



# **THE DUTIES OF THE HEART**

**RABBI BACHYE**

Global Grey ebooks

# THE DUTIES OF THE HEART

BY  
RABBI BACHYE

TRANSLATED, WITH INTRODUCTION  
BY  
EDWIN COLLINS

1909

The Duties Of The Heart By Rabbi Bachye.

This edition was created and published by Global Grey

©GlobalGrey 2018



[globalgreyebooks.com](http://globalgreyebooks.com)

# CONTENTS

Editorial Note

Introduction

Wisdom, The Highest Good

Seek No Reward But Wisdom's Self

The Gates Of Knowledge

The Ethics Of The Body And The Ethics Of The Soul

Examples Of Duties Of The Heart

The Duties Of The Heart Are More Important Than Any Others

The Dual Duty Of The Dual Man

All Conduct Is Conditioned By The Heart

The Duties Of The Heart Are For Every Time And Place

Endless Virtues Spring From Those Of The Heart

The Duty Of Using Reason: And Of Taking No Dogma On Trust

Faith Without Knowledge

Belief In The Existence Of One Creator As The Basis Of Ethics

The Only True Unity

The Examination Of Creation Shows The Goodness Of The Creator

Free Will And Providence

Gratitude To God And Man

Gratitude Is Due For Good Intentions

The Motives Of Human Benevolence

Man's Obligation Of Gratitude To God

The Motive Forces That Impel Man To Grateful Service

The Whole Of Human Conduct Belongs To The Domain Of Ethics

The Danger Of Pride And Self-Righteousness

The Danger Of Pride

Humility, True And False

The Signs And Consequences Of True Humility

Humility And Egotism

Aids To The Cultivation Of Humility

The Charity Of The Meek

Consistent Humility And Sincerity

Where Humility Is Sin

The Hall Marks Of The Meek

The Pride Consistent With Humility

Humility As A Worldly Advantage—Contentment

The Proper Study Of Mankind Is Man

Of Trust In God

Keeping Account With The Soul

Contemplation Leading To Communion With God

The Gate Of Love

The Right Study Of Nature Leads To Nature's God

What Is Repentance?

The Motives To Repentance

On The Possibility Of Repentance

Habits Of Those That Love God







































































































appear so small in his eyes, that he will be continually striving to increase them. He will be humble because of his sense of inability to attain to the realisation of his ideal in respect to them, and he will be full of gratitude to God for giving him these precious qualities. Such pride is helpful, and not harmful, to humility.

---

## HUMILITY AS A WORLDLY ADVANTAGE— CONTENTMENT

Humility is profitable to man in this world, because it makes him rejoice in his lot. For the whole world, and all it contains, is insufficient to satisfy the ambition of him into whom pride and a sense of greatness have entered, and he will look with contempt on whatever share of it falls to his lot; whereas, the humble man assigns no special rank to himself, but is content with whatever comes to him, and finds it sufficient. And this induces restfulness of soul, and minimises anxiety. He will eat what comes his way, and dress in the raiment that is readily found; and a small share of the world satisfies him.

The humble also bear troubles with greater fortitude than do the proud.

---

## THE PROPER STUDY OF MANKIND IS MAN

Although it is incumbent upon us to investigate and study the whole universe, so as to understand the wisdom and goodness of the Creator, the subject most necessary to study, as well as the nearest and most obvious, is the evidence of divine wisdom shown in all that concerns the human species. For man is the universe in little (microcosm), and the proximate cause of the existence of the great world (macrocosm). And it is our duty to study the origin of man and his history; his birth, and the composition and structure of his component parts, and the members and organs of his body, their relations to each other, and the functions and purposes of every one of them; and the necessity of his being made as he is, in structure, form, and appearance. And then we must consider the objects of his being and all his mental qualities and characteristics, and the powers of his soul, and the light of his reason, and all the essentials and accidentals of his being, and his passions and desires, and his relation to the scheme of Creation.

From the standpoint of this study much of the mystery of the universe, and many of the secrets of this world, will become clear to us, because of the likeness of man to the world; and it has been said by some of the wise men that Philosophy is man's knowledge of himself: that is to say, such knowledge of man will enable us to recognise the Creator from the signs of His wisdom displayed in man. This is the meaning of what Job said: "And from my flesh I shall see God."

