

# THE HEART REALLY MATTERS

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

Why do we read the Book of Ruth on Shevuos? One answer is that Ruth was the great-grandmother of King David who was born on Shevuos and 70 years later died on Shevuos. Still, what does King David have to do with Shevuos in particular?

Our sages tell us that "the king is the heart of the nation!" What does that mean? The king as a leader doesn't tell the people what to think. He rather, amplifies the pulse of the people. He tells us what we really feel. In Tehillim-Psalms King David expresses prophetically the highest aspirations and moorings of the Jewish heart, individually and collectively. He reveals for us a G-d intoxicated intellect. He writes, "What's good for me is being close to G-d!" (Tehillim 73:28) What King David artfully articulates in Tehillim is the authentic heart of the nation.

In the fourth chapter having to do with trust in G-d, The Chovos HaLevavos makes a surprisingly strong claim regarding the requirement to develop "duties of the heart". He states that Olam Haba-the world to come is not a necessary result of the external performance of Mitzvos but rather a function of the internal dimension of those Mitzvos. He informs us that the outer aspect of the Mitzvos yields a "this worldly" benefit while the next world is a consequence of the depth and direction of the heart. Ultimately, Olam Haba is based on a relationship. It is not a business deal with a quid pro quo. One can no more expect by coldly dropping flowers on the table or even a diamond that love will automatically flow in return.

When I was yet an unmarried Yeshiva student, we had the great honor of meeting a holy man. The Manchester Rav, Rabbi Yehuda Zev Segal ztl. prayed with us the afternoon service. Long after most of us had finished saying our prayers he remained bent over, shaking and weeping all the while. We watched in awe without knowing exactly what we were witnessing. I remember saying quietly to the fellow next to me, "I wonder what he did so wrong!"

Days later while eating a Shabbos meal at the home of one of the rabbis we were discussing the visitor we had been treated to that week. The Rabbi told us that Rabbi Moshe Feinstein ztl. had considered the Manchester Rav to be one of the thirty-six hidden Tzadikim of the generation. I had a knack for asking obvious questions that elicited sharp responses, so I queried aloud, "If he is singled out, publicly as one of these hidden Tzadikim then he's no longer hidden. His true identity has been exposed, his cover is blown and he cannot by definition be one of the thirty-six hidden Tzadikim in whose merit the world exists."

The Rabbi looked at me with a look that shouted. I wondered what I had said so wrong. It was a good question I thought. Then he gently but intensely explained, "Label, you think you see him? You see his beard. You see his hands. You see his eyes, but do you really think you see who he is? He holds a Siddur and prays the same words as you and me and look at the chemical reaction those words have within him. He puts on Tefillin and so do you. You can be sure that his is somehow different than yours. The outside is merely the tip of the iceberg. Beneath the limbs and the deeds he does there's a whole hidden continent of love and devotion we could never hope to fathom."

The bottom line is- "HASHEM wants the heart as it says, (Shmuel A 16) "HASHEM sees to the heart ..." (Sanhedrin 106B) On the Yom Tov of the giving of the Torah we are reminded again by the struggles of Ruth just to join and the life's work of King David, just how much the heart really matters.

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