

THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 24:1

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

The next trait we're to strive for in our search for spiritual excellence is termed "the fear of sin", which we'll define below.

The first thing to notice about it, Ramchal points out, is the fact that it was placed so late in the list of traits that were cited in R' Pinchas Ben Yair's beraita which forms the basis of The Path of the Just (see Ramchal's Introduction). That alone "underscores its importance" and shows just how "very special and essential a matter" it is, and just how "difficult it is to achieve", Ramchal adjures.

He makes that point because on one level that's sort of counter-intuitive: fear seems simple enough to come to and quite native to our make-up, given that there's so much out there to fear, and that we're riddled with fears of all kinds of noxious things. But Ramchal makes the point that our thinking so is based on a misunderstanding -- we're confusing fear of this or that with what the beraita actually had in mind.

As Ramchal put it, "there are two sorts of fear -- actually three, the first of which is very easy to come to, in fact, there's nothing easier to experience than it-- and the second of which is the hardest".

That first category of fear is "the fear of punishment", and the second is "the fear of, or reverence for God's Grandeur, which fear of sin is a subcategory of".

But that calls for a lot of explanation.

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