

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 4:4 - PART 1

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

We'll now delve into just how to apply our trust in G-d's judgments in the *seven* most significant areas of everyday life, and we'll do that at some length.

The first area we'll concentrate on is our physical circumstances. This touches upon issues of life and death itself, earning a living, health and well-being, and a lot more. Ibn Pakudah suggests that when it comes to such overarching life circumstances we'd do best to forge ahead with what G-d has given us and to trust His decisions about them. Which is to say that we're to be "satisfied with our lot in life".

But that's so often difficult to do -- most especially in modernity when we're pressured to "consume", i.e., use, use up, and go on to use something else. Ibn Pakudah offers that we *can* be satisfied, though, once we realize that we can only have what G-d planned for us to have, and that what we have is ours because it matches our makeup and circumstances, and is for our ultimate good.

If you're concerned about your livelihood then understand that "just as life, death, illness and health are in no one's hands but G-d's", Ibn Pakudah writes, "your livelihood ... and all your other physical needs are in His hands as well". Do the best that you can in all instances, but know that in the end G-d will do what He deems best.

He then adds a critical point -- that though it's true that all the important things are determined by G-d, you're still-and-all to earn a living. Don't reason that since G-d will provide for you one way or the other, that you needn't bother working. For that would be entirely off the mark (as we'll see below).

It also wouldn't do to expose yourself to danger and engage in risky things either, cynically depending on G-d's decree in that area. For you'd be culpable for your own death should you fail, even though you'd have technically died as a result of G-d's decree. And even if you manage to escape harm, you're still not to pin your hopes on a miracle.

At bottom we're counseled to be like "the farmer who ploughs his field and removes its thorns, who sows and irrigates it when there's no rain even though he trusts that G-d will make the earth fertile, will guard it from disaster, increase its crop and bless it." But why would the farmer do that? For he'd know, as Ibn Pakudah puts it, "that it would be *wrong* to leave the land fallow and unsown" based on his trust in G-d's abilities.

His statement here that it would be "wrong" to leave things to G-d's decrees alone touches on a vital point about how to trust in G-d and live in the world at the same time. And it seems to imply the following.

G-d has indeed placed us in the world and granted us independent being, despite His overarching sovereignty. And He also created a world that's chockfull of needs. Now, had He not wanted us to play a part in fulfilling those needs, He would never have created us. After all, He didn't have to. So we're indeed to engage in the world despite G-d's full presence here and His masterful control over it. And it would be *wrong* to scorn our role here and to depend on G-d's decrees alone, for G-d doesn't want us to do that.

With that in mind, Ibn Pakudah points out, we're to go about engaging in our life's-work knowing "that no particular means of earning a living itself can help or hurt" on its own. It would also only make sense to "avoid being especially pleased with any career in particular or to try to enhance it" -- which is to say, to take it *overly* -seriously. Since that would weaken your trust in G-d.

In the end we're to thank G-d for providing us with a living. And if we have an unprofitable day we're to realize that we either perhaps already earned what we were meant to that day, or that we might come upon income another way. We'd do well to realize that "when your profession matches your personality and stature" and you're thus doing what you're meant to do, that you're to apply yourself to it and trust that G-d will always be with you.

in fact, the same goes for our health and well-being. "Trust G-d when it comes to all that," we're told, "yet always try to remain healthy by the usual means". But we're not to place our trust in those means per se, only in G-d's will. For G-d can certainly restore our health with or without medicine, and could even cure us with poison if He wanted to! So always place your trust in Him.

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