

THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 26:3

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

There's something ironic about the actions of the holy, Ramchal points out: "even their mundane acts ... are transformed into actual holiness". (That's obviously not to say that any inadvertent sins on their part would become holy; it means that the sorts of things that would be de rigeur in a righteous or even pious religious life would be tinged with sheer holiness when they'd engage in it.)

Ramchal proves that such a thing is possible by citing the example of what was once a perfectly standard act of devotion when the Holy Temple stood. It was a mitzvah then to offer sacrifices when we sinned, as means of atonement. Ramchal's point is that it wasn't the sacrifice per se that allowed for atonement then, but rather the fact that a holy Kohan who played a central role in that would eat of it -- that's what would sanctify the sinner's sacrifice. As we're told, "those who offered it would be atoned for by the priest's eating of the sacrifices" (Pesachim 59b).

That's to say that by simply eating the sacrifice a holy Kohan would somehow transform the meat that was offered into something not just acceptable, laudable, and commanded, but into something that was out-and-out holy and purifying simply because he himself was holy and had ingested it.

He goes on to offer there that given that that's so, "you can now see the difference between purity (which was a trait of piety) and holiness". For while "pure individuals only do those physical things that are absolutely necessary," like eating, drinking, and the like, "and they mean to derive no (personal) benefit from them other than what they must", they're "thus freed from (suffering) any sort of (spiritual) harm from the physical world".

That is, pure individuals have to eat and drink, so they do. They'd rather not have to indulge in mundane things like that, but at least they know that they're only doing so because they must, not because they want to, so they're recognized for their purity and don't suffer the spiritual mishaps that could befall the rest of us. But that's not the pinnacle, Ramchal points out.

The pure still-and-all "haven't reached the (superior) level of holiness, simply because it would have been better for them to have done without those things" they ate or drank, even if they didn't approach it from an impious angle, and they did the best they would.

"For the holy-- those who constantly attach themselves to G-d, and whose souls move about in the

true notions of love and reverence for the Creator -- are considered to be walking before G-d in the land of the living" where people do indeed eat and drink. So when they do, whatever they digest becomes not only not-harmful but holy.

That's to say that the holy can not only eat, drink, and the like without compunction, there are instances in which they're to be encouraged to: because their having done so would actually be more laudable than our pious avoidance.

As, "his very person is considered to be a tabernacle, sanctuary, and altar", it follows then that "the food that such a person would eat would be like a burnt- offering brought upon the fires of the altar".

One would have to be holy to elevate mundane things into instances of sheer holiness, to be sure, but the point remains that things that are mundane and fraught with spiritual threat when one is less-than-holy are nonetheless rich in sanctity when one is on that level.

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