

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

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

We'll now touch upon the sublime and recondite topic of trusting G-d. Trusting G-d means conceding to His judgment about the course of our lives as well as the course of the world at large, even when events defy our own better judgment. It calls for a leap of faith in many instances, and it's often not for the weak of heart. Nonetheless, since we're told that trusting G-d's judgment leads to a sense of security and confidence, peace and tranquility, and that it eases the human burden, it obviously has its benefits and is indeed a better option than it might seem to be.

Though Ibn Pakudah doesn't delve into it, we'd do well to differentiate between believing in G-d and trusting Him, since we spoke of the "leap of faith" involved in it above.

To qualify as a believer, I'd merely have to be convinced that G-d is the Creator and that the universe didn't come about "out of the blue". I wouldn't need to believe anything else. Needless to say, though, that's a rather anemic and shallow level of belief. A deeper one would entail my believing that G-d somehow or other involves Himself in the day-to-day workings of the universe, rather than leaving things to the machinations of dry, raw reality. A deeper-yet faith would entail my believing that G-d interfaces with the universe on a detailed level, and that He in fact cares about, even loves His creatures. And the *deepest* level of faith would entail my trusting His judgments about things -- my life and self included.

Ibn Pakudah's first point about trust is simple enough. It's that we *all* trust in certain things. Which is to say that we all have things we rely on and go to when all else fails. His second point, though, is more daunting. He declares that if you *don't* trust G-d, and trust in something or someone else instead, "G-d will then put you under the care of the one you trust".

What that implies is that if I believe that someone other than G-d Almighty has the power to control my surroundings enough to save me from danger or to maintain my well-being that I call out to him, reach out for him, or "know" he'll save me one way or another -- then I'll indeed *have* to depend on him, and can only hope for the best. Whereas if I trust in the fact that G-d is indeed in control of things, and I call or "reach" out to Him, and indeed know that He alone can save me, then He'll take me under His wings. That goes a long way toward explaining everyday examples of success and failure, hubris and humility, the day-to-day life of people with deep and abiding faith as opposed to that of nonbelievers, and a lot more.

It also implies that if I truly trust G-d, then I don't have to seek anyone else's approval, and I

consequently don't have to flatter or impress anyone or agree with everything he or she says, since there's nothing he or she could do or say that would ultimately affect me. And it likewise denotes that I'm thus liberated from the "straight-jacket of the need to please others" and the "burden of needing to thank or repay them", as Ibn Pakudah puts it.

But I'd enjoy certain other advantages as well -- both material and spiritual. We'll dwell upon the material ones now and explore the spiritual ones next time.

If I truly trust that it's G-d alone who provides for me, that He cares about my well-being, that He hears my prayers, and that His judgments are just and wise, then I'm at a distinct material advantage over others who don't.

For while they'd need all kinds of specific things to succeed which may or may not be available; while they'd have to do things that would threaten their well-being or their very lives; while they'd always have to be suspicious of others; while they'd be dependent upon the laws of supply and demand, upon the availability of things, and upon government regulations; while they'd have to fear their enemies and those who'd want to steal their ideas; while they'd have to hope for good health, depend on others for their food and living situation, and struggle with the idea that while what they have now may serve them well indeed but that it will all be of no avail when they're gone, etc. -- I wouldn't have to worry about any of that. For I trust in G-d.

I could calmly, tranquilly, and happily rely on the fact that G-d will somehow or another see to it that I'm provided for, "just as He sustains the fetus in its mother's womb, the chick in its egg, the bird in the air, the fish in the sea, and the tiny, weak ant", as Ibn Pakudah puts it. And I could rely on the fact that He'll protect my health, well-being, and safety -- both in this world and the next.

But, don't get us wrong here. No one is suggesting that we all simply sit back with our arms crossed and "wait for the check to come in the mail"! We're certainly expected to do our part to succeed. The difference lies in the fact that the person who trusts G-d's decisions would know Who's in charge at bottom, no matter what he encounters. And he'd also know that we'll always be given what we need in life if we trust G-d -- though we might not necessarily get "all the trimmings".

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