. . . . .

The tongue is the pen of the heart, and the messenger of the distant hidden soul.

. . . . .

In speech one can see the superiority of man over the lower animals.

. . . . .

It is the fools who think they know everything, and in their pride neglect that study of the world and man, which would compel gratitude to God, and life devoted to His service and the doing of good works.

. . . . .

When you have studied all that can be known of the universe, do not think that you know all about the wisdom and power of God. For in the world, we know, God has only manifested just so much of His wisdom and power as were necessary for the good of man. Not according to the reach of His wisdom and power is their manifestation in the phenomenal world (for they are infinite), but in accordance with the needs of His creation and of His creatures.

---

## OF TRUST IN GOD

(From the Sixth Gate.)

Of all things the most necessary to him who would serve God,<sup>1</sup> is trust in God.

. . . . .

If one does not trust in God, one trusts in something, or in some one, else. And he who quits his trust elsewhere than in the One Eternal, removes God and His ruling providence from over him, and puts himself in the hands of that thing or person in whom he trusts.

. . . . .

He who trusts in his own wisdom or abilities, or in the strength of his body and in his own efforts, will labour in vain, weaken his powers, and find his skill inadequate to the attainment of his desires; . . . and trust in wealth may be the destruction of the soul. He who trusts in God will be led to serve none other than Him, in that he will not build his hopes on a man, and will not wait, in anxious anticipation, for any human being; and he will not serve them, or try to curry favour with them; and he will not be hypocritical to please mankind, to the detriment of his service of God; and he will have no fear of man nor of human fault-finding. He will be independent, and strip off from himself the livery of human favours and benefactions.

. . . . .

He who trusts in God is able to turn his attention from worldly anxieties and devote it to doing what is right. For, in the restfulness of his soul and the liberty of his mind, and in the diminution of his anxieties in regard to worldly affairs, he may be compared to an alchemist who knows how to turn silver into gold and brass and tin to silver. Only that he is better off; for he needs neither implements nor materials in his alchemy, and he needs not store up his gold in fear of robbers, nor restrict his production

<sup>1</sup> It must be remembered that Bachye regards moral virtues, aid all righteous conduct, as part of the service of God.

to what is only enough for the day and be in fear for the morrow. For he has confidence that God will supply his wants when and where it may be requisite.

If he who trusts in God is wealthy, he will hasten cheerfully to fulfil all the religious and ethical obligations of wealth; and if he is without wealth, he will look upon its absence as a blessing from God, relieving him from the responsibilities its possession involves, and from the anxiety of guarding and administering it.

The wealthy man who trusts in God will not find his wealth a hindrance to his faith; for he does not place his reliance upon his wealth, which is, in his eyes, trust money assigned to him for a limited period that he may apply it in various appointed ways. He will not be proud, nor will he make any mention of his goodness to any one to whom he has been commanded to give some of this wealth, and he will not require any reward, or thanks, or praise; but he will render thanks to the Creator who has made him the agent of His beneficence. And if he loses his wealth he will not be anxious, or mourn its absence, but will be thankful to God at the taking away of what was only entrusted to him, just as he thanked God for the original gift; and he will rejoice in his portion, and not seek the injury of any one else, and not envy any other man his wealth.

The worldly advantages of trust in God include peace of mind from worldly anxieties, and rest for the soul from the disturbances of trouble caused by any want in the satisfaction of bodily appetites.

---



## KEEPING ACCOUNT WITH THE SOUL

The keeping account with one's own soul is when a man busies himself in silent discussion between himself and his reason with the concerns of his religious and his worldly life, so that he may ascertain what are his spiritual and mental possessions, and what his obligations.

Every human being is bound, in proportion to his mental gifts, to keep account with his soul, and to calculate what service of heart and mind he owes the Creator. And more is required of those gifted with clearer perception, or who have been specially blessed, than from others; because both their debt of gratitude and their power of fulfilment are greater.

