

# THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 10:4

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

"But is it actually humanly possible to love G-d?" Ibn Pakudah asks at this point, despite the instructions he'd given us in the last chapter. The question is certainly legitimate. After all, we and He are utterly disparate; and while it's said that "opposites attract", it doesn't seem true of such utter opposites as ourselves and G-d Almighty. Yet Ibn Pakudah affirms that it's indeed plausible for us to say that we can love Him -- as much as is humanly possible.

He posits that there are actually three degrees to which we humans can fully love G-d to the best of our abilities: with what we own, with what we're comprised of, or with what we are. For we can dedicate everything we own to His service, we can imperil our health and well-being for His name's sake, or we can be willing to relinquish our very lives if that's somehow appropriate (though it's vitally important to recall that that's only very rarely called for by our faith; and any willingness to go so far is more a gauge of one's love rather than a requirement of it).

And indeed some rare souls were willing to do all of that if they had to, to mark how much they loved G-d. In fact, our forefather Abraham demonstrated as much, as well as others of his stature. So we see that it *is* humanly possible to truly love G-d. But it calls for G-d's direct and outright intercedance, since it's normally beyond human capacity and all but unnatural, so few of us have what it takes.

Hence it's clear that loving G-d isn't simply yearning for Him or venerating Him affectionately as we might imagine (though that's certainly laudible). It's far more comprehensive than that. But most of us can express a great degree of love for G-d by being generous with our means and by extending our spiritual reach, as well as by taking advantage of the following.

For as Ibn Pakudah informs us, "even if we express a love for G-d ... in the expectation of getting something in return for it, or because we fear (retribution) in this world or the world to come (if we don't) ... but we (still and all) try to fulfill mitzvot all the time, then G-d will strengthen us and help us arrive at true love."

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