

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, INTRODUCTION - PART 2

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

After having expounded on the intellect that G-d granted us to fulfill His wishes and to thus grow close to Him, Ibn Pakudah now points out something else.

It is that not only are we capable of drawing close to G-d with our minds. We can also do that by means of the Torah which He transmitted to us prophetically through Moses, and by means of the oral traditions passed down by the prophets and elaborated upon by our sages.

For as is known, the Torah and all its accouterments derives from a series of prophetic revelations, starting with Moses at Mount Sinai, onward to the revelations attained by the later prophets which were then passed on to the sages, who then gingerly expanded upon those traditions to suit the needs of time, place, and individual.

But the Torah tradition itself can be broken down into two elements: what G-d bids us to do physically and manifestly to draw close to Him, and what He asks us to do *within*, in our hearts and minds. And each touches upon a category of mitzvot.

The more manifest kinds of mitzvot can also be broken down into two kinds: perfectly logical ones (like not stealing or committing adultery, and the like), and not at all logical ones (like not eating meat with milk, not wearing wool and linen together, and the like). We'll find, though, that the duties of the heart will all prove to be quite logical and explicable.

We'll also find that in both camps-- physical, manifest mitzvot and inner ones-- there are imperatives (things were charged to do) and prohibitions (things were charged *not* to do).

Now, the various imperatives and prohibitions connected with physical mitzvot are well known, so we needn't delve into them here. Instead, our task will be to lay out the *inner* imperatives and prohibitions, since they're less known. And we'll in fact be doing that in the course of this whole work.

In short, though, inner imperatives include: believing that the world has a Creator who created it from nothing and is utterly unique; accepting His Oneness; serving Him in your heart; reflecting on His wondrous creations; trusting Him; surrendering yourself to Him; fearing Him; dreading and being abashed before Him knowing that He observes you both outside and in; yearning to fulfill His wishes; dedicating your deeds to His Name; and loving Him and those who themselves love Him.

And inner prohibitions would touch on making sure we don't engage in the opposite of the above (by not believing in a Creator, not believing Him to be One, etc.), as well as not coveting; not acting out of

vengeance or bearing a grudge; not contemplating sin, yearning to commit one, and deciding to commit one, and the like.

Needless to say, G-d alone knows if we're successful or not in our inner devotions. For only He can read our hearts. In fact, that will prove to be a major factor in the duties of the heart. Since engaging in them usually wins us no favor with others (as more external mitzvot might, which we might impress others with). They only win us favor in G-d's eyes, and thus they're uniquely able to draw us close to Him.

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