Among the many subjects of such contemplation, are the origin of one's own life, and the wonder of emergence from non-existence to existence, from nothingness to being, not on account of any superiority anticipated in man, but only by the kindness of God, and His goodness, and His free generosity. Thence it will be obvious to his reason that he has been considered more than all the animal and vegetable world, and raised in degree above all the rest of the material creation, and appointed to a more exalted destiny, and he will be conscious of his great obligation.

. . . . .

Such contemplation concerning the Deity and man's relation to the Creator, will show the duty of concentrating the heart on God's unity and spirituality, and on his service; so that there is no other thought or intention in all that one does, except to do it for the sake of God alone, with no thought of human praise or of the fear of man, or of advantages or of the removal of dangers, in this world or in a future state.

The service of God is of three kinds only:—Duties of the heart, such as are explained in this book; duties of the members and the heart together, such as prayer, the teaching of Scripture, and the teaching of Ethics [*lit.*, the teaching of wisdom, and commands of goodness, and prohibitions of evil]; and duties of the bodily members alone, such as the ceremonies of

religion and the giving of charity. With these last the heart has nothing to do, except in so far as their intention and motive are concerned.

---

## CONTEMPLATION LEADING TO COMMUNION WITH GOD

If the believer will constantly meditate on the fact that the Creator sees all his thoughts and deeds, and will think it over with his own soul, the Creator will be constantly with him, and he will see Him with his mind's eye, and be in constant awe and reverence of Him; and he will examine all his conduct. And when this has become a constant habit of his mind, he will, helped by God, have reached the highest degree of the pious ones, and the most exalted rank of the righteous. He will not lack anything; nor will he choose anything more than the Creator has chosen for him. His will depends upon the will of the Creator, and his love on the love of the Creator; and that is loved by him which He loves, and that is contemned by him which is contemned by the Creator.

A man should commune with himself in reference to the desires of his heart and his worldly tastes; and a careful consideration of the ends they serve will lead him to look with contempt on ephemeral possessions; and his thoughts and desires will be fixed on the highest good, and on what is of eternal value to his mind and soul; and he will learn to strive only for what is barely necessary of the things of this world. He will desire to be kept from both poverty and riches, so that he may have enough for simple healthy life; and he will yearn after wisdom and spiritual possessions, of which no one can rob him.

Another subject for self-communing is the question as to whether we have made proper provision for the journey we must one day make, to another world, just as a traveller does not wait till he is on a journey before making provision for his necessities while travelling.

Another subject that should not be neglected, in the communing with one's own soul, is the inclination of the soul to seek the fellowship of the sons of men and the advantages of solitude and of separation from men, and the evil of associating ourselves with their follies when we are not forced to do so. Too much talking is calculated to lead to the talking of slander and the telling of lies, and even to the taking of false oaths. One

of the *Chassideem* said to his disciples: "The *Torah* permits our swearing by the name of the Creator to what is true, but I counsel you not to take an oath by the holy name of God, whether to the truth or to a lie. Say simply 'Yes,' or 'No.' Too much social intercourse also leads to boasting and displaying one's knowledge.

The pure of heart will always love solitude. But here again the temptation to complete solitude must also be guarded against. For the society of philosophers, the pious, and of great men, is of great advantage.

One should also consider well, in communing with his soul, whether he has made the best use of any wealth that he may possess, doing good with it. And he should meditate also on the many ways in which one man can help another; and consider that he should love for others what he loves for himself, and hate for others what he hates for himself, rejoicing in their joy and grieving at their sorrow. And he should be full of compassion for them, and ward off from them, to the utmost of his power, anything that may injure them; as it is said (Levit. xix.), "And thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

---

## THE GATE OF LOVE

The intention of all separation from the world is only so that one may concentrate the whole heart upon the one object of love for the Creator, and that one may be filled with longing to fulfil His will. This perfect love of God is the primary aim and intention, as well as the end and fulfilment, of all obligations taught by Reason, by Scripture, or by Tradition.

. . . . .

This love of God is the yearning of the soul for the Creator, and her turning, of her own accord, towards Him, so that she may be united with His light, which is the highest. That is, that the soul, which is herself pure spirit, inclines, more than any other spiritual being, to her like, and in her very nature recedes from that which is her opposite:—from gross matter.

