

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 1:1

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

At bottom, the pursuit of spiritual excellence comes down to searching for G-d, making a commitment to Him once you've "found" Him, and following through on that commitment the rest of your life. Obviously, then, we'd have to know just **who** and **what** He is-- aside from being the Creator. For while many accept the idea that there was a Creator, not everyone knows or acknowledges G-d's other "roles", if you will.

That's obviously a heady and endless subject which we couldn't ever hope to plumb the depths of. But as we'll find in the course of this work, there are indeed many things we **can** say about G-d Almighty-- as well as many things we simply can't. We'll now begin the discussion.

The most fundamental thing to be said about G-d aside from His being the Creator is that He's "One". In fact, we say it day after day, at least twice a day, when we recite the "Sh'ma Yisrael", i.e., the Torah verse that reads, "Hear O Israel! G-d is our L-rd; G-d is One!" (Deuteronomy 6:4) in our prayers. The statement doesn't only imply that He's the only G-d, which is of course true. It goes far deeper than that, as we'll see later on in this gate.

Ironically, though, many of us **don't really know what we're declaring** when we say that "G-d is One"! Still and all we're taught that we're obliged to accept the reality of His Oneness "wholeheartedly"-- once we determine what it's all about after all.

The obvious question is, then, how do we accept G-d's Oneness "wholeheartedly" rather than perfunctorily? By declaring Him to be One and actually believing it **after having explained it to ourselves**.

After all, there are people who just declare that G-d is One without knowing what they're saying simply because everyone else around them does.

Others say it and actually feel it in their hearts. But only because they trust the traditions handed down to us attesting to how true it is. They don't really know what they're saying, though.

And yet others say and feel it after having thought about what it means. But they're confused about the true implications of what they're saying; and thus while they have the best of intentions, and have done a lot of their "homework", they're nonetheless off the mark.

The ideal way to declare G-d One and to actually mean it is to delve into the true implications of G-d's Oneness after having proven G-d's very existence to yourself. As Ibn Pakudah adds, "that's why I

define the wholehearted acceptance of G-d's Oneness as the act of having both your heart and your lips accept G-d's Oneness equally, after knowing how to prove it, and after coming to know all the aspects of G-d's actual Oneness on your own."

[Subscribe](#) to *Spiritual Excellence* and receive the class via e-mail.