

# THE DUTIES OF THE HEART - GATE 2 INTRODUCTION

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

We'll do what we can in this second gate to catch sight of G-d's presence in our midst and thus confirm His existence. But we'll see something else too along the way -- just how good He is to us.

Now while no one can ignore the pain and sorrow many people suffer, the often overlooked underlying goodness of it all can't be denied either -- once we're made aware of it. And that will be our task here.

The truth be known, many of us will be hard pressed to accept the points Ibn Pakudah will make below -- simply because we're so mired in the very symptoms he lays out, and thus find it difficult seeing how very right he is. In many ways we're like inveterate alcoholics who like our whiskey too much to own up to how much havoc it's wreaking in our lives. For as we'll find, it's ironically very often our own inability to recognize all the good G-d has granted us that causes us our pain and sorrow.

Perhaps, then, it would do us well to especially ponder the ideas presented below and take them to heart. Because if we're ever to achieve spiritual excellence as we'd like to, we'd need to own up to a number of things that elude us, no matter how unpleasant hearing them said outright may be for now. Because in the end we'll recognize the truth and genuinely be the people we'd like to be.

So why in fact don't we realize how good G-d is to us, and why do so many of us scoff at the very idea? For three reasons, as Ibn Pakudah sees it.

First, because we're virtually absorbed in the material side of the world and look to it for succor. So we tend to be bedazzled by the magic of this and that thing and quickly lose interest in everything G-d has already granted us, complain about the things we don't have and oftentimes don't need, and think life is bad.

Second, because we all grow up with a plethora of G-d-given favors -- large and small, apparent and inapparent -- which we then grow used to and come to accept as a "given". And by the time we realize all we have, we're already too preoccupied to appreciate it, and have grown slack in our gratitude. In a way we can all be said to be like spoiled brats that way.

And third, because we simply don't understand the nature of suffering, and think well-being and comfort is due us. In truth, life itself is a gift--- a veritable usually several decades long favor granted us by G-d in love, and based upon nothing we did to deserve it. The other point to be made is that

we oftentimes suffer for reasons beyond our ken; yet we think we're wiser yet than G-d, and that we should decide how we're to live life.

So we're encouraged to appreciate all we have, life included. And to thank G-d for it all. We'll explore the multitude of favors we enjoy in more depth in later chapters.

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