

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, INTRODUCTION - PART 4

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Continuing to wonder why a book dedicated to explicating the inner, heart-based mitzvot hadn't been written before he set out to write *The Duties of the Heart*, Ibn Pakudah thought that it was because there really weren't many heart-based mitzvot.

But he discovered that while there's a finite number of physical mitzvot (613, in fact), there's a near infinite number of heart-based ones, when you consider how capable they are of coloring and infusing nearly *everything* we do.

He then wondered if perhaps everyone was already *so* aware of and so committed to fulfilling these mitzvot that it was simply unnecessary to lay them out in book form.

But to his dismay he knew (just as most of us know, and only too well) that the great preponderance of people simply don't strive for spiritual excellence. And that when they *do* do the sorts of things that benefit us all, they often do it for self-serving ends--perhaps to appear intelligent, caring, or pious to others, etc.

Such individuals not only do the right thing for the wrong reasons, they also bypass the need to concentrate on certain fundamentals of the faith we'll be touching on later.

And they include: faith in G-d's Oneness; whether were supposed to delve into the import and implications of it on our own, or whether it's enough to depend upon the tradition for that; and whether were supposed to say "G-d is One" the way most people do, without really knowing what they're saying, or whether were to research the matter on our own.

Many sages, though, have dedicated the requisite time and energy needed to dwell on these points, as well as other duties of the heart. In fact, the story's told of a certain sage who would only associate with others until midday, when he'd seclude himself and say, "Bring on the hidden light!", referring to the duties of the heart.

And it's them that we should emulate.

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