

THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 22:5

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

A number of people who should have known better nonetheless took credit for their righteous and good deeds, assuming they were responsible for what they managed to accomplish. Even great men like the prophet Nechemiah and King Chizkiyahu were guilty of that.

But they were wrong and severely reprimanded for it; "and from this we can infer" Ramchal concludes, "that one is never to grow haughty and proud over his good deeds". Indeed, each one of us needs to own up to the fact that we take far more credit for our deeds -- righteous or otherwise -- than we deserve.

Ramchal then adds this cogent, albeit humbling and stunning thought: that that's true of exalted souls "like Abraham, Moses, Aaron, David or the other saintly individuals": they alone had to be warned not to take credit for their righteousness, given their greatness which might have lead them to make such a mistake.

"As for us", though, whom he terms "orphans of orphans" -- given how waif-like we are in our values and how we flounder about for lack of wisdom and guidance -- "we have no need for this" warning. "We clearly have so many faults that we don't need to reflect very deeply to recognize them", so it's easy for us not to take credit for our righteous deeds.

After all, as he puts it, "all of our wisdom is nothing, and the greatest of our sages are but students of the students of the early ones", so how dare we assume to take credit for righteousness?

What we need to do is "to recognize that, over-all, our minds are superficial, and our perceptions very limited. Foolishness is rampant amongst us and error is triumphant. Whatever we do know is only the bare minimum. So it's certainly inappropriate for us to be at all haughty. Instead, we should be humble and lowly".

Indeed, the sensitive soul who knows his own heart cannot help but agree and be humbled.

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