

THE PATH OF THE JUST □ RAMCHAL'S INTRODUCTION PART 5

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

It was none other than Moshe Rabbeinu who laid out the parameters of true piety near his death, like a loving master leaving behind essential lessons for his disciples. Imagine the moment and the anticipation! The one and only individual to whom "G-d would speak ... face to face, the way a man speaks with his friend" (Exodus 33:11) was about to divulge a path to holiness.

This is how he put it. "And now, Israel -- what does G-d your L-rd require of you" in the end, you ask? None other than to "revere G-d your L-rd, to go in all of His ways, to love Him and serve (Him) with full heart and soul, and to keep all of G-d's commandments and statutes" (Deuteronomy 10:12-13).

So, what Ramchal set out to do from there was to smooth the jagged edges of this statement by defining some terms.

"Revering G-d", as he put it, means "being in the same state of reverence before Him that you'd be standing before a great and awesome king", which is to say, to stand at rapt attention in G-d's presence, and to be "abashed before His greatness".

"Going in His ways" doesn't merely mean adhering to His mitzvah-system (which will come up shortly) but "rectifying your character" and following G-d's lead in that, if you will. For as our sages put it, "Just as He is compassionate, you are to be compassionate; just as He is gracious, you are to be gracious, and so forth" (Shabbat 133B). "The point," Ramchal adds, "is that all of your traits and actions are to be just and ethical".

"Loving G-d" comes to more than standing in blissful attention at His presence. It focuses upon "doing what pleases Him" while "deriving a great deal of joy" in the process. And being troubled "if G-d is somehow displeased by (what) you or someone else" does in disrespect.

Serving G-d with "fullness of heart" not only means doing so wholeheartedly as the term implies, but also "with the purest of intentions". That means to say, to "serve Him for no other reason whatsoever" than to simply serve Him, and in a way that's "not conflicted, but full", and not by "rote, but rather with your full self."

And "keeping all of G-d's commandments" is to be taken quite literally, and we're to thus observe them "in full and with all of their conditions".

Ramchal decided to base The Path of the Just upon a well-known statement by Rabbi Pinchas Ben Yaer that lays out a detailed methodology for accomplishing all that. As Pinchas Ben Yaer put it,

"Torah study leads to caution, caution leads to enthusiasm, enthusiasm leads to innocence, innocence leads to abstinence, abstinence leads to purity, purity leads to piety, piety leads to modesty, modesty leads to fear of sin, fear of sin leads to holiness, holiness leads to Divine inspiration, and Divine inspiration leads to the resurrection of the dead" (Avoda Zarah 20B).

And he concluded this introduction by promising to "explain each trait's particulars and gradations, the means to attain them, as well as their respective deterrents and how to avoid those" in the course of this work. May G-d grant us each the ability to grasp and live by these insights.

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