They who love God will do all that is right, without the hope of reward, and will forsake all that is evil, without the fear of punishment. They will also have no fear of anything, or of any person, in this or any other world, except of the Creator alone. And they will be indifferent to the praise and blame of men in doing the will of God. They will be pure in body as well as in mind, and fly from evil deeds of all kinds. They will serve the Creator not only in obedience to the laws of revelation, some of which are only binding in given circumstances, but also in the duties that are commanded by Reason and Conscience, and with every good spiritual quality.

---

## THE RIGHT STUDY OF NATURE LEADS TO NATURE'S GOD

(From the Second Gate, the Gate of Investigation and Contemplation—  
Chap. II.)

That investigation and careful study of all created beings and things is a duty binding upon us, so that we may bring out from such contemplation proofs of the wisdom of the Creator (blessed be He), is taught by reason, by Scripture, and by the tradition handed down through the Sages of the Talmud.

Reason tells us that the superiority of the human being<sup>1</sup> over the dumb creature<sup>2</sup> consists in his superior recognition and perception, enabling him to understand, with all their subtle differences,<sup>3</sup> the secrets of the Divine wisdom and of natural science; that are manifested in the facts of the universe, and in his superior power of receiving fruitful knowledge from these perceptions. . . . And when a man thinks, meditates and intelligently studies, and tests the signs of this wisdom, his superiority over cattle will be great in proportion to his understanding [of these things]. And if he hides himself from these things he becomes similar to the cattle, or even lower than they; as Scripture says (Isa. i. 3), "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, Israel hath not known," etc.; and it is written (Isa. xl. 26), "Lift up your eyes and see, who hath created these things"; and it is written (Ps. viii.), "When I see the heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast formed," etc. . . . And from tradition we learn the same thing. Our Sages of blessed memory have said (Talmud, Sabbath 75), "Whoever understands how to calculate the course and movements of the heavenly bodies, and does not make these calculations, to him the words of Scripture apply; (Isa. v. 12), 'The harp and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine are at their feasts: but they look not at the work of the Eternal, neither consider the operation of His hands.'" And they have said,

<sup>1</sup> *Hammedabbayr*, the being who can put words in order, the speaking and reasoning being.

<sup>2</sup> *Sheäyno medabbayer*, who cannot put words in order.

<sup>3</sup> This is the meaning, *beenah*, understanding; compare *bayn*, between.

"Whence do we learn that a man is bound by the Mosaic Law to study astronomy? From the words (Deut. iv. 6, 7), 'And you shall observe them and do them, for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of the peoples, who will hear and say, surely this is a wise and understanding nation, etc. . . .' And what is the kind of science and intelligence that would have such value in the eyes of the peoples of the world? Surely it is the calculation of the movements of the heavenly bodies. . . ." And they have said (Talmud, Erubin 8), "If the *Torah* (revelation, especially the Pentateuch) had not been given to Israel, we should yet have been able to learn the will of God and His laws from a study of nature, learning the different virtues from different creatures, as, for instance, modesty from the cat, the marriage laws and sexual purity from the dove, honesty from the ant, and so forth."

---

## WHAT IS REPENTANCE?

(From the Gate of Repentance. <sup>1</sup>)

What is meant by repentance is when a man sets himself to the service of the Creator, after he has departed from that service or sinned in it, and restores that which has been lost therefrom, whether by reason of that man's stupidity in reference to God and the things that constitute His service, or because of his passions having prevailed over his reason, or blinded him to his duties, or because evil companions have led him to sin, or to whatever cause his sins may be due.

. . . . .

If his departure from the service of the Creator has consisted only in neglect of what is commanded, the manner of his repentance requires him to occupy himself diligently with the good works he has left undone, and with activities that tend to form both habits harmonious with the fulfilment of those commands and a character to which such conduct comes naturally. If his departure from the service of the Creator consisted in doing things against which the Creator has warned him [disobedience to the prohibitions of the Pentateuch or of divinely guided human reason], his repentance must be shown in his carefully guarding himself against all return to conduct at all similar to that wherein he has sinned.

. . . . .

