

# THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 8:3 - PART 2

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

We'd then be expected to take the covenant that each entity has with G-d Almighty, ourselves included, and to delve deep within to determine if we're adhering to our end of it. For just consider how true to their covenant all the world's inanimate and animate creatures are.

"Have you ever seen one of them sever its ties to G-d's service?" Ibn Pakudah asks, That's to say, has anyone ever seen one of them disobey G-d's orders, so to speak? After all, each and every creature and entity alike does exactly what it's supposed to, as it was designed to. In fact, the world couldn't go on if that weren't so.

Then we're to be introspective about our own loyalty, as to whether we're true to G-d or not. Can we be depended on to keep our covenant with Him and do what's expected of us, too?

Truth be known, all the variegated and complex systems that go into the workings of our being \*also\* do what's expected of them all the time (unless we're ill, G-d forbid -- which we'd do well to depict as a directive from G-d Almighty being followed by the body also, by the way). After all, if all our body-parts weren't doing what they were supposed to, our beings would be disjointed and our lives would be utterly out of control. Can our will and convictions be depended upon along just as much? That's what we're asked to consider deep within.

After all, just think of all the favors G-d grants us all the time. And consider how He always provides us with what we need most of all, and has granted us the mental and physical capacity and wherewithal to get along from there on.

Most of us recognize how much we have to be thankful for in that realm alone. But once we actually take note of G-d's "exceptional kindness toward us, body and soul", as Ibn Pakudah points out, and the fact that he does that \*even though He observes us all the time and knows us inside and out\* with all our failings; as soon as we realize that He grants us the ability to contradict Him (which would seem to go against His best interests); and when it becomes clear to us that He granted us the Torah in order to know what to do and what not to do -- we're to set body and soul toward pleasing G-d, drawing closer to Him, removing the foolishness that separates us from Him, and to loving Him and acquiescing to His will.

And then, along the same lines, we're to reflect upon whether or not we're directing our heart to G-d indeed. How do we do that? By first accepting His Oneness, as it was explained to us at the beginning of this work. Which is to say, by worshipping Him alone; never assuming He's like

\*anything\* else -- physical or spiritual -- whatsoever; and by knowing that He's the one and only Creator and L-rd of the universe.

We're also to direct all of our actions toward getting closer to G-d rather than for praise, reward, or out of fear of others' reactions. After all, as Ibn Pakudah puts it, "notice how close friends act when one of them senses the other no longer cares for him. Or how an employer feels when his employee is no longer loyal to him! The spurned one becomes angry and ignores everything the other had ever done, even when the latter had worked so hard at it and was always open and aboveboard". So he suggests that the same goes -- and all the more so -- when it comes to our relationship to G-d, who knows us inside and out, as we said. As such, it would only make sense that we'd want to be as loyal to Him as we could, rather than duplicitous.

We're then encouraged to think about all the other ways we could be worshipping G-d which we may not be doing. (By the way, rather than draw a parallel with serving a king as Ibn Pakudah does, which we no longer resonate with, we'll use a more contemporary model.) After all, if the loftiest, most original, selfless, caring, and beneficent person you could even imagine -- someone you'd love to draw close to and to please -- were to ask you to do something that demanded a lot of you, would you spare any effort to do it? Not at all. Why, if he asked you to think about something taxing for example, you'd set the whole of your being to the task. If he asked you to praise him or to acknowledge his kindness in writing, you'd write as elegantly, use as much metaphor, figure of speech, and hyperbole needed to in order to do it, and you wouldn't be put off. In fact, if you could, "you'd move heaven and earth and everything in it to enunciate your gratitude toward him and to praise him, and to express all the good feelings in your heart about him", as Ibn Pakudah says. His point is then, shouldn't we be doing the same when it comes to serving G-d?

Ibn Pakudah then goes off on a fascinating tangent which we'll begin next time, as we continue to explore our motivations and convictions.

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