

THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 1:1

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

When read caringly, attentively, and reverently this first chapter of The Path of the Just is capable of setting us right from the first and of bringing us up close to G-d, it's that invigorating. For it's a disclosure outright of so much of what matters most in our lives, of our place in the universe, and of what we're capable of in the end. In fact, many have set it to memory while others make a point of reading it again and again. Let us now approach it and do our best to be guided by its great light.

Its initial point is that what's most important if we're ever to achieve spiritual excellence -- in fact, "the very foundation of piety, and the root of thorough Divine service" as Ramchal words it -- "is that our duty in the world ... becomes clear and self-evident" to us. That's to say, that we understand exactly what we're here to do, and that we know just what we're to "direct (all) our sights and proclivities towards" just so we can do it.

After all, if we didn't know what's expected of us we could never, ever carry it out and we'd spend our lives doing everything but.

(Known only to his more dedicated enthusiasts, Ramchal actually wrote a book on logic, known as Sefer HaHigayon. As he makes this point there in Ch. 23, it's essential to know where we're driving beforehand simply because "we can only agree on how to reach a goal after we know what it is." And that's certainly true of our ultimate life-goal.)

But just what is our life-goal? Well, as Ramchal puts it in the name of our sages so stunningly and bluntly, "we were created" for no other reason than to "delight in G-d and enjoy the radiance of His Divine presence."

Mull over that for a while if you will. For what it says is that we were created to experience G-d up close, to bask in His light if you will!

As we're assured that there'll indeed be a time when this "true delight", as Ramchal terms it, this "greatest pleasure of all", will come our way. For at a certain point, there "will be no more impediments" and "the greatest of joys a soul could experience" will come about indeed (Klach Pitchei Chochma 4) and go on forever (Assara Orot).

The "catch" though, as we'd say, is that this sublime encounter will not take place in the here-and-now but rather in "the World to Come", which was specifically "created, readied and prepared for just such a pleasure", unlike our own world where no one could endure such a phenomenon.

In any event, "the road that will take us to our desired destination" -- this eternal encounter with the Divine -- is this world. So the point is that we were placed here just so as to set out to achieve that. And we're likewise taught here that "the means to bring (us) to this goal are the mitzvot that G-d has commanded" which can only be fulfilled in this world. (So rather than serving as mere "good deeds" as many think, or as a prosaic list of "Jewish practices" or rituals, mitzvot actually act as agents of revelation, as the very tools to bring on an encounter with G-d Almighty!)

So in sum, "that's why we were placed in this world in the first place: so that we might reach the place set for us -- the World to Come-- by the use of the means prepared for that task", the mitzvot. For only after having done that will, "we ... bask in the good we will have acquired through these means."

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