

THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 1:2

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Its only fitting that you toil and strive Ramchal asserts, to be worthy of this good -- of drawing close to G-d, since its so essential. And that we do what we can to clutch onto Him with the specific things that will enable (each one of us) to do this -- the mitzvot, which are so fundamentally potent.

Ramchal brings some of the dynamism of the mitzvah-system to light in other works. One of the things he points out is this ironical aspect of the mitzvot. Even though humanity is mired in physicality day after day, moment by moment, he points out, we can paradoxically reach our full potential through (our) physicality and corporeality (Derech Hashem 1:4) by using the mitzvah-system. For while mitzvot are mostly rooted in material things they nonetheless make contact with Heaven and allow us to as well.

For we can elevate our very mundane (though compelling) appetite for food to a point of holiness by eating only kosher things, by dedicating our favorite foods for Shabbat and Yom Tov meals, for example, rather than eat haphazardly and with no other end in mind than to gulp down food. And along the same lines, we can likewise elevate our wardrobe by avoiding Shaatnez (See Leviticus 19:19), exalt our dinner table by discussing Torah in the course of a meal, and the like.

And that way our initial shortcoming will come to be an asset in the end (Derech Hashem 1:4), which means to say that our very human need to eat, etc. will ultimately enable us to transcend ourselves. And well thus be able to luxuriate in the hidden light of G-ds presence (Daat Tevunot 40) thanks to our very basic, animal needs. For as we see, despite their physical base, mitzvot induce G-ds holiness and salutary light downward, and thus act as the means of (our) achieving true goodness (Maamar Halkkurim).

So it would only make sense that wed commit ourselves to the mitzvah- system and never swerve. Yet we do veer off-course, despite the great good wed miss in the process and regardless of our determination. Why?

For one thing, as Ramchal puts it, because despite the glorious fact that wed just been informed of the very best way to draw close to G-d Almighty and to fulfill our life-mission, and notwithstanding the certainty that we have it within us to withstand pitfalls, the truth of the matter is that G- d has nonetheless placed mankind in a situation where there are many things to hinder closeness to Him. For we have been placed in the midst of a mighty battle, wherein all worldly happenstances are trials and tests of our determination.

For were tempted by this and that, thrown off-course by one situation or another, and almost daily accosted by circumstances that seem to dare us to try to be pious despite them. So what are we to do given that?

For one thing it would help us to know, as Ramchal put it elsewhere, that certain things can only be resolved by tribulation (Derech Hashem 2:3). Thats to say that sometimes our mettle is purposely tested and were provoked to overcome a moral dilemma; but were to know that wed deliberately been placed in that situation because our triumph will do us a world of good (Klallim Rishonim 34).

In any event, Ramchal continues here, you will only be worthy of clutching onto your Creator if you are truly a warrior, victorious in your battles from all sides, and you manage to overcome your obstacles to mitzvah-observance.

Do that and you will go from the vestibule of this world -- as our life-experience is termed, since at bottom this too-short life serves as an entrée to eternity -- and youll enter into the palace of the World to Come where youll be enlightened by the Light of Life, G-d Himself. And with that perspective in mind were far more likely to succeed.

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