

THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 22:8

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

And finally, we'd need to learn how to show respect for others if we're to be truly humble. After all, it's said that "no one, not even a non-Jewish stranger in the marketplace, ever had a chance to say hello to Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai", who was so keenly aware of this principle, "before he himself said it first" (Berachot 17a). And we're to follow his lead.

As such, we'd need to learn not to stand on ceremony when someone else has a need, and to acquiesce to their needs instead; to assume that everyone has his or her unique insights and wisdom, and to purposefully listen to them; to own up to our own faults and limitations, and to accept others' input; and more.

(What's interesting to recall here is that Ramchal is addressing what pious individuals, rather than the rest of us, are expected to achieve in degrees of humility. The point is that even though we, too, are capable of it, it's also far more difficult than we might imagine at first blush.)

Summing up this chapter, Ramchal says, "We've thus explicated all the main principles of modesty, but their details are so numerous that you'd need to use your own judgment about them" to determine them, and to always consider the circumstances at hand.

"One thing is sure", he then concludes, and it's that "modesty removes many stumbling-blocks along the way and brings you closer to the great good". That's because "a modest person is very little concerned for matters of this world, and he's not envious of its vanities".

So if we're ever to achieve spiritual excellence, we too would need to strive for modesty, and to use it as a stepping-stone toward humility which is essential for that lofty goal.

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