

The Duties of the Heart, by Rabbi Bachye, tr. by Edward Collins, [1909], at sacred-texts.com
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The Wisdom of the East Series
EDITED BY
L. CRANMER-BYNG
Dr. S. A. KAPADIA

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART

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WISDOM OF THE EAST

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART

BY RABBI BACHYE

TRANSLATED, WITH INTRODUCTION

BY EDWIN COLLINS

HELLIER HEBREW SCHOLAR, UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, LONDON

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EDITORIAL NOTE

THE object of the editors of this series is a very definite one. They desire above all thi

L. CRANMER-BYNG.
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INTRODUCTION

BACHYE'S "Guide to the Duties of the Heart" is the unique work that first linked the ethic
Only a small part of the original finds a place in the following pages; but I have in my t
[p. 6]

and showing his line of argument and the aim and spirit of his work, instead of a mere col
If the modern world owes its delight in physical beauty, and much of its sense of the true
[p. 7]

of the Greeks. These two are among the most definite colours that the prism of modern thou
In the world's organism, it seems to be the special function of the Oriental peoples to se
It is to help in this process of renewing the spiritual and moral life of the West that th
In the middle and latter half of the eleventh century, Spain became the rallying-point, an
[p. 8]

centre, of Jewish culture--religious, philosophical, and poetic; and while practically the
It is to this brilliant period in the history of Jewish literature that our author belongs
Rabbi Bachye bar Joseph ibn Bakoda was a contemporary of the poet-philosopher Ibn Gebirol,
[p. 9]

Next to nothing is known of his life, and even the exact date of his birth, and the place
He was a man of the most amiable and genial character, and, though profoundly religious, e
[p. 10]

Before the writing of his "Duties of the Heart," no systematic treatise on Ethics had appeared. It was to supply this want that he wrote, in Arabic, the book which was destined in its Hebrew edition. By the Duties of the Heart Bachye understands the whole of conduct, and of thought in its moral aspect.

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morally, of no significance, except in so far as it represents a manifestation of character. The whole of conduct belongs to the domain of ethics. Every act, and every abstention from an act, is morally good or bad. Thus Bachye is at one with Stephen in asserting that "the moral law has to be asserted in its own name." The perfection of the human soul, however, from which all right conduct must result, and which is the end of all conduct, is not a moral law. But Bachye's ethics is not theological in the sense of taking as its starting-point the Bible. It is a philosophy.

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He does not even grant the existence of a God at all, nor appeal to revelation for assertion of that truth. He starts by submitting to the test of reason the questions,--"Is there a Creator or not?" "Is there a soul?" He then proceeds to demonstrate the duty of devoting the heart and mind to the study and contemplation of the results of such study will lead to true humility, and to perfect trust in God. Full intellectual recognition of the goodness of the Creator will, through gratitude and humility, lead to the restraints and commands of the Bible are given to bring the less intelligent of mankind to the study of the Law.

[p. 13]

The ethical system of Bachye is distinctly Oriental. All the impulse to virtuous conduct springs from the centre, the soul, to the outward act. It is interesting to note that, although Bachye is an orthodox Rabbi, his ethics is not a Jewish ethics.

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but from the centre, the soul, to the outward act.

It is interesting to note that, although Bachye is an orthodox Rabbi, his ethics is not a Jewish ethics.

EDWIN COLLINS.

Feb. 1, 1904.

Footnotes

¹⁰* By Jehudah Ibn Tibbon.

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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 t
This Wisdom, or Philosophy, is of three kinds: the Philosophy of Nature, dealing with the
[p. 16]

world. Only some of these sciences are more necessary to the subject of Religion, and othe
Footnotes

¹⁶* The word here used is Torah (see note on <page 17>).

