

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 3:6 - PART 1

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Here's a rule of thumb about the degree to which we're expected to worship G-d: the more generous G-d has been to us, the more expected and fitting it is to worship -- or thank -- Him. So let's now explore the often surprising depths to which G-d has gone to be generous to us, and determine how we can express our thanks.

The very most fundamental gift G-d has granted us all is *reality itself*. (How breathtaking a thought and how daunting! All of reality, everything we know and will ever or never know of -- connected to ourselves or completely removed from us-- simply would never exist were it not for the fact that G-d wants it to!)

The next greatest gift is life itself -- your life to you, mine to me. Life is indeed a gift and not at all a "right" or "entitlement"; each one of us could have been denied it and would, of course, never known otherwise. And the third greatest category of gifts are all the great and fulsome things we enunciated before (in the second gate).

Now, since *everyone* enjoys all such basic (albeit brimming and bounteous) favors, *all of humanity* is thus expected to worship G-d in the most fundamental of ways, at least. Which comes down to observing the most fundamental category of mitzvot, i.e., the clearly logical and only to-be-expected rules of decency like not murdering or stealing, not being promiscuous or worshipping idols, etc.

Fulfill those expectations in your life with the thought in mind that you're doing that in the service of G-d (rather than simply because it makes sense to) and you'll draw close to G-d in life and thereafter.

Others, like the Jewish Nation, have been granted greater favors than that (though it's indeed hard to imagine greater gifts yet than reality itself, life, and the plethora of everyday good and bounteous things we all enjoy; yet there are). After all G-d Almighty freed us from slavery, bestowed His Torah upon us, and granted us the Holy Land.

So we're expected to worship Him even more so; and we do that by fulfilling what's referred to as the "authority-based mitzvot" -- the things we do on authority alone, without an exclusively logical basis. Like observing the Sabbath the way we do, rather than as a simple and logical "day of rest"; eating kosher -- which has nothing to do with cleanliness, health, or the like; and etc. Fulfill those mitzvot as well as the aforementioned ones in order to show obeisance and gratitude to G-d and

you'll draw yet closer to Him.

Others yet within the Jewish Nation have been granted even more favors by G-d. Like each and every Cohan and Levite, as well as every descendant of the Royal House of David (though many don't know that they are that). They're favored over other Jews because they enjoy certain religious privileges and advantages.

As a consequence, they're expected to fulfill their own, extra mitzvot (which have to do with service in the Holy Temple and governance) and to thus worship G-d beyond the ways other Jews do. They, too, can benefit highly, both spiritually and materially, if they succeed.

And the same rule applies to each one of us as well. The more generous G-d has been to us, the more expected and fitting it is for us to worship Him. We'll delve into some of the particulars of that next time.

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