

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 4:4 - PART 5

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

The fifth area in which we're to trust in G-d's decisions also has to do with mitzvot we fulfill. But it focuses on those mitzvot that have specific bearing on our relationship to others.

They include giving charity, tithing your income, teaching others Torah, reproaching wrongdoers, returning items entrusted to you, keeping secrets, speaking and acting kindly, honoring your parents, counseling people about G-d's goodness, having compassion for the poor, accepting others' reproaches, etc.

Now, these sorts of mitzvot can be very complex sometimes. Because not only do they involve your doing things, they also involve your reactions to what others do to *you* as a consequence. After all, there are a lot of self-serving reasons to do those kinds of things, and people react to them in many different ways. So it turns out that your *intentions* for giving and those reactions speak volumes about your spiritual station and your trust in G-d.

The initial thing to remember is that all you can do is decide to do the good deed and set out to, as we said last time. Since only G-d can have it come to fruition or not. So the person who trusts in G-d's decisions would indeed decide to give charity, for example, set out to, and trust that the outcome is in G-d's hands.

But there are other elements as well. And that's where our intentions -- that is, the thinking *behind* our decision to offer charity -- come in. For spiritual excellence would demand that we do good for others' sakes, not our own. Which is to say, that we not look for the glory of being generous, the praise, the gratitude, the indebtedness. But rather that we be generous for two reasons alone: to help the other person, and to draw close to G-d.

To that end, it would be best to do good discreetly and even anonymously -- certainly without fanfare.

But that may be hard. After all, who doesn't want to be recognized as goodhearted and generous? And which sensitive soul isn't aware of how often we do things for just that reason? And so Ibn Pakudah ends with the sage advice that from now on whenever G-d presents us with a "chance to do a mitzvah, (that we) consider that a favor from Him" -- an opportunity to help others out and draw close to G-d Himself, rather than a chance to "shine", as we'd put it.

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