

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 3:3

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Let's back up a bit and first shed some light on just what "serving" G-d entails before we go on. It comes down to acquiescing to His wishes over our own. Now, since the very thought of that often rails against our very natures, we're taught that we'd need to be induced to do it. The truth be known, the person in search of spiritual excellence would have come to realize by now that it behooves us all to serve G-d, in fact. Because such a person would have already "caught sight of G-d" as we indicated, and would *want* to serve Him.

But the difficulty of the very idea of acquiescing one's own will to G-d's cannot to be denied. Many, many of us have struggled with it and been snared by the temptation to resist (though the best of us always manage to transcend the struggle). So again the point is that we need to be induced to serve G-d from time to time, either from within or from without.

We determined last time that it's often not to our advantage to wait for an inner inducement, though, simply because it may not come, or be equal to the task. So we embraced the notion of depending on the Torah's demands to induce us to serve G-d. This week, to the contrary, we discover that there's a downside to depending on that alone.

As we all know, we often do things for self-serving purposes, and we can fall into that trap when it comes to trying to draw close to G-d by means of the Torah as well. We might thus follow its dictates for the great spiritual reward due the righteous, or to avoid the unpleasant consequences due sinners. And that's a less-lofty way to serve G-d than by deciding to through inner determination.

It's also true that when we're induced to serve G-d through the Torah we're asked to do a lot of physical, earthly things (albeit for G-dly reasons, to be sure), while if we're to serve Him out of an inner impetus we'd more often concentrate on heart-based thoughts and intentions.

An important point to be made is that at bottom Torah-based service is meant to foster inner motivation in the end; it's a preamble to it. For G-d wants us to apply our hearts to His service most of all (even -- and perhaps most especially -- when we engage in physical acts of worship). So it only stands to reason that self-inducement is likely to be richer and more fecund.

And also because while there are a finite amount of distinct Torah-based mitzvot (613 in all), there are an infinite amount of heart-based, self-motivated ways to serve G-d; because it's relatively easy

to fulfill a great many mitzvot (who has trouble celebrating Shabbat or the Festivals? Attending a traditional wedding or brit? Praying to G-d each day? etc.), while it's loftier and more personally demanding to serve G-d from within alone; and lastly because one could conceivably fail in his efforts to serve G-d through external motivation, while we're less likely to fail if we're moved to do it from within.

Hence we see that there are indeed downsides to depending upon the external motivations of the Torah system alone to serve G-d as fully and deeply as we'd like. But aside from the ones we cited last time, there are indeed distinct advantages to having the Torah system to depend on.

Only G-d's own Torah can tell us what exactly to do to mediate between our body's and soul's obsessive inclinations toward and away from the world (as they were depicted last time). Who among us can read his or her inner being enough to know how to do that on his own? And who among us can fathom the eternal consequences of our deeds on his own? And can we all claim to be bright, intuitive, nuanced or even consistent enough to always serve G-d from within?

It's important to realize as well that our people have been favored by G-d on many levels (and we're taught that the more generous someone is to you, the greater is your obligation to serve him). After all, G-d granted us His Torah, deemed us worthy of serving Him in uniquely Jewish ways, and enabled us to endure these many, many centuries against all odds. Hence we owe Him obeisance for that in ways we couldn't fathom without the Torah's direction, so we're to depend on it for expressing our gratitude for that as well.

And also because, as we said, Torah-observance is indeed a preamble to self-induced service and is thus a necessary prerequisite; it has us engage in or avoid things whose everyday effects upon our beings we couldn't otherwise fathom, which we must depend upon revelation for; and because the Torah is rooted in prophetic revelation from G-d, which deems it inherently invaluable.

So at bottom we see that we need to learn how to worship G-d from within *and* from without. But we're to begin from without (by means of Torah) and then advance to serving Him from within.

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