

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 3:7

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Given all that's due G-d, considering all He's done for each one of us, and given that we often have trouble thanking Him in kind for it all, what's the "least" we can do?

First, it would be wise to never use the very gifts, talents, or circumstances He's given you as means to rebel against Him. (Could there ever be a greater instance of "biting the hand that feeds you"?) Yet we're very often guilty of that. Who among us, for example, doesn't use his or her G-d-given ability to speak in order to say untoward things? There's much to be said about this point alone, but we'll go on.

It would help to always cite G-d's kindnesses to you, and to give Him direct credit for it by thanking Him personally, and praising Him for it all. Simple statements like "Thank G-d" and "G-d willing" go a long way toward acknowledging His presence in your life and affirming your gratitude. (We've always been struck by the ironic fact that while nonbelievers often cite the name of G-d -- though in very inappropriate contexts -- believers often don't cite Him at all!)

It wouldn't do to belittle or to make fun of what He's granted you. For while many take doing that as a sign of humility -- as if they themselves weren't taking credit for the gifts G-d has given them -- the astute person would realize that demeaning the gift demeans the Giver, and they'd do all they could to avoid doing that).

We'd also do well to realize that the favor has come to us from G-d Himself -- albeit through one "emissary" or another. For G-d has many agents to bring about what he wants; and things often derive from the most unlikely sources, simply because G-d has chosen to go that route rather than another, for His own reasons. So while we're certainly expected to thank the people "seemingly" responsible for the favors done us, we're to nonetheless "wink" at G-d in the background, and remember to thank Him as well.

We wouldn't want to brag about the favor done us, about the role we might have played in it, or about how much we thought we deserved it. For that, too, would demean the gift and its Giver; and we'd be guilty of petty one-upmanship.

We'd be wrong to think that the only way the favors granted us would persist would be if we keep our "shoulders to the wheel" and do everything we can to sustain them. But, again -- it's not about us, it's about G-d in our life.

It would certainly be a mistake to make fun of or belittle anyone who doesn't enjoy the same advantages you do. In fact, G-d may have granted you what you have just to "test your mettle" and see if you'd react that way.

And it would certainly be important for you to remain steadfast to G-d and acquiesce to His wishes.

As an aside, it would also be essential to strive ever higher, spiritually. Ironically, there are two diametrically opposite ways to do that: by associating with those lesser than you, and with those greater than you. The "lesser" people you're to associate with are those with less wealth than you. You're to be there for them emotionally, personally, and monetarily. The greater people you're to associate with are those more advanced than you in their souls. You'd do well to draw from their wisdom and righteousness. And it would also be important for you to take nothing for granted.

If you indeed act as we've indicated, G-d is likely to continue granting you goodness, we're told. But if He doesn't, Heaven forfend, then there'd be two reasons why: either in order to undo one of your past wrongdoings, or to allow you an even greater reward in The World to Come.

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