

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 6:5 - PART 2

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

The fifth truism we'd need to realize is that of G-d's greatness and might. In fact, we needn't go any further than to observe our own inner and outer beings to do that. After all, our G-d-given bodies are uncanny blends of almost otherworldly precision and wonder, and our minds and hearts are more recondite, marbled, and flecked than anything the angels could imagine. And G-d alone was behind it all.

Yet we manage to credit ourselves for a lot of that somehow. The great and holy ones who learned to surrender to G-d's wishes never did that. The prophets, for example, "collapsed, bowed and prostrated themselves before angels when they encountered them", and those selfsame angels "could only bow and prostrate themselves before G-d Himself" in full realization of their own paltriness.

And besides, as Ibn Pakudah put it, we'd also do well to "think of all the ways G-d's will manifests itself in creation -- in the sun, moon and stars, the spheres, the earth and all therein, all the minerals, plants and animals", and to dwell on "man's own stature; his stature in relation to the earth; the earth's stature in relation to the moon; the moon's stature in relation to the higher spheres; and the stature of all that in relation to G-d's own greatness", and we couldn't help but humble ourselves to Him.

Sixth, we're to realize that the humble and unassuming are "always rewarded in the end, while the arrogant and haughty always suffer." For as it's said, "G-d encourages the humble and lowers the wicked to the ground" (Psalms 147:6)", "The humble will inherit the world" (Ibid. 37:11), etc.

Of course, we don't always see or experience that ourselves, and the thrust of modern literature and culture seems to draw us to the opposite conclusion. But the arduous, sincere student of Torah will catch sight of that truism for him- or herself as it's depicted there, and will see it play itself out in the world, too.

And seventh, we're to note "how often the world changes, how swiftly kingdoms and governments change hands, ... how the annihilation of one people paves the way for the advancement of another, and how the end of all is death". For once we do we'll surely surrender our wills to G-d's, for we'll have learned not to pride ourselves on what we have or have done, which is all so will-of-the-wisp.

Ibn Pakudah ends this chapter with this poignant remark. If we do indeed learn our lessons well and come to surrender to G-d's will and wishes, he assures us, then all "the misfortunes that come in the aftermath of arrogance, haughtiness, and grandiosity we'd mentioned will depart from you, and you'll be saved from sin and stumbling" -- i.e., from pain, error, illusion, and from the kind private and G-dless anguish that the emphatically self-assertive know of only too well.

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