

THE PATH OF THE JUST □ RAMCHAL'S INTRODUCTION PART 1

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

There are certain basic moral truths that every reasonable and competent person agrees upon, regardless of whether he or she abides by them. And there are likewise basic religious truths that every earnest, reflective, and believing Jew accepts outright. But in point of fact, there are some religious truths that we don't have right-at-hand which we'd desperately need to hear said outright if we're to maintain our faith, bearing, spiritual equilibrium, and perhaps even our very humanity.

Curiously enough, though, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (whom we'll refer to as "Ramchal", as he's best known) indicates at the beginning of this work that he only set out here to "remind people of what they (already) know" and which they have no doubts about, truisms that are "so well-known and ... self-evident, that they're often buried over, or completely forgotten" because they're so clear. In fact though, that's not all he did. While he did indeed focus on the traits and behaviors that nearly everyone believes are laudable, and made that the thrust of the book, there's nonetheless a whole other layer here that touches on the vexing religious issues we raised above.

For, besides addressing those traits, The Path of the Just also lays out our *raison d'être* and *tachlis*, our great goal in life. And then -- most significantly -- it then ties the two together. We'll get to that later on in this introduction and in the first chapter.

In any event, if we'd like to acquire the traits that everyone acknowledges are laudable, then we'd have to follow a certain process, Ramchal reasons, given how nonchalant we seem to be about them. And the process is one we'd term "ingraining".

For as everyone knows, many good and great thoughts pass us by in the day. Some stick with us for a while, but most of them simply get lost. Not because they're not important, but because we don't dwell on them and allow them to leave a firm and indelible impression on our mind. So, the best way to ingest the lofty ideas set out in The Path of the Just, the author informs us, would be to simply read it again and again until its thoughts become ingrained in our beings. That way, we'll "remember what we might have offhandedly forgotten" and take-in what we'd otherwise scan over without a thought. To be sure, there are many people who reread The Path of the Just every year, a couple of times a year, and more.

Expanding on the need to review the material again and again, Ramchal says elsewhere that sometimes we need to "blow" on ideas like embers, to have the tiny glow in them roar outward all aflame and come alive, so we can reflect on them and thus take them to heart (*Derech Eitz Chaim*).

He speaks in more esoteric terms at another point about how concentrating on things like that enables the soul to sort of gather its forces, if you will, and thus effect change within us (Sod HaMerkavah). At any rate, for our purposes the point is that we'd do best if we reviewed The Path of the Just regularly, reflect on its wisdom in the process, and take it to heart.

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