

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 10:3

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

But, honestly now -- how do we ever come to love G-d sincerely and altruistically on a day-to-day level?

There are a number of prerequisites, we're taught (each one of which is a virtual career onto itself, the truth be known). We'd first need to acknowledge G-d's existence in our lives in a heartfelt way, dedicate everything we do to Him, serve Him for His name's sake alone, and to surrender ourselves to Him as well as to those who know and worship Him.

We'd then have to be introspective about our obligations to G-d and about how often He conceals our iniquities from sight, and about how patient and forgiving He is; and we'd then need to delve into the books of the prophets and the ancients to see how they came to love Him, then to reflect upon G-d's wonders in the world.

Once we'd done all that, we're told, "as well as having abstained from the pleasures and desires of the world; having fathomed the Creator's greatness, essence, veracity and exaltedness; having reflected upon our own relative worthlessness, insignificance ... in the face of G-d's abounding goodness and great kindness" -- we'll come to love Him "wholeheartedly and with genuine purity of soul, and to long for Him vigorously and ardently".

One sure and more practical way to arrive at so exalted a level, we're told, is to foster a sense of awe of Him in our daily lives, and to constantly remind ourselves that He oversees everything we do from the inside out, guides us mercifully, and draws near to us in love.

Do that, we're assured, and "you couldn't help but turn to Him in your heart and mind genuinely, and in perfect faith", and "you'll never desert G-d in your thoughts". Do *that*, "and He'll never depart from your eyes. He'll be with you when you're alone, and dwell with you" wherever you are. "A room full of people would seem empty to you" since you'd be facing G-d, "and an empty room would seem not to be" because you wouldn't be alone at all.

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