

Title

The Duties of the Heart

By

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About this eBook

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THE DUTIES OF THE HEART

Wisdom, The Highest Good

The supreme benefit, and the highest good bestowed by the Creator on human beings (after the gift of existence and the perfected faculties of perception and intelligence), is Wisdom. This, indeed, is the very life of their spirits. It is the lamp of their reason, which enables them to come to the will of God, and delivers them from all disaster in this world and in the world to come.

This Wisdom, or Philosophy, is of three kinds: the Philosophy of Nature, dealing with the properties and accidents of Matter; the Philosophy of Number and Measurement, the Mathematical Wisdom, including Astronomy and Music; and Philosophy, properly so called, including the knowledge of God, and the knowledge of His laws, and the rest of the sciences that are concerned with life and mind, and with human souls and spiritual beings. But all divisions of Wisdom are gates which the Creator, Blessed be He, has opened to human beings to enable them to attain to religion and the world. Only some of these sciences are more necessary to the subject of Religion, and other divisions are more necessary for the attainment of worldly advantage. The highest form of Wisdom, the Divine Wisdom, is that which is most necessary to Religion. It is our duty to study this philosophy, in order, by means of Reason and discriminating intelligence, to attain to our religion, to morality and the laws of life that make for the health of our bodies and our souls.¹

Seek no reward but Wisdom`s self

But it is forbidden to us to study it for purposes of worldly advantage; but from the single motive of *LOVE ALONE*. The Rabbis say: "Do things for the sake of the work itself, and speak the words (of the law) for their own sake. Thou shalt neither make the Torah a crown, to magnify thyself with it, nor a spade to dig with." And they say, in reference to words of Psalm cxii., "Happy is the man who fears the Eternal, and delighteth greatly in His Commandments," Rabbi Eliezar explains delighteth greatly in His Commandments, themselves, and not in the merit, or in any reward, spiritual or material, attached to their performance, as we have learned, 'be not like servants that serve their master for the sake of receiving a reward, but be ye like servants who serve their master with the intention of receiving no reward, and let the awe of Heaven be upon you.'"

The Gates of Knowledge

Three gates the Creator has opened to mankind, so that they may enter into the domain of spirituality, ethical conduct and the laws divine, that guide us in our works and daily life to health of body and of mind and soul. The first is the lofty portal of pure Reason, with all obstructing errors cleared away; the second is the book of the Torah,² revealed to Moses, the prophet; the third is built up of traditions.

¹ The word here used is Torah.

² Torah, literally guide, instruction, but generally translated "Law," is a word used in Hebrew literature with several distinct meanings: - (1) The Pentateuch, as distinguished from the rest of the Bible; (2) Scripture, any part of the O.T., as distinguished from The Talmud Rabbinic opinions and traditions; (3) The Contents of the Bible and

The Ethics of the Body and the Ethics of the Soul

The wisdom of the Torah is divided into two parts:

I. The wisdom of the visible, that enables us to know the duties of the body and its members; and these include not only all the practical obligations both of ethics and religion, but also all the physical obligations and restraints of a good and moral life.

II. The Duties of the Heart and Mind; duties that concern thought and feeling, and whose fulfillment is entirely in the hidden depths of the human heart and soul, and this is the wisdom of the invisible.

The duties of the heart and mind have all of them their roots in human reason, and, like some corporeal duties, would be recognized as binding even without revelation.

Examples of Duties of the Heart

Among commands relating to duties of the heart and mind are the following:

- To believe that the world has a Creator, who created it from nothing, and that there is none other like Him. To accept His Unity and worship Him in our hearts. To devote intelligent thought to the wonders of His Creation, so that they may be to us a sign concerning Him. To trust in Him, and humble ourselves before Him; to fear Him, to tremble at the thought that He looks at us - at all that is revealed and all that is hidden about us; to desire to do His will; and to concentrate all our efforts upon good deeds that are absolutely disinterested and only motivated by love of God. Further, that we should love Him and those that love Him, and hate those that hate Him.

Also, that we should not covet, and not avenge, or bear a grudge. (Compare Levit. xix.) They also forbid us to think sinful thoughts, or to have sinful desires, and even to contemplate the commission of any transgression, and other similar things which are hidden from man and none but God, alone, can see.

Thus the duties of the heart involve the formation of ideals of conduct, love of man, faith, etc.; the cultivation of right beliefs based upon Reason; the conscious effort of the mind to realise the wonders of creation, so that we may come to know, of God, truths which human language, that can only accurately tell of things material, can never adequately express. That trust in God which makes right conduct possible, even at the cost of personal risk and loss; the banishing of hatred, envy, scorn, all longing for revenge, and all desire for sin, are also obligations of the heart. And they include all nuances of virtue, such as these that have their being in the heart alone, and are not manifested in material life, save only by their influence;

Talmud, together with scientific, medical, ethical, or other facts or theories, studied for the purpose of elucidating the spiritual meaning, or practical application, of the Mosaic Law; (3a) the habit of studying Torah in the sense (3), i.e., Religion, hygiene and ethics, etc., based upon principles traceable to the Pentateuch.