

# THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 2:1

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

Ramchal offers us an evocative image in another work of human nature before Adam and Eve's terrible blunder in the Garden of Eden that has bearing on both this chapter of The Path of the Just and the next one.

He says that Adam and Eve then "functioned by means of an exalted Light that came (their) way moment by moment", rather than by their own instincts or thoughts. In fact, "everything (they) did was based on what they derived" from that Light (Adir Bamarom pp. 414-415), it was so all-encompassing and dependable. (This was in fact alluded to by the statement that Adam and Eve were dressed in "garments of light" in the Garden of Eden [Zohar 1, 36b]).

Ramchal's point, though, is that all of that ended once they ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. They then had to depend on their rational minds to get by. But as everyone knows, of course, people often don't use their minds when making decisions ... and there's the rub.

Here's how Ramchal further lays out the dynamic. It seems that Adam and Eve were forced from then on to "keep a watchful eye over everything" they did, and to "always think about what (they) were doing" rather than depend on the sort of Divine guidance that had done them so well before. And they had to "constantly worry and ... be on guard" (Adir Bamarom, Ibid.) from then on to be sure they did the right thing.

All that came about as a direct consequence of that sin. That's why we too have to think carefully about everything we do.

Another consequence of it was the fact that should we, their descendants, sin seriously and frequently, we'd find that our "rational minds would ... become obscured" (Adir Bamarom, p. 448) -- that is, that we'd become irrational and impulse-driven.

Now of course most of us aren't seriously or habitually sinful, so we aren't always irrational and impulse-driven. But the implication is of course that the more sinful we are, the more irrational and impulse-driven we tend to be.

Ramchal then adds -- and quite ominously -- that the sort of murkiness of the rational mind we tend to suffer with when we sin is "the single worst flaw" a soul could experience (Adir Bamarom, *ibid.*). In fact, we'd actually "never sin" if our rational minds were always in full flower (Adir Bamarom, p. 450), since we're "mostly driven by our minds" (Klach Pitchei Chochma 124).

And so we're "obliged ... to always pay attention" to what we do, because conscious deliberation "strengthens the soul and keeps the yetzer harah away from it" (Derech Eitz Chaim).

We'll soon see how much of a role this need to remain aware of our actions and to act consciously and deliberately plays in our spiritual goals.

(Many wonder, by the way, why Ramchal didn't actually begin this discourse with a discussion of the place of Torah study in all this, since the statement that serves as this book's motto indicates that "Torah study leads to caution", the subject at hand. Some would say that it's because Torah study comes up several times in this work anyway, so there's no need to dwell on it here. And others say that Torah study is the underpinning of everything we do to serve G-d anyway and actually leads to all the good traits Ramchal will be discussing, so discussing it would be superfluous. But perhaps a better explanation is the one that Ramchal himself offered elsewhere that it's the sort of conscious attentiveness that goes into Torah study that easily leads one to caution [Ma'amar Vichuach HaChacham v'haChassid]).

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