

THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 19:4

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

The essence of piety is out-and-out generosity and loving-kindness -- which is to say, the shifting of your focus from your own cares and concerns to others'.

How sterling a trait it is at that! It's one of the things that keeps the world going (Pirkei Avot 1:2); those who live their lives in accordance with it benefit from it now and in The World to Come (Peah 1:1); it's the very first and last praiseworthy trait cited in the Torah, thus serving as a framework around the entire Torah (Sotah 14a); and it's one of Judaism's defining traits (Yevamot 79a).

In fact, as great as being charitable is, true and all-encompassing generosity is even greater. For we're taught that "generosity is greater than charity... in three ways: while one can only give charity with money, he can be generous with his entire body (as when you visit the sick, counsel the needy, etc.); while one can only give charity to the poor, he can be generous to the poor and the rich (since anyone can become ill, despondent, etc); while one can only give charity to the living, he can be generous to the living or the dead (as when you help bury them or mourn their passing, etc.) (Shabbat 151b, also see Succah 49b).

And though the truly generous and loving wouldn't center on this fact to be sure, still and all it's true that G-d Himself is generous and kind to those who act that way, and is more merciful in His judgments of them (see Rosh Hashanah 17a).

"The point of the matter," Ramchal declares to us as well, "is that you should never cause suffering to any being, human or animal, and should be compassionate and kind to all". For, "compassion and the willingness to do good are fixed in the heart of the pious who are driven to satisfying others' needs and to not cause any sorrow" and we're to draw inspiration from them.

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