It is as if a man who has become ill from taking insufficient food of a nourishing kind, or through eating improper food, wishes to restore his health.

He will have to eat abundantly—perhaps almost to excess—of nourishing food suitable to his constitution, and carefully avoid all food of a similar nature to that which has proved hurtful, until his health is fully restored.

<sup>1</sup> The only Hebrew word for repentance is *teshubah*, from *shub*, to return.



Then he may resume an ordinary, wholesome diet, between the two extremes. . . .

Repentance, however, is of three kinds.

First, that of him who repents because he is out of the way of sin and temptation; but as soon as he is in the way of temptation his inclination prevails over his reason, and he does not refrain from sin, and only then, when he has finished his sinful action, sees the shameful nature of his conduct, and regrets his transgression.

Such a one has repented with his lips and not with his heart; with his tongue and not with his deeds, and deserves the condemnation of the Creator; and of him it is written (Jer. vii. 9), "Will ye steal and murder and commit adultery and swear falsely? etc. Is this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your eyes?"

The second kind of repentance is that of him who repents in his heart and in his physical and material conduct, and makes a firm stand with his reason against his passions, and so orders his conduct and his habits of life as to compel his soul<sup>2</sup> to fight with her desires until he is victorious and is able to refrain from what is hateful to the Creator; but his soul<sup>3</sup> still has pleasure in turning continually towards what is contrary to the service of the Creator, and thirsts after transgression, and he strives earnestly to subdue his soul and his passions; and sometimes he prevails and sometimes they.

Such a man is not perfect in his repentance, and the duty of making atonement is still incumbent upon him until he shall depart altogether from transgressions.

The third kind of repentance is when a man fulfils the conditions of repentance and causes his intellect to prevail over his desires, and accustoms himself continually to enter into reckoning with his soul, and fears his Creator, and is ashamed before Him, and lays to heart the greatness of his sins, and fully recognises the greatness of Him against

<sup>2</sup> The word that I have here translated soul is *nefesh*, a word generally so rendered in the English Bible; but it is used of the life principle, and sometimes merely as a synonym for self. The Hebrew word for soul in the purely spiritual sense of that word is *neshamah*; while yet a third, *ruach*, is an exact equivalent for our word *spirit*, both in the primary sense of breath and in its higher secondary significance.

<sup>3</sup> Bachye devotes a long chapter to describing these conditions.









## HABITS OF THOSE THAT LOVE GOD

(From Chap. VII. Of the Gate of Love.)

The customs of the lovers of the Eternal are too numerous to recount. Nevertheless, I will mention a few of them that come opportunely to my mind.

These men have learned to know their God with a practical and fruitful knowledge.<sup>1</sup> . . . They have recognised His delight in them and how He shapes their way, and they perceive that it is He who makes their lives to flow as a gentle stream,<sup>2</sup> and that it is He who nourishes and supports them. They have recognised His rule and His restraining power in all those affairs—whether of religion, ethics, holiness, and physical purity, or of the world—in which He has given them permission to occupy themselves, and liberty of choice as to their conduct. And it has become clear to them, and they firmly believe, that all their affairs and their every movement are conducted by the decree of the Creator, blessed be He, and by His pleasure. And they have resolved<sup>3</sup> not to be guided by their own preferences, but to rest in perfect trust upon the Creator, trusting that He will choose what is best and what is proper for them.

. . . . .

Even where they cannot show in actual deed the carrying out of their good intentions, and even when weakness prevents the attainment of their ideals in the fulfilment of God's law, they will choose to do these things at any future time when they may be enabled to by the help of God, and they will hope and pray for that time, appointed by Him.<sup>4</sup>

The longing after pleasures is rooted out, because there has entered into them a longing to serve the Creator, and the fire of passion is extinguished in their hearts, and all fierce heat of the imagination, by reason of the strong light of the service of God that envelopes their hearts, even as the light of a lamp pales and wanes in the light of the sun.

<sup>1</sup> *Yadang*.

<sup>2</sup> *Hu menahelem*.

<sup>3</sup> Literally, "made a stand against being," etc.

<sup>4</sup> *Betach* implies a kind of trust and confidence that gives rest and quiet contentment.

