

THE PATH OF THE JUST - CHAPTER 4:1

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

In the end, the very best way to develop the sort of caution we've been talking about, Ramchal advises, is to delve into Torah. Because it will invariably point out what matters in life and what doesn't, which will then inspire you to be cautious in your life-choices.

But Ramchal then makes a very astute point that has bearing on a lot of things having to do with how we're to grow in our spirit. He asserts that while one person might be moved to change by one thing or another, someone else might be repelled by the very same thing, and vice versa -- and yet both would need to grow. So it's obvious that we'd have to know what inspires us and what doesn't if we're to move ahead.

He says that there are three sorts of people over-all as far as spiritual yearnings are concerned: "those who fully understand (what matters most)", "those of somewhat lesser understanding (than they)", and "the great majority of people"; or, put simply, there are people in search of spiritual excellence indeed, there are also people not quite there but on the way, and there are some who are willing to settle for spiritual mediocrity but who could be inspired to do better if given the right impetus.

For the truth of the matter is that not everyone yearns for nearness to G-d or for a chance to dwell close to Him and to bask in His light forever. While we contend that everyone's soul yearns to do that, since the soul originated in G-d's Being and would love to "go back home" for good, the lower elements of one's beings can actually be repelled by the thought. After all, an individual drawn to "wine, women, and song" his whole life, who is repulsed by the thought of praying for example for any amount of time or of contemplating loftier things, would be aghast at having to spend eternity in Heaven. Yet his soul would want to dwell there, in fact, and would want to know how to. So it should be encouraged to and nudged along (albeit tenderly and appropriately if it's to be effective).

For Ramchal's point here is that in fact anyone could be drawn toward goodness (if not out-and-out righteousness) if properly motivated. We would just need to be aware of what makes a person "tick" and use that to his soul's best advantage.

As such, a more altruistic person would be motivated by high ideals, and should be offered them; someone less high-minded but good should be inspired by fine and correct points that would nonetheless be closer to the ground and less idealistic; and someone lesser-yet who could only be appealed to by more self-serving needs should be told about them. We'll explore these three types

and what motivates them in some detail in the following sections. The wise among us would pinpoint his or her own standing and act accordingly.

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