

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 5:3

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

One of the aims of this gate, we discovered, was to learn how to "purge our minds and hearts of the confusions that plague them". Well, it seems that a lot of that confusion is rooted in our tendency to "be hypocritical and to flatter others," as Ibn Pakudah already pointed out. And indeed, the sensitive soul can't help but notice how much of a short life he or she spends trying to please and impress everyone else and to ward off their displeasure in just those ways, and how befuddling and bedeviling that all is.

So if our aim is to draw close to G-d and to commit ourselves to Him, then we'd have to come to the point where we care less about what others think and more about what He does, the way we care more about our family and their needs than we do about others'. That's certainly not to say that we're to overlook others or do things with zealous disregard and "pious" disdain in our longing to get close to G-d in the face of all those others vying for our attention. Only that we know for a fact before Whom we're standing within the throng, and that we do whatever we do with Him in mind primarily.

Dedicating your *inner* life to G-d is easy enough, since you needn't buck any opposition or ridicule there, where G-d knows what you're feeling and thinking. It's the outward, manifest things that we'd be expected to do for G-d's sake alone -- the ones everyone sees and judges. Because that's the more demanding realm, it's where any impressions we'd hope to make start to form, and it's where we're challenged to be honest about whom we hope to please.

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