

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 10:1

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

We're said to love G-d when we long for His presence and want nothing better than to cling to Him. But, how could any one of us ever come to that, seeing how very human we are? After all, aren't we just naturally and routinely drawn to the earth, despite the loftiness of our souls (which would explain our pull to G-d)? So let's spend a little time addressing the relationship between our body and our soul.

Understand first off that it's our soul that reigns ultimately, despite the fact that it's impalpable and invisible in a very tactile and visible world, and thus seems to not really be in control. (This irony alone helps to explain a lot about our spiritual struggles, by the way.) Understand as well that the soul loves the body, its mate. Nonetheless, we often give the body more leeway and actually encourage a rift between it and the soul. The secret for success, then, is to allow the soul to hold sway after all.

Now on to the dynamic between the body and soul. When the soul "senses the presence of something that would benefit and improve the body's lot", we're told, "it focuses its attention on that thing and longs for it" on some level, since it will be such a help to the body. But when, conversely, the soul senses the presence of something that could augment "itself", it "focuses its attention on it" on a whole other level, in that it "clings to it in thought, dwells on it, and desires and yearn for it" -- i.e., it comes to love it. But the body is so demanding and needy that the soul can't help but pay a lot of attention to it (both because of the body's requirements, and because of the soul's love for it), so the soul is very often more occupied with the body's needs than with its own more ethereal and eternal needs.

There comes a time, though, when the soul draws upon pure reason and comes to be rather fed up with the body's mundane demands, and it starts to lean toward its own (and "our" own) needs. Its "eyes" suddenly "open, and it sees clearly rather than through a cloud of ignorance of G-d and of His Torah, and ... many aspects of our Creator ... become clear to it", as Ibn Pakudah puts it rather arcanelly.

And that's when it begins to happen -- when the soul first starts to revere G-d, and then to finally fall in love with Him. For the soul "begins to perceive G-d's abilities and His essential supremacy, and it comes to surrender itself ... to Him in "reverence, dread, and terror" in the face of G-d's Essence and greatness". But there then comes a point in this phenomenal moment when G-d Himself comes to reassure the soul of His own love for it and to allay its fears. The soul then "longs to drink from the

cup of the love of G-d, to dedicate (itself) to Him alone, to love Him, trust Him and yearn for Him". And it then begins to occupy itself "with nothing but the service of G-d, (and with) nothing but thoughts of Him".

The soul suddenly comes to care little for this world, and it becomes oblivious to all the pain and pleasure we experience in life on some obscure, ethereal level. And it then tries to inspire the whole of our being to follow in its ways. We'll listen to it if we're wise; for that's what those who love G-d would do.

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