

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, INTRODUCTION - PART 5

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Ibn Pakudah introduced a second theme last week, aside from the original one, which was why heart-based mitzvot weren't explored in the past. And that second theme touches upon the question of whether it's wiser to explain certain more abstract articles of the faith (that don't touch upon actual practice, i.e., halacha) *on our own*, or whether it's better to depend entirely upon the explanations we've inherited.

And he remarked that while some of his contemporaries thought it best to simply draw and rely upon our spiritual heritage when it came to such things, Ibn Pakudah himself thought we were *obliged* to delve into them on our own-- if we have the acuity needed.

In fact, he likened anyone who's able to delve into those things on his own but doesn't to the poor servant of the king who was charged with shirking his duties.

It seems there had once been a rather intelligent and capable servant of a great king who was ordered to handle a very special assignment. He was to collect all the taxes from the people, to categorize the funds he received, and to allot whatever was needed for each purpose.

The servant was rather lazy or perhaps naive, though. And he let the people convince him to take their word for what they'd paid out, and to allow them to decide which causes they were to set aside for. The king found out soon enough, and he ordered the servant to come before him.

How much did you collect, and what did you allot it for? asked the king. The servant was dumbfounded and couldn't say a thing. After all, he simply didn't know. And he was arrested. Not for embezzlement so much as of dereliction of duty. After all, all he did wrong was to allow others to do his work for him, when he was perfectly capable of doing it on his own.

The same goes for you charges our author. If you're knowledgeable and clever enough, and you're capable of understanding what you've been taught already by our great sages, who explicated the more abstract fundamentals of our faith-- you're obliged to make use of all of that to draw conclusions on your own.

His point is clear, though, that you have to *know* what the sages passed down to us in the form of the electric, light-studded, coalesced doctrine we have. And only then can you-- and *must* you-- put two and two together and offer cogent insights of your own. Again, though, this doesn't touch on practical halacha so much as on the haunting abstract ideas the tradition offers.

As the Torah puts it, "Should something too enigmatic for you to judge occur in differing bloods, laws, plagues... which is to say, when it comes to practise and halacha, youre obliged to act according to how you are instructed" (Deuteronomy 17:8-10) without recourse to novel interpretation or insight.

The implication though according to Ibn Pakudah is that when it comes to things like the nature of G-d's Oneness, about His various names and characteristics, about a particular principle of the faith like serving G-d, trusting Him, surrendering to Him, dedicating your deeds to His name, ridding your good deeds of untoward influences, repenting, fearing Him, loving Him, being abashed in His presence, being introspective for the sake of His name, and so on, that youre to delve into these matters in light of the traditions, but on your own.

Its important to underscore the point, though, that study of the tradition would naturally come first. Otherwise your conclusions would be purely personal and conjectural. But that the person who can arrive at clear, logical conclusions after having seeped himself in the Tradition should delve into the matter on his own as deeply as possible, and arrive at as many proofs (i.e., of the underlying veracity of the tradition) as he possibly can.

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