

# THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 1:3

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

The question now arises as to whether we should in fact delve into G-d's Oneness on our own or not. Ibn Pakudah, as we indicated, contends that if we're intelligent enough to do it, we should; or else run the risk of being accused of intellectual laziness.

Interestingly enough, he likens someone who declines to, to "a patient who knew all about his disease and its cure, but who depended entirely on his doctor to heal him". There's a lot to be said about this analogy, but suffice it to say for our purposes here that Ibn Pakudah is clearly alluding to the idea that we **already know** how to prove G-d's Oneness. But is that so?

As we'll see, there'll be a number of points made to prove both G-d's Oneness and His very existence that are far beyond most of us. So how could Ibn Pakudah imply that we each have it in us to prove such things, and that we shouldn't depend on others' proofs?

His point seems to be, though, that there's something deep in the heart that indeed knows G-d very well. And that while it might not be able to **describe** Him to others well enough, it would certainly recognize Him should it "run into Him". He also seems to be saying that if we'd indeed sit down long enough and think deeply enough about it, that we could in fact come up with a "working sketch" of Him, if you will-- a valid enough depiction of what His "Oneness" implies.

And while we might be off on a detail or two, the process of arriving at whatever we'd come upon would itself affirm our faith. For while we'd **all** likely miss the fine distinctions between "true" and "circumstantial" oneness that Ibn Pakudah will stress later on, we'd nonetheless have toiled in holiness and arrived at some degree of clarity.

That brings us to another point. If we were to accept Ibn Pakudah's proofs of G-d's Oneness outright without having puzzled over some of them, we ourselves could be accused of being intellectually lazy!

So despite the boldness of the idea, it's incumbent upon us if we can to delve into G-dliness. With one caveat, though. That we be grounded enough in the fundamentals of the Jewish Faith not to make things up as we go along. For while we're certainly encouraged to inquire and delve, we're nonetheless discouraged from taking leaps off cliffs far more steep and sheer than we could ever imagine.

Again, though, if we have the wherewithal and we're grounded enough in the basics, then, as Ibn

Pakudah laid out, the Torah itself commands us to delve into G-dliness. As it says, "(Come to) know today and reflect upon (the fact) in your heart that G-d is the L-rd" (Deuteronomy 4:39). "Know that G-d is the L-rd" (Psalms 100:3), and "Let him who boasts, boast of this: that he understands and knows Me" (Jeremiah 9:23).

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