

THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 22:4

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Ramchal underscored the fact that our sages went out of their way to praise the unpretentious and self-effacing. "A humble person" they said, "is considered as having offered all of the sacrifices" in their lifetime (Sotah 5b), presumably because he or she would have already learned the lesson that the sacrifices were to teach us: that both we and everything we own are in G-d's hands alone. And our sages often went to great pains to depict G-d's "longing" and love for the humble (see Chullin 89a).

His point once again here, though, is that we only come to be humble when we purposefully and assiduously set out to be; and that part of the effort involves our being honest with ourselves about our makeup and efforts, and by our refusing to be seduced by our conniving heart that wants to dissuade us from humility.

But understand that being humble doesn't only have to do with being unpretentious about one's gifts, wealth, or social standing -- it also touches on the many mitzvahs one might have fulfilled. Because while we're certainly to be praised for all our efforts along those lines, the truth of the matter is that we'd need to be humble about those, too. For we couldn't have fulfilled those mitzvahs in the end had G-d not granted us the wherewithal.

For, as Ramchal words it, it's important to realize that "whatever (spiritual) advantages you might have have still and all granted to you by G-d" Himself rather than by your own efforts alone. And realizing that itself should humble you.

Now, he presents an interesting parable for that, likening the recipient of G-d's input in this instance to "a pauper who receives a gift out of the goodness of his benefactor's heart, which the recipient can't help but but embarrassed when accepting". In fact, he goes on to say, "the more generous his benefactor would be to him, the more embarrassed would the recipient be".

What he's implying is that there's nothing that will draw us to closer to true humility as the stark realization of just how good and generous G-d is to each one of us. Not only does He grant us life outright and the means to go on, He also grants us the means to draw closer to Him through His mitzvah-system, which is His very most precious gift. The simple realization of that alone should strike you as extraordinary, and should humble you.

For, Ramchal tells us in another of his works, true humility and shamefacedness are rooted in the soul's suddenly "realizing that it has come upon something it apparently doesn't deserve" (Adir Bamarom 1, p. 250-252), as well as from "realizing that it doesn't deserve to stand in G-d's presence" (Adir Bamarom 2, p. 155), let alone to be granted a gift by him. So the sensitive soul should take that to heart.

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