

# THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 3:9

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

Since we addressed the profound notion of free will last time, let's go deeper yet now and delve into the stuff we're made of, and the meaning of our lives. Now, whole books can be culled from the rich mine of wisdom Ibn Pakudah provides us with in this chapter (like so many others). So take heart if you find yourself dazzled and a little overwhelmed. The best advice we'd offer would be to reread it from time to time and to savor its delights again and again.

The truth of the matter, as Ibn Pakudah puts it, is that we're strangers passing through this world, and native to the far-off, unearthly world we originated from. (In fact, it would do us well to see things in that light in our travails, and to keep "home" in mind when we interact with others, plan for the future, try to maintain our bearings and try keep a perspective on things, and when we set our goals.) And it would only be expected of us to love the world we find ourselves in now, yet long for home.

We're said to have been created out of the same "nothingness" -- the same etheric, diaphanous, and abstruse stuff -- the angels were created out of. And we were chosen to have the wherewithal to draw close to G-d.

But we'd have to accomplish three things in our lives if we're ever to achieve that great goal. In Ibn Pakudah's words, we'd have to "remove the veil of foolishness" surrounding us (which the sensitive, honest soul knows of only too well); to "pass tests set up to determine whether we'll serve G-d or not"; and we'd have to endure some hardships that will be sent to test our spiritual mettle in order "to determine whether or not we can serve G-d" in the depths of our beings and thus achieve the level of those exalted souls who'd undergone all that before and passed.

We're depicted as having been granted five "gates" through which the world outside must pass in order to reach our inner beings: our eyes, ears, nose, tongue and hands -- each with its own "gatekeeper" of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. (Indeed, without them we'd be without access to anything outside of ourselves, and could neither grow in our beings nor delight in G-d's wonders.)

The "palace" that is our body is said to have been granted various body-part "administrators" and "functionaries"; our minds are said to have been granted two opposing "advisors" -- reason vs. enticement -- which are both free to express their opinions, and that we've also been assigned "scribes" that maintain "records" of everything we do, deep in our beings.

We're comprised of a slew of emotional "employees" and "attendants" that make-up our inner lives,

including "happiness and worry, gladness and sorrow, memory and forgetfulness, wisdom and ignorance, strength and timidity, generosity and selfishness, righteousness and wrongfulness, bashfulness and brazenness, hope and fear, love and hate, pleasure and pain, arrogance and modesty, control and acquiescence" which we can channel in any direction we'd like, but which it would be wise to use in the pursuit of spiritual excellence.

Given all that we have within us and given the great wealth all around us, we're warned not to be "bewitched" by the more frivolous things of the world. Ibn Pakudah likens them to "the afterbirth to a newborn, or an eggshell to a chick", in that they're far from essential, and they serve a limited purpose after which they're superfluous. We're advised to make use of the better of our two "advisors" -- reason -- when it comes to these things, to make the service of G-d our prime motivation and to repent when we go off the mark, and we'll indeed achieve spiritual excellence.

Do that, we're told, and "when your days of trial and tribulation in this world are over, the Creator will command all the aforementioned gates, gatekeepers, servants and employees to leave you, and all the bonds and affiliations between your self and your body will be undone. You'll then return to your original state of being", which is to say, you'll go home again in good standing.

[Subscribe](#) to *Spiritual Excellence* and receive the class via e-mail.