

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 4:7

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Since trusting G-d's decisions in our life deepens our faith so, and is so helpful and comfortable, we'd have to wonder what prevents us from simply doing it. So we're told that a few things do. We've encountered some before, like the mistaken belief we have that G-d isn't really in utter command of the universe, our being absorbed in the pursuit of pleasure, our being used to all the good around us and taking it for granted, our not understanding the ultimate good that suffering renders, our sense of entitlement in the face of all the good granted us, etc.

But there are others, too. One of the things that keeps us back from trusting G-d is the fact that we just don't realize how loving and benevolent He is. Many of us picked up the notion that G-d is vengeful and unfair. Some of that comes from superficial readings of Torah verses that seem to suggest things like that, or by statements made by Anti-Semitic religious zealots in centuries past, and the like. But the truth of the matter is that G-d is good, loving, benevolent, forbearing, and merciful. (After all, how could we be expected to love G-d as we're commanded to if He's not "lovable"?)

There's another, more subtle reason why we find it hard trusting G-d. It's based on the fact that we don't look beneath the surface of things, and we thus don't catch sight of G-d's role in our day-to-day lives. Ibn Pakudah presents a parable to illustrate that which is very apropos. It seems there once was a king who deemed it necessary to fine a certain citizen, and he ordered his viceroy to do it. The viceroy ordered a certain official to do it, who then ordered a lower-ranking official to, who himself then ordered a rather low-ranking official, who ordered some underlings to finally do it, which they did by subpoenaing him.

Ibn Pakudah underscores the fact that the poor soul who'd been subpoenaed certainly wouldn't blame the subpoena itself for his travails, but he *would* blame the underlings who presented it to him. Yet as we know, they couldn't really be held responsible -- nor could the lower-ranking officials or the viceroy. It's the king alone who instigated the order, hence he's responsible for what happened.

The point of the story is that many things happen to us that we resent or wish we could have avoided, which we either blame the "proximate cause" for (i.e., the thing that carried out the last step, like the subpoena in the story above) or the next-to-proximate cause (the underlings). We fail to look deeper in the background and to find G-d's will there. And failing to see Him in the day-to-day tends

to have us forget Him and thus not trust Him either.

Ibn Pakudah points out that we learn to trust others to "be there for us", as the phrase goes, in the process of maturation, and that trusting G-d is thus the greatest degree of trust one can ever come to learn. After all, we learn to trust our parents when we're young, we then learn to trust our employers as we grow older and others -- until we "begin to see how imperfect all people are and how they themselves all need G-d", as he puts it -- and we then learn to trust and rely on Him alone for all things.

If we're fortunate enough to have learned our lessons well, we'll reach the sublime point where we only want for ourselves what G-d wants for us and we come to "surrender to G-d's will, and to succumb body and soul to His judgment without wondering whether one thing is better than another, and without choosing one situation over another". In fact, some even manage to "understand why they were created and placed in this impermanent world, ... (and) abhor this world and its circumstances" as a consequence. They then "flee to G-d in thought, soul and in body; to delight in dwelling on Him in solitude; to become bored with every thought but of G-d's greatness" and to want nothing better than to "draw closer to G-d" and more.

We'll touch upon some of these last themes as the work progresses, which are rather recondite and exalted. But the idea is that trusting G-d in our lives leads to great delight and great liberation. But we get ahead of ourselves. In any event, "the overriding principle in trust is this" we're told: "The more you know about G-d and the more you believe He guides you and provides for you so well and to your advantage, the more you'll trust Him".

So we'll end this vital section of "The Duties of the Heart" with Ibn Pakudah's prayer that "G-d in His mercy include us among those who trust Him and surrender themselves outwardly and inwardly to His judgment".

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