

THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 23:5

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

A number of factors hold us back from being truly humble. Foremost, Ramchal asserts, are rank "overabundance" and the sheer delight in things.

Truth be known, the sheer reverence for "overabundance" -- for wanting too much of quite enough -- defines modernity. Whereas stark and painful want and poverty gnawed at and injured so many people in the past, and the blessing of plenty has refreshed the human heart for many years now, things have gone too far and it's now against our spiritual well-being.

These verses lay out the dilemma, as Ramchal understands it: "(Beware, lest) you eat and grow full (and forget G-d), and your heart becomes proud" (Deuteronomy 8:12-14). In other words, the terrible spiritual consequences of enjoying overabundance are our setting G-d out of sight and mind, and our placing ourselves at the center of the universe instead.

Wanting to avoid that at all costs, "the pious find it better to deprive themselves sometimes (of this and that), so that they might subdue the inclination towards arrogance which flourishes in a climate of plenty" Ramchal offers. The point is that we'd do well to deprive ourselves of things here and there to avoid that, too.

What also prevents us from being humble is a lack of Torah knowledge, Ramchal underscores. As he points out, our sages enunciated that thusly: "A sure sign that someone knows nothing is (his) bragging" (Zohar, Balak), which suggests that a person only thinks he needs to brag when he actually has nothing worthwhile to be proud of. And they said that, "A single coin in (an otherwise empty) bottle makes a loud clanging sound" (Baba Metziah 85b), which means that only a mind that's full of thoughts of consequence and of spiritual content can drown out useless untruths.

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