

THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 1:5

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Now that we understand "the preciousness of the Divine service granted us", Ramchal emphasizes, as well as the fact that it alone is "the means to bring us to true wholeness" and that without it "we would attain nothing" spiritually, we can appreciate just how important it is to take the mitzvah-system seriously.

After all, "a goal is only reached by the combined power of the means used to reach it" -- that's to say, our spiritual goal depends on the number and quality of mitzvot we fulfill. So it only makes sense for us to do our best, since each notch downward or upward would matter a great deal.

Thanks to the mitzvah-system, "all worlds (can) be thoroughly rectified" -- both our inner worlds and the world at large, as Ramchal indicates elsewhere. For that could only come about when "all 613 roots of (our) soul are perfected through the 613 ... mitzvot", since our souls, the mitzvot, and the world at large are all bound together. And everything we do here affects both ourselves and everything else (Adir Bamarom, pp. 186- 187).

Hence it's clear that "we must fulfill the mitzvot and our service to G-d in a most precise manner -- in as precise a manner as we would weigh gold or pearls if we were jewelers, because of their great value". Since "they result in true wholeness and in the eternal, incomparable preciousness" that is closeness to G-d.

Ramchal concludes this first chapter with the statement that since it has "become clear to us that the main purpose of our having been placed in this world was to observe mitzvot, serve G-d, and to withstand (the) spiritual trials" we're faced with all the time, it's imperative that we direct everything we do to G-d, and that "that there be no goal ... other than getting closer to Him and eradicating the barriers that separate (us) from Him" (also see Derech Hashem 1:4).

Indeed, haven't we been told that "if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all the nations you will be My treasured possession. For though the whole earth is Mine, you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Exodus 19:5-6)? Weren't we enjoined to "acknowledge Him in all (our) ways" (Proverbs 3:6), through everything we do? And haven't we ourselves declared that "I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine" (Song of Songs 6:3) in our declarations of loyalty to G-d?

But in order to achieve all that we'd need to follow a clear and well- structured plan that would take us through the steps, define each objective, warn us about what to watch out for, and grant us insight into the hazards to avoid.

The plan Ramchal uses is based on Rabbi Pinchas Ben Yaer's penetrating statement cited in the introduction to the effect that "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), which we'll follow step by step. It will prove to be enlightening, and to be rooted in wisdom and profound insight into human capacity.

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