

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 6:8

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

"The first thing to do to ensure service to G-d", Ibn Pakudah informs us, "is to free yourself of the need to be in control". How pithy a statement, yet how overwhelming its implications for us! After all, isn't the whole thrust of modern thought, science, and technology to give us as much control over as many things as possible! So are we doomed to lapse into spiritual mediocrity? Is there anything we can do to ensure our own service to G-d?

The long answer is for us to apply all we've learned so far with the full knowledge that we're bucking the tide, and yet we're doing that with G-d's help, His blessings, and His full, merciful knowledge of what we have to face. But the short answer is based on our surrendering to G-d's dominion over us from now on, and on "allowing" Him to be in control of everything. After all, otherwise we simply slip into egoism and the like all over again.

But Ibn Pakudah also cautions us that learning to surrender to G-d's will isn't only important unto itself -- it's actually fundamental to achieving all other good and lofty traits. In fact his point is that we'll never reach our spiritual potential if we don't learn how to surrender our will to G-d's will. For as we're told, "**you can't even be said to truly believe in G-d unless you take the service of Him upon yourself ... in (all) humility*."

Thus we're expected to reiterate again and again to ourselves how vitally important it is to be humble rather than haughty, simple rather than sensational, acquiescent rather than assuming.

In fact, Ibn Pakudah adds, the sort of humility and acquiescence we're addressing here also happen to be the beginnings of repentance, a process of renewal and transformation which we'd all do well to learn about (and which is also the thrust of the Gate after this one).

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