

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 3:5

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

We said that we'd first have to be induced by G-d's Torah to learn how to worship Him and grow in our beings, and that we're to then allow ourselves to be induced to serve G-d from within. So we'll touch upon both now, but dwell upon self-inducement most especially.

Ibn Pakudah's plan, as we'd intimated, is for us to delve into Torah in order to arrive at emotional maturity, and intellectual and spiritual clarity; and in order to learn how to sloff off all worldly worries or concerns, to yearn to fulfill G-d's will instead of others', and to achieve true piety. And *then* -- which is admittedly a life's work but which can also be done in stages along with what follows -- we're to welcome in self-inducement. Since self-inducement based on immaturity and befuddlement is nothing other than self-absorption.

Ibn Pakudah depicts self-inducement as G-d's way of "reminding you ... how to come to know Him, and how to recognize all the signs of His wisdom" on your own. Which is to say that G-d does indeed inspire our beings; but He likewise waits for us to go on from there since, as it's implied, we need to be *reminded* to, despite our heartfelt wishes.

What can we draw on to prompt ourselves to self-inducement and further devotion? In Ibn Pakudah's words, our inherent "admiration for truth", our "preference for righteousness", our "recognition of the fact that the good should be rewarded", our wish "to live peaceably with others and to act kindly to them", and our ability to "forgive sinners who truly repent." For those inborn values stimulate us to strive for lofty traits like truth, righteousness, goodness, conciliation, and repentance. (After all, isn't it true that we never strive for things we don't admire, yet we go out of our way to achieve the things we do?)

The next, vital step would be to recall all the ways G-d has been good and generous to us in our life. The truth of the matter is that G-d has been so bounteously good to each one of us on various levels that we'd be hard pressed to recall all the instances. The stark reality of that fact alone would do a lot to spur us on to a deeper degree of devotion. After all, how else could we ever repay him for all He has done us?

But let's touch upon the why's and how's, now -- why we lapse into spiritual mediocrity (which we'd now equate with lackadaisical devotion to G-d), and how we can leap into spiritual excellence (i.e., enthusiastic devotion) instead.

We're taught that the two things that most especially hold us back are two very familiar traits of ours: our tendency to overindulge in things, and our out-and-out arrogance. How well the sensitive soul knows the problems involved in these traits of his or her's; and how deeply felt is the urge to rid oneself of them by degrees, until ultimately so!

In any event, we'd thus do well to concentrate on them first. For despite the struggles involved and the great effort required to undo these traits bit by bit (and no more quickly, lest we "relapse"), the spiritual rewards are great, fulsome, comprehensive, and eternal.

The obvious first step to overcoming overindulgence is to simply decide to begin doing without one nonessential item of food, drink, etc., at a time. And the first step in overcoming arrogance is to socialize a little less (since we tend to brag, demean others, fish for compliments, envy others, etc., in social circumstances).

But as we all know, that process is oftentimes daunting. The key lies in remembering the sort of so-very-needed tranquility and assurity that spiritual excellence brings us in the midst of a very noisome, hurtful, invasive world.

There's another point to concentrate upon, as well. Which is our stance when it comes to a relationship with G-d. The truth be known, many of us are very pleased to have G-d in our life *as long as He brings along gifts every time He visits*. It takes a mature soul to accept G-d *as G-d*, on His own terms.

The way to do that, we're advised, is to accept G-d's authority over you the way you'd expect others to accept our own authority over them. Which is to say, in a spirit of trust, love, loyalty, and synergy.

For you'd undoubtedly expect the person under your authority to respect you; to be faithful, industrious, acquiescent, grateful, dependable, and productive; to trust your judgment, and be willing to endure some hardships in the course of things; to resonate with your intentions and preferences, to be dedicated to the things you're dedicated to; and the like. Wouldn't it be logical to be all those things to Him under whose authority we all are? And isn't that the very epitome of devotion?

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