

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 5:5 - PART 10

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Perhaps the greatest philosophical dilemma a believing Jew struggles with is knowing where his or her own input ends and G-d's begins. In other words, where does what we do actually dovetail with what G-d does *through* us? For if we have free will as we're taught we do, and if G-d is nonetheless All Powerful and All Knowing, and He compels us to do this or that -- then where do our efforts and His begin and end?

We delved into this before (in 3:8) but we'll discuss it again here since it touches on our struggles with the yetzer harah.

After all, as we've found, the yetzer harah's main objective is to draw us away from growth and spiritual excellence, which calls for a lot of *personal effort*. So if it could convince us that nothing that we do matters in the end since G-d is behind it all anyway, that would seem to be a crafty way for it to get us to slacken off and to "let the chips fall where they may". But as we'll see, the yetzer harah is very duplicitous when it comes to all this; so we'd do well to lay out its arguments then offer Ibn Pakudah's responses.

If the yetzer harah "sees you being negligent in your Divine service and inclining toward sin" Ibn Pakudah points out, "it will try to defend the case for Divine compulsion". That's to say, if you come to slacken off in your worship, your yetzer harah will have you rationalize it by saying that G-d's will is behind it. "After all" you'd rationalize, "if the Creator really wanted you to serve Him, He'd have compelled ... you to" (as Ibn Pakudah words it).

On the other hand if it sees you slackening off in your *career* or the like, it will argue for the idea of free will and for how important it is to do everything you can to succeed, and it will take you to task for being lazy.

The truth be known, both free will and Divine compulsion are valid, depending on the context. But the yetzer harah tries to take the side of the argument that best suits its needs at the time. (In fact we *often* tend to believe things because they suit our needs rather than because they're true. But that clearly goes far beyond the subject at hand, though we'd all be wise to reflect upon the truth of it in our own lives.)

Ibn Pakudah counsels that it would be best for us to assume that we're free to do as we will when it comes to our Divine service -- and to thus be proactive about our spiritual growth. On the other hand, though, we're to assume that G-d alone controls our circumstances when it comes to our

careers and the like, and to thus trust His decisions.

This series is dedicated to the memory of Yitzchak Hehrsh ben Daniel z"l, and Sara Rivka bas Yaakov Dovid, z"l.

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