand. For while we are all charged by the Torah to be kind, compassionate, and charitable, we are not charged to go to the extent that a pious person would each and every time. The point once again, though, is that we can draw inspiration from the pious and emulate them to some degree.

And the pious would always strive for peace and harmony between people, which is a trait that Ramchal terms "the most essential feature in the improvement of human relations".

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