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SEEK NO REWARD BUT WISDOM'S SELF

BUT it is forbidden to us to study it for purposes of worldly advantage; but from the sing
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[p. 17]

THE GATES OF KNOWLEDGE

THREE gates the Creator has opened to mankind, so that they may enter into the domain of s
Footnotes

¹⁷* Torah, literally guide, instruction, but generally translated "Law," is a word used

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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 membe
[p. 18]

both of ethics and religion, but also all the physical obligations and restraints of a goo

II. The Duties of the Heart and Mind; duties that concern thought and feeling, and whose f

The duties of the heart and mind have all of them their roots in human reason, and, like s

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EXAMPLES OF DUTIES OF THE HEART

AMONG commands relating to duties of the heart and mind are the following:--To believe that
Also, that we should not covet, and not avenge, or bear a grudge. (Compare Levit. xix.) Th
[p. 19]

of any transgression, and other similar things which are hidden from man and none but God,
Thus the duties of the heart involve the formation of ideals of conduct, love of man, faith

Footnotes

¹⁹:* This is the literal translation of nichsof; comp. keseph, silver.

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THE DUTIES OF THE HEART ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANY OTHERS

THE obligation to fulfil the duties of the heart and mind is greater than any other, for,
[p. 20]

refer to the commands of Reason, or to those of Scripture or of Tradition, they are the fo

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THE DUAL DUTY OF THE DUAL MAN

MAN is made up of body and soul; and both alike are given us by the beneficence of the Cre

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ALL CONDUCT IS CONDITIONED BY THE HEART

IT is quite clear to me that even the duties of the body and its members can never be perf
[p. 21]

the service of The Infinite [^{**}] and to delight in it, then the obligation to ethical cond

Moreover, with regard to any sinful conduct, it is not the act itself, but the sinful inte

Footnotes

²¹:* The Rabbis frequently used this term for God. Hashem = THE name, i.e., the Divine na

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THE DUTIES OF THE HEART ARE FOR EVERY TIME AND PLACE

WHILE some religious and moral duties are only obligatory at special times and in special

[p. 22]

us to remove hatred and jealousy from our hearts.

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ENDLESS VIRTUES SPRING FROM THOSE OF THE HEART

THESE inner virtues of the mind and heart, unlike the precepts that the body can fulfil, a

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THE DUTY OF USING REASON: AND OF TAKING NO DOGMA ON TRUST

IT is the bounden duty of all who are not intellectually incapable of independent thought,

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FAITH WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE

THE faith of the believer is not complete unless he knows the meaning and the reasons of h

[p. 23]

intellect, and the power to sift and prove, is sinful if he neglects to do so, and also ev

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(FROM THE GATE OF UNITY.)

BELIEF IN THE EXISTENCE OF ONE CREATOR AS THE BASIS OF ETHICS

PERFECT recognition of the existence and unity of God forms the only sure basis for right

The love of God, and the consequent acceptance of the yoke of duty in obedience to His wil

The unity of conduct, and the concentration of our love and striving after good, require b

Footnotes

²³* Bachye is only following many Hebraists, and not at all straining the sense, when he

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[p. 24]

THE ONLY TRUE UNITY.

THE word One, in common speech, denotes both accidental, transitory unity and a unity that
For it denotes a being composed of substance and form, of what is essential and what is ac
Even when denoting absolute unity, the word One may be applied to a thing that is one of a
But essential, absolute, real, objective unity, that is unchangeable and cannot be multipl
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[p. 25]

THE EXAMINATION OF CREATION SHOWS THE GOODNESS OF THE CREATOR

THE way in which man can most readily arrive at a knowledge of God is by a critical study
The result of this examination will be to show you that the Creator is not only wise but i
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(FROM THE THIRD GATE, EXPLAINING THE OBLIGATION OF ACCEPTING THE SERVICE OF THE DEITY, BLE

FREE WILL AND PROVIDENCE

WHEN you understand the mystery of movement and the dynamic laws of the universe, and real
[p. 26]

[paragraph continues] He has placed in your power the choice of good and evil.

