

THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 3:1

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Not only would we have to be aware of a number of things to acquire the trait of caution as we'd indicated, but we would also need to be conscious of our own inner motivations. For if we'd hope to achieve spiritual excellence we'd need to know the depths of our heart.

For the human heart is awash with contradiction: there are bright, clean and pious corners there, but there are also some quite murky, smarmy and unholy ones. But the truth of the matter is that as a whole the human heart is an untidy brew of all of that, which should be unsettling.

In any event, Ramchal tells us here that if "you want to master yourself, you will need to involve yourself in two kinds of self-analysis," first "a consideration of what is the true good you are to choose, and the true bad from which you should flee," and the second is "a consideration of your own actions to determine whether they are good or bad" -- which is all quite reasonable. Since it simply points out that we'd be expected to weed out the bad from the good.

And he adds the following in its wake: "Do nothing without (first) considering it in light of this notion" that is, without bearing in mind whether what you're about to do is a good and lofty thing, and should be followed through on, or if it's wrong and should be abandoned.

Now, that would obviously call for a lot of analysis and forethought, both as to the nature of the thing we're about to do along with reflection on whether the Torah would deem it right or wrong (since we're to only factor in Torah-based moral values). But it's here that Ramchal adds another point that should stop us cold.

He warns us that we should not only be weeding out the obviously bad things we do -- but that we should also be "inspecting and observing" the "good ones", to see "if there is any underlying motivation that is not good, or if there is any part-bad that you might be forced to extricate and remove", given the multi-faceted makeup of the human heart we spoke of.

For even the grandest deeds can be tinged with self-interest; as everything we do is riddled with hidden under-moorings. We might contribute a great deal of money to good causes in the hope of being known as a philanthropist, or we might pray with special fervor in the hope of being seen as "really religious" by our neighbors.

At bottom it comes to this: be honest with yourself (as you must to become pious) and you'll come upon a lot you'll like and a lot you won't. Sigh deeply, admit to your humanity, and isolate the best to

offer to G-d.

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