

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 2:6

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Given all it does to foster spiritual excellence, what would ever prevent us from reflecting upon G-d's presence in the world?

A number of things. First, the mistaken belief we cited earlier that G-d isn't really in utter command of the universe, and that He "delegates duties" to lesser but commanding phenomena. The truth is, though, that while G-d certainly does make use of the superabundance of implements at His disposal, it's He alone who makes all the decisions. And until we come to know that deeply in our beings we'll never know Who to thank for all the good.

We already offered three other things that prevent reflection, including our being too absorbed in the pursuit of pleasure; our growing used to all the good around us, and taking it for granted; and our not understanding the ultimate good that suffering renders.

But in addition to those is another one: our out-and-out arrogance and sense of entitlement in the face of all the good granted us. But as Ibn Pakudah put it, "only a fool would think he deserves all he has and more; and only a fool wouldn't reflect on G-d's generosity, or compel himself to praise and acknowledge Him for them".

So it would do us all well to grow past all that and acknowledge the good G-d has bestowed on us by dwelling on the signs of G-d's wisdom, seeing new signs of it each day, and by worshipping Him accordingly.

But make no mistake about it. For as Ibn Pakudah warns us, "all we have alluded to in this gate is but a fraction of what can be culled from the mysteries of G-d's wisdom". After all, "what you know about the Creator's wisdom and abilities in this world is absolutely nothing compared to His **actual** wisdom and abilities. For we only see the things we need to know for our own well-being -- not everything His infinite abilities are capable of bringing about". We'd thus be wise to take the time to dwell on what we don't know, too, and to worship and adore G-d on that level as well. The experience will prove to be stunning.

In fact Ibn Pakudah likens our situation to that of a young man long ago who was born and raised in a king's palace and knew of nothing else. It seems the king had taken pity on him from birth and had him treated well and relatively lavishly.

The palace staff member who regularly brought him all his food, clothes, and niceties thought at

one point that it was time to fill the child in on the truth of his situation.

"It's important for you to realize that you're a subject of the king, and that it's **he** who has been providing you with everything you have," he said. "It's your responsibility to thank and praise the king!"

The young man thought about that, was humbled, and said in all sincerity, "I offer praise to the owner of this palace for choosing me as his subject, for singling me out for all his favors, and for looking after me."

But the man was thunderstruck by the fact that the young man -- not knowing any better -- referred to the great and mighty king as merely "the owner of this palace" and he said, "Don't say that! For the king's domain doesn't only consist of this palace. He has countless others along with vast stretches of land, and he provides for many, many individuals. All the goodness bestowed on you is nothing compared to what he's done for others; and his taking personal notice of your situation is nothing compared to the many, many others whose situations he's taken notice of."

But, again, having been born and raised in the one palace (and only one wing of it, at that), the young man didn't know what the older was talking about. "What should I be saying?" he asked. "Say, 'I offer praise to his Royal Highness whose rule is boundless, and whose goodness is endless. Now I know that I am but one of his many subjects, that I am of no consequence, and that what's been granted me is nothing compared to what the king is capable of granting others.'"

The point is that we, too, would do well to realize how small our purview is, and how little we actually know of G-d's capabilities and goodness. We should praise and thank Him for **all** He has given us -- for what we know of, and for what we can't even imagine -- and worship Him accordingly. After all, as Ibn Pakudah points out, consider the awe and respect you have for someone who's wealthier, and more capable and powerful than you; and how quickly you'd do whatever he asks of you, simply because he paid attention to you! Shouldn't we heed G-d's wishes all the more so?

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