

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 6:2

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

The truth of the matter is that we "surrender" ourselves to others -- that is, we subsume our wills to others' wills -- all the time. In fact, it comes so naturally to us that we often don't notice it.

(To be sure there are people who are so feisty and self-assertive that they seem never to "give in" and always appear to do whatever they want to. But it's clear that they're the greatest "surrenderers" of all in that they always acquiesce to the demands of their feisty side, the poor souls!)

Ibn Pakudah reports that there are actually two instances in which we're very often willing to subsume our own wills to another's, and one which is rarer but the best of all. The first two are when we're intimidated by others, and when circumstances demand it. The more uncommon yet laudable instance is when we want to draw close to G-d.

Surrendering to another's will because he or she intimidates you is a mistake and is based on a character flaw, we're told. It's one of the unhealthy examples of surrender we spoke of before, and is actually the worst of them. Ibn Pakudah depicts it as "a personality flaw" on the part of the person succumbing to it that "could have been avoided but wasn't" only because its victim didn't know how to.

He declares (and quite stridently, too) that "it's rooted in ignorance" and that it's endemic to people "who lack knowledge of and an appreciation for their own beings and self-worth". And he describes it as a "weakness and blindness of spirit ... (that) prevents us from seeing what's good for us". So we're obviously not being advised to practice that sort of surrender.

The second instance (surrendering to others when circumstances demand it) is a common-enough phenomenon. Certain hapless circumstances simply *force* us to succumb to others' wishes, as when we're ill, when we depend on someone for a livelihood or a favor, when we're in dire straits, etc. We have very little choice in those instances but to subsume our will, swallow our pride, and agree to the other's demands -- no matter how uncomfortable we'd ordinarily be with them. These instances are so commonplace and reasonable that they stand out as the best examples of everyday, often healthy surrender.

After all, they're the times we force ourselves to allow a doctor, a relative, an attorney, and the like to do things to or for us that we'd never ordinarily stand for, simply because we really haven't a choice. For the most part, though, these are temporary or only occasional instances. And when left to our own devices again we quickly turn around and assert our own wills. In fact, we could learn a lot

about healthy surrender from these examples.

But the instance in which we're most encouraged to surrender ourselves is one that touches upon our encounters with G-d. We're to surrender our will to His (and to those who teach us how to draw close to Him) *all the time*, Ibn Pakudah underscores. And we're to always approach His Presence humbly and in a spirit of compliance. It's this instance that serves as the thrust of this gate.

Ibn Pakudah tells us that one who has managed to achieve this draws closer and closer to G-d all the time. So we'll expand upon this in the following chapters.

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