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GRATITUDE TO GOD AND MAN

SINCE Reason obliges us to do good to all who do good to us; a recognition of the existenc
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GRATITUDE IS DUE FOR GOOD INTENTIONS

ALL admit that our obligation to benefactors is in proportion to their intention to benefi
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THE MOTIVES OF HUMAN BENEVOLENCE

THERE are five aspects of human beneficence:--(1) that of the father to his children; (2)

[p. 27]

a good name, or honour, or worldly reward; (5) that of the strong towards the weak, because
If we look closely at all these kinds of benevolence, we shall find that, in motive, not only
The beneficence of a father is for his own good. The son is a part of himself, and the very
Nevertheless, Reason, as well as Scripture, obliges the child to serve, honour, and reverence
The beneficence of a master to his slave is prompted only by self-interest, and yet the Creator
The beneficence of the rich to the poor, for the sake of the reward of heaven, is like the

[p. 28]

to come to him at some future time, in return for a small, perishable, and contemptible good
The beneficence of one section of mankind to another for the sake of the love of praise and
Even he that takes pity upon the poor and the afflicted whose sufferings are painful to him
Thus the primary intention of everyone in doing good to others, is to do good to himself,
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MAN'S OBLIGATION OF GRATITUDE TO GOD

IF man earns gratitude, reward and love for intermittent beneficence that is not unselfish

[p. 29]

causes all good, and whose goodness is without end and continuous, and is entirely free from
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THE MOTIVE FORCES THAT IMPEL MAN TO GRATEFUL SERVICE

THERE are two distinct motive forces impelling man to humble and grateful service of God.

The service due to the humility of hope and fear is that which arises from the acquired, e
The service undertaken at the prompting of

[p. 30]

[paragraph continues] Reason is free from all suspicion of hypocrisy, and from all admixture

Footnotes

^29:* See note, <page 17>.

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THE WHOLE OF HUMAN CONDUCT BELONGS TO THE DOMAIN OF ETHICS

THE whole of human conduct may be divided into acts that are commanded and acts that are prohibited.
[p. 31]

[paragraph continues] Scripture and Reason--Ethics, properly so-called--are in agreement),
Behold, then, all the actions of mankind are, without exception, either good or bad: and that is all.

Footnotes

³⁰* Note that not the act but its motive determines its ethical significance.

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[p. 32]

THE DANGER OF PRIDE AND SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

MANY whose intention is to do right and serve God are not on their guard against things that may lead to pride.
Man may strive to awaken his intelligence, so that it will make clear to him what the Creator has intended.
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(FROM THE GATE OF HUMILITY.)

THE DANGER OF PRIDE

THE man who does good works is more likely to be overtaken by pride in them than by any other sin.
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[p. 33]

HUMILITY, TRUE AND FALSE

HUMILITY is lowliness of the soul; and it is a quality of the soul that, when established, leads to wisdom.
But there are three kinds of humility. One kind of humility is shared by man and by very many animals.
The second variety of humility is humility towards men; either on account of their having power over us, or on account of their being our superiors.
[p. 34]

for it does not comprehend all reasonable beings, nor is such humility proper at all times and in all places.
But the third kind of humility is humility before the Creator, blessed be He, and its obligation is upon all men.

Footnotes

³⁴* Kol hammedaberim, a phrase often used by our author, means, literally, all who speak
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THE SIGNS AND CONSEQUENCES OF TRUE HUMILITY

HUMILITY before the Creator obliges a man to behave meekly and unselfishly in all his transactions.
The truly humble man will mourn for all the mistakes made by other men, and not triumph over them.
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[p. 35]

HUMILITY AND EGOTISM

HE who has true humility will be free from all pride, conceit, self-praise and self-glorification.
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AIDS TO THE CULTIVATION OF HUMILITY

AMONG the aids to the cultivation of proper humility are the contemplation of the greatness of God,
If a man fills his mind with these and similar thoughts, he will be continually humble, un-
[p. 36]

heart, and this will deliver him from sin and error; as our sages, of blessed memory, say:

Footnotes

³⁵* In summarising, I have, here, been careful not to modernise the form of B's thought.
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THE CHARITY OF THE MEEK

HE who is humble before God will not only do good to all men, but he will speak kindly to all.
If it be wrong to speak disparagingly of a dead dog, how much more so, of a living man; and
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CONSISTENT HUMILITY AND SINCERITY

HE who is humble before God should be meek and modest in all the affairs of the world; both

Footnotes

³⁷* Wherever this phrase occurs it refers to the Rabbis whose sayings are preserved in the Mishnah. See The Duties of the Heart, by Rabbi Bachye, tr. by Edward Collins, [1909], at sacred-texts.com

WHERE HUMILITY IS SIN

IN matters of religion, justice, and of right and wrong, however, the meek will be high-spirited. See The Duties of the Heart, by Rabbi Bachye, tr. by Edward Collins, [1909], at sacred-texts.com

THE HALL MARKS OF THE MEEK

FIRST among the signs by which the meek are known is that they forgive all injuries and sufferings. [p. 38]

anger against those that treat them with contempt, even when they have the opportunity of revenge. The second is, that when misfortunes come to them their endurance triumphs over their fears. See The Duties of the Heart, by Rabbi Bachye, tr. by Edward Collins, [1909], at sacred-texts.com

THE PRIDE CONSISTENT WITH HUMILITY

IT may be asked: Can pride and humility dwell together in the heart? The answer requires a distinction. There are two kinds of pride. Pride in the bodily powers and in corporeal and material things. Even pride in spiritual and mental qualities is of two kinds; one shameful, and the other honorable. [p. 39]

perfectly satisfied with himself, and to his thinking it enough if he gets a good name, and a good reputation. The admirable kind of pride is that, when the wise man prides himself on his wisdom, and on his knowledge. See The Duties of the Heart, by Rabbi Bachye, tr. by Edward Collins, [1909], at sacred-texts.com

HUMILITY AS A WORLDLY ADVANTAGE--CONTENTMENT

HUMILITY is profitable to man in this world, because it makes him rejoice in his lot. For contentment. [p. 40]

world, and all it contains, is insufficient to satisfy the ambition of him into whom pride has entered. The humble also bear troubles with greater fortitude than do the proud.

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THE PROPER STUDY OF MANKIND IS MAN

ALTHOUGH it is incumbent upon us to investigate and study the whole universe, so as to understand
[p. 41]

must consider the objects of his being and all his mental qualities and characteristics, and
From the standpoint of this study much of the mystery of the universe, and many of the secrets

.

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 truth

.

When you have studied all that can be known of

[p. 42]

the universe, do not think that you know all about the wisdom and power of God. For in the
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(FROM THE SIXTH GATE.)

OF TRUST IN GOD

OF all things the most necessary to him who would serve God, [**] is trust in God.

.

If one does not trust in God, one trusts in something, or in some one, else. And he who trusts

.

He who trusts in his own wisdom or abilities, or in the strength of his body and in his own

[p. 43]

the soul. He who trusts in God will be led to serve none other than Him, in that he will not

.

He who trusts in God is able to turn his attention from worldly anxieties and devote it to

If he who trusts in God is wealthy, he will hasten cheerfully to fulfil all the religious
[p. 44]

possession involves, and from the anxiety of guarding and administrating it.

The wealthy man who trusts in God will not find his wealth a hindrance to his faith; for he

The worldly advantages of trust in God include peace of mind from worldly anxieties, and r

Footnotes

⁴²* It must be remembered that Bachye regards moral virtues, and all righteous conduct,

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KEEPING ACCOUNT WITH THE SOUL

THE keeping account with one's own soul is when a man busies himself in silent discussion

[p. 45]

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

Among the many subjects of such contemplation, are the origin of one's own life, and the w

.

Such contemplation concerning the Deity and man's relation to the Creator, will show the d

The service of God is of three kinds only:--Duties

[p. 46]

of the heart, such as are explained in this book; duties of the members and the heart toge

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CONTEMPLATION LEADING TO COMMUNION WITH GOD

IF the believer will constantly meditate on the fact that the Creator sees all his thought

A man should commune with himself in reference to the desires of his heart and his worldly

[p. 47]

tastes; and a careful consideration of the ends they serve will lead him to look with cont

Another subject for self-communing is the question as to whether we have made proper provi

Another subject that should not be neglected, in the communing with one's own soul, is the

The pure of heart will always love solitude. But

[p. 48]

here again the temptation to complete solitude must also be guarded against. For the society of men is a great temptation. One should also consