

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, INTRODUCTION - PART 1

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Though the thrust of this work will center on the ways our *heart* can best serve G-d, it would be silly of us to altogether skirt past the mind as if it hardly mattered. For in fact were told that the greatest gift G-d has granted us beyond mere conscious awareness of things is our ability to reason and to acquire knowledge. In fact, our mind is termed the life of our spirits and the light of our intellects.

Without it we couldnt hope to succeed on any level in our search for spiritual excellence, despite our very best and most heart-felt intentions.

But there are many, many things to think about and know. There are things wed have to know in order to accomplish everyday sorts of things, other things to know to accomplish some more exalted things, and yet other things to know to achieve our *ultimate goal*-- drawing closer to G-d. And it would do us well to know the difference, and where our priorities are to lie.

So were told that the knowledge of more practical things, as well as of even more exalted things that nonetheless dont directly touch on our relationship to G-d are at best secondary to the kind that would draw us closer to Him.

And that the latter sort of reasoning and knowledge only comes to us when we delve into the kinds of things wed need to know to comprehend G-ds Torah. For while other forms of knowledge and insight certainly make life a lot easier and help us carry out our G-d-given functions in the world, only the latter type directly help us achieve our ultimate goal.

As well discover in the course of this work, Ibn Pakudahs underlying points will prove to be that the sorts of things well be concentrating on here, in The Duties of the Heart, will indeed either directly or soon-enough help us in our search for spiritual excellence. And that there are three sorts of **Torah** knowledge as well: knowledge of less-essential things like proper cantillation, grammar, and story-line; knowledge of more exalted things like the physical mitzvot (commandments); and knowledge of ultimate issues, if you will-- the duties of the heart.

But theres a hitch. For despite the fact that certain studies directly nourish our beings and lead head-on to spiritual excellence, wed still-and-all have to engage in them for the **right reasons** to achieve our goal.

Wed need to avoid delving into them for material gain, in order to advance our careers, or to impress

others. Our impetus should be achieving spiritual excellence for its own sake, and thus drawing close to G-d.

After all, wed be touching upon some of the very secrets of the universe, and it wouldnt do to delve into it for selfish, self-serving reasons!

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