

THE PATH OF THE JUST □ RAMCHAL'S INTRODUCTION PART 4

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

There are all sorts of conflicting ideas on the subject of just what piety and service to G-d are all about. And they run the gamut from stark abstinence or selfless subjugation to a rather laissez faire sort. But in fact the "positive and preferred" kind of piety that Ramchal endorses, as he terms it, is "different from our conception of it".

And the only reason why most of us misunderstand piety, he points out, is because we simply don't think about it much.

He then makes an interesting point. We'd certainly need to concentrate on it. Because while we might think, he argues, that piety is a "given", a good person's "default" position (as we'd put it) which he or she just naturally slips back into when not doing harm or sinning, that's not so. For, "matters of piety, G-d-reverence and love, and purity of heart are not so ingrained in your heart", he argues, that you could "come upon (them) nonchalantly and ... naturally". In point of fact, we'd have to follow a process to achieve all that and to avoid its deterrents. For as G- d surely knows, "there's no lack for things to keep them from you".

So it follows then that we'd need to actively pursue piety and reverence, and that we'd have to answer for not having done that. After all, "how will we respond on the Day of Reproach if we will have slacked-off in our study of these things, and abandoned ... the very essence of what G-d asks of us?" How dare we abandon "our great obligation to our Creator" while spending so much time on things that don't fulfill what He specifically asks of us, Ramchal implores.

He pointed out an additional fact in another work. We ordinarily delve very rigorously into each mitzvah's nuanced requirements, arguing for and against each variation and citing many sources for our case ... and yet we're willing to accept pat and fixed definitions for some subtle and wide-ranging mitzvot like "loving G-d", "fearing G-d", and the like. And we give scant thought to the makeup of traits like humility, innocence, and abstinence which we agree are important to strive for (Vichuach HaChacham v'haChassid).

His point is that at bottom what we're expected to do is to "consider ... the true nature of G-d-reverence and its ramifications", to "set Divine- love in our hearts", to attach ourselves onto G-d's presence by "longing for Him" and concentrating upon "His greatness and exaltedness", and to set about "rectifying and setting-straight" our characters.

Text Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman and **Torah.org**