

THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 20:2

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

How many times have you started doing something you thought would be good, then caught sight of something going very, very wrong in the background, yet went right on anyway? If you're sensitive, you probably never did; but if you aren't, then you might have gone on and with awful consequences.

Having that sort of thing in mind Ramchal warns us that the first thing we'd need to do to make sure that we were truly being pious would be to "understand that you can't judge things having to do with piety by first impressions". We'd all need to "reflect on and analyze the ramifications" and consequences of the things we do.

As, "sometimes an act appears to be a good thing (to do), when it must (actually) be abandoned (on second thought) because what would come out of it would be bad," and if you were to do it without thinking of the consequences, then "you 'd actually be a sinner rather than a pious person".

Why, wasn't "the second Holy Temple destroyed because of ... piety not weighed on the scales of balance?" he asks.

For we're taught that at a certain point in antiquity "the Rabbis wanted to offer the (blemished and forbidden) animal (that the non-Jewish rulers demanded be sacrificed). But Rabbi Zecharia ben Evkolas said to them (piously indeed, but unwisely), 'People will surmise that blemished animals can be offered on the altar'" so we can't do that, which while it was technically true was nonetheless short-sighted given the consequences.

And didn't the same Rabbis then want "to have Bar Kamsa (who was fomenting all sorts of far-reaching trouble) killed, but (the same) Rabbi Zecharia ben Evkolas said to them (again piously, but unwisely) that, 'People will surmise that whoever wants to offer a blemished animal will be killed by the Rabbis'" so we can't allow that, which while also technically true was nonetheless short-sighted?

Indeed we have been taught all that, and also informed in the end that the great and pious "Rabbi Yochanan himself said that Rabbi Zecharia ben Evkolas's (pious but misplaced) caution caused the destruction of G-d's household, the burning of the Sanctuary, and our being exiled among the nations" (Gitten 56a)!

"So we see that you cannot make judgments touching on piety by how they first appear" Ramchal underscores. "You have to turn it over in your mind a number of times until you can judge what would be most fitting-- to act, or to refrain from acting" and to go forward accordingly.

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