

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 10:2

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Understand that people love G-d for very different reasons. A few love Him for some quite self-serving purposes, believe it or not; while others love Him for more altruistic motives. We'll offer the first sort (because it's far more common, the truth be known), then we'll touch upon the latter, because something deep in the soul longs to know what drives good people to do the things they do to grow close to G-d.

Put bluntly, many hapless souls love (or better said, *act like* they love) G-d in the belief that doing that will somehow "inspire" G-d to do them favors or take kind notice of them, or that it will one way or another persuade Him to overlook their sins and accept them ... as if G-d could be bribed, compelled, or coerced to change His mind! But that's clearly not the sort of longing for His presence and wanting nothing better than to cling to Him that defines loving G-d; what it is, is an errant and insincere form of self-worship.

Others, though, worship and love G-d *for Himself*: in full realization of His greatness and exaltedness, and for no other reason (much the way some would love a great thinker for his or her mind, for example, knowing full well that their love would never serve their own ends).

But how do we do that on a practical level? After all, we're all challenged outright to love G-d "with all (our) heart, all (our) soul, and all (our) might" (Deuteronomy 6:5)! So what then does that mean, and how do we live our lives by its lead?

At bottom, our being asked to love G-d to that extent means we're to serve Him with everything we are (i.e., with heart and soul) and everything we have (i.e., with all our might and means). But that, too, is rather broad. So, the Talmud (Yoma 82A) breaks it down thusly (with our explanation).

We're taught that "with all (our) heart" implies "with both our i nclinations", meaning to say, with our bad as well as our good traits -- by channeling greed, for example, into a hunger for spiritual excellence; and being stingy by shuddering at the thought of "spending" time on things that will distract us from G-d.

"With all (our) soul" implies "even if you have to sacrifice your life", meaning to say -- on one level -- that you'd even be willing to give your life if it were threatened to affirm your faith in Him; or on another level, to be willing to sacrifice smaller goals for the larger one of drawing close to G-d and loving Him.

And "with all (our) might" implies "with all your money", which indicates that you're to use everything you have in His service. Finally, Ibn Pakudah adds, the phrase also signifies that "we're to love G-d both in secret and openly", rather than just for public consumption; and to "never equate the love of G-d with the love of anything else" but rather to understand it to be the heights of spiritual growth.

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