

THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 3:2

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Ramchal offers that we should "sift through and analyze our ways each and every day" in serious reflection much the way successful business-people regularly "evaluate their business practices" in order "to be sure they don't suffer loss". That's to say that we should "take stock" of ourselves each and every day in order to see just where we're successful and where not, where we're in a rut and where we're on the wing.

But let's emphasize that we're expected to do more than cast sporadic glances at what we do. Instead, we're to reflect deeply -- to lay each move and motivation under bright light; look at it top, side, and underside; to draw it closer in to see it anew, perhaps a degree or two higher-up than we'd ordinarily took at it, or close enough to us to catch a whiff of it, if you will. And we're to then adjudge its worth and either accept or reject it.

The truth of the matter is that if you don't actually ponder your ways and strive for such insight and self-understanding it "will never come your way" and "you'll linger in the dark" instead -- oblivious, and awash in "a fog and in utter darkness", as Ramchal had put it (Derech Eitz Chaim p. 137). For if we were in fact self-aware and sensitive to what urges us on, we wouldn't sin, Ramchal assures us there; as that sort of "knowledge boosts the soul" on one hand, and dampens the yetzer harah on the other.

He also makes the point that not only should we reflect upon what we do and what drives us, but also on our very beings. He suggests that we set aside time each and every day to dwell upon the sort of profound existential questions that the great ones do, like, "Who am I?", "Why am I in this world?", "What does G-d Almighty require of me?", and "What's expected of me in the end?" For, it's very difficult to grow in your spirit if you don't do that (Ibid.).

Do all that regularly, that is, "delve deeply into all of your actions and examine all your ways" the ways we spoke of, and you'll be successfully cautious; and you'll eventually "leave yourself without any bad habits and traits, or ... sins or transgressions". For a circumspect soul would be leery of making the same mistakes again. Don't follow through on this, though, and you'll find yourself "bound and imprisoned" by your mistakes.

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