

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 3:6 - PART 2

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

As we pointed out last time, the more generous G-d has been to a person, the more fitting it is for him or her to worship and thus thank Him. We'll see now how that touches upon us personally when it comes to all the material and spiritual good G-d has granted us.

You'd be expected to worship G-d more intensely in the following instances, among many others: if G-d assigned you a leadership role in society in which you hold sway over public opinion and can affect change; if He bestowed wisdom upon you, deeper understanding, and the wherewithal to counsel others for their own good; or if He granted you spiritual excellence indeed, and allowed your search for it to come to fruition (for, the truth be known, many have sought spiritual excellence and not achieved it despite their efforts; for it too is a gift from G-d).

Serve Him more intensely in those or similar circumstances, we're told, and you'll continue to enjoy the good you'd been favored with. Grow lax in your gratitude, though, and you threaten your link to G-d. In fact, the early pious ones were always a little leery when good fortune came their way. After all, they reasoned, perhaps they couldn't do enough to thank G-d for all the good, which might jeopardize their relationship to Him in the end.

Now, let the sensitive soul take this last point to heart. For who among us who's honest to him- or herself wouldn't admit that he or she'd serve G-d more devoutly in those circumstances *just to have the good fortune continue*! After all, there's something of a hungry child in each one of us.

Ibn Pakudah's advice for us is to have in mind the fact that so human but petty a reaction to G-d and His favor is based on three phenomena in the human spirit. First, the fact that, at bottom, we're self-absorbed and pleasure-driven, as we'd already cited.

Second, that we just don't appreciate how much good G-d has done for us in so many large and small ways, and we assume the only way it will continue coming is if we ask for it! His point is that "G-d has already been so good to you -- in ways you know and in ways you don't know -- that by asking for more, you show that you've forgotten Who did all those good things for you in the first place."

And third, that we really don't know ourselves and are only scantily aware of what we do. While it's certainly important to recognize one's strengths and abilities, we tend to laud ourselves and to be proud of nearly everything we do. Take a deep breath or two, garner your loins, and dare to see

yourself for what you really are and you might be shocked by your oafishness and meanness.

It's our blindness to all that that has us think we deserve G-d's favor all the time, that has us become dumbfounded when we lack for something, and that keeps us wanting more and more. (After all, we "deserve" it...). And as if that wasn't enough, it actually has us believe that we're doing G-d a favor when we worship Him!

"If you'd only realize how much attention your Creator indeed pays to you, and how much better He knows what's good for you and what's not than you ever could" he says, "you'd have more and more gratitude ... and you'd get what you deserve rather than what you imagine you do."

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