

# THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, INTRODUCTION - PART 8 (CONCLUSION)

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

Ibn Pakudah finishes his introduction by detailing the process he used in writing "The Duties of the Heart". He first broke the various duties down into ten major ones, which he presented as "gates" or major sections. He decided to include the following elements in each gate: a working definition of each duty, a laying out of its composite parts and implications, and a listing of the sorts of things that would deter us from being successful at that duty. And he wrote it all in "straightforward, everyday, and accessible language that would be (easily) understood."

The wise reader would use this very same process in his or her own search for spiritual excellence. After all, it would do us all well to clearly, simply, and succinctly break our spiritual goals down into categories; to then define our terms fully, in order to know what we're actually addressing (and what not); to lay out the details of what we're to do; and to consider the day to day implications of that in our lives.

Ibn Pakudah then explained that he used logic and common sense to explicate and justify his original thoughts, but that he was sure to "back them up" with Torah verses and citations from the Talmud that either said outright what he himself was pointing out or alluded to it.. And he cited the words of non-Jewish sages as well.

He began by addressing what he depicted as "the greatest and most fundamental" duty of the heart-- accepting G-d's Oneness. So he called the first gate "The Gate of the Wholehearted Acceptance of the Oneness of G-d". As we'll find, though, this gate won't just touch on accepting the fact that there's only one G-d. It will go to great lengths to explain the whole notion of G-d's Oneness and Perfection.

He called the second gate "The Gate of Reflection Upon Created Things" because it concentrates upon catching sight of G-d's Presence in the world. The third one became "The Gate of Service to G-d", and it explains the how and the wherefores of Divine Service. The fourth is "The Gate of Trust", which dwells upon trusting in G-d in our daily lives. The fifth is "The Gate of Directing Our Actions to G-d's Name", which delves into the area of complete and concentrated dedication to His Presence. Sixth is "The Gate of Surrender" and it offers details on surrendering one's own wishes and self to the Divine Presence. Seventh is "The Gate of Repentance" and it details the process of returning to G-d when we'd turned our backs to Him. Eighth is "The Gate of Introspection" because it delves into the

subject of self-awareness. Ninth is "The Gate of Abstention" because it lays out the areas in which we'd do well to practise some form of abstention (though it's not the Jewish way to be utterly ascetic, no matter how much one dedicates his life to G-d). And the tenth and last one is termed "The Gate of the Love of G-d" because it dwells upon the sublime idea of loving G-d Almighty

Ibn Pakudah then turned to each one of us and said, "as you read my book brother and abide by it, use it as a reminder; and assess your soul honestly with it. Read it again and again, draw conclusions from it, and affix it to your heart and mind." For after all, this book is a living text-- one that demands that we take it to heart and incorporate it in our lives and in our search for spiritual excellence.

He then presented the parable we cited earlier on in this series that touches upon concentrating on those elements of our Holy Torah that delve into the The Duties of the Heart most of all. And he concluded his introduction with a prayer "that G-d teach us how to serve Him", which should be our heart's underlying prayer, too.

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