

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 2:5 - PART 1

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

The best realm to catch sight of G-d's wisdom in after all is the one that's most accessible to us -- ourselves.

So we'll be contemplating a number of things right in front of our eyes which we still-and-all take for granted or only half consider. Now, while we'll be selective about what we concentrate on, what we say here is based on Ibn Pakudah's choices. And some of them will seem obvious to us in modernity or self-evident. But remember that the overarching theme of this whole chapter is best expressed by the verse, "How great are Your works, G-d! How very deep Your thoughts" (Psalms 92:6). Which is to say that *everything* we touch upon will prove to have been "worked on" by G-d Himself, and that a "chip" of G-dly wisdom always lies nestled deep within it.

We'll wander about from birth to death and everything essential in between, and touch on body and soul -- till in the end we too come to understand King David's heartfelt accolade, "Thank You for having made me so awesomely and wondrously!" (Psalm 139:14).

Let's start off by considering our womb-life, if you will. How astounding it is to realize how well and propitiously placed we were there. After all, our mother's womb was an utterly safe, secure, all-encompassing, weatherproof, well-stocked, and warm cradling crib which we stayed in and left according to schedule.

How wondrous and G-d-given our childhood was, too. After all, despite their own needs, and despite the great transcendent and down-to-earth demands we made of them, G-d granted our parents the "supernatural" capacity to raise, tend to, and protect us day after day. They were also granted the grace and inner strength needed to not tire of us, or to resent our impatience and obliviousness till we grew strong enough to go on our own.

Ibn Pakudah makes the compelling point that we can also detect G-d's wisdom in the fact that we couldn't really judge things correctly when we were young. If we could have, he indicates, there would inevitably have come a point when we'd realize how much we needed to know to get by in this world (as adults), and how little we did know then (as kids). We'd become distraught, frazzled, and discouraged. It's G-d's great wisdom and mercy alone that enabled us to go on. And he indicates that another sign of G-d's wisdom lies in the fact that kids invariably have accidents and become ill, for one reason alone: to learn the ways of the world, and to be encouraged to grow wiser.

We'd then do well to reflect on our bodies as a whole and on the role each of its part plays. How each specific organs have its unique function by wise design; how primary our heart and mind are; how orderly our digestive system is, allowing for ingestion all the way to elimination (from which we learn just how needy and inviting the body is at first, and how independent and dismissing it becomes); and how each part's shape corresponds to its function.

We're invited to then reflect upon our precious mind, with its ability to think and reason, remember and forget, and to have pangs of conscience. Imagine what we'd do without any one of them! Without memory we'd be stranded in our own lives without a past or a future, without connectives and without reasons to be grateful. And yet if we weren't able to forget at all and set things aside we'd be woeful all the time. Since we'd always be dwelling on our troubles, enemies, or debts and not seeing the good right in our midst. And thanks our noble conscience we're prodded to do good in the world, to be honest, and to hone our inner core.

And it's thanks to our ability to think and reason that we can realize the many-fold instances of G-dly wisdom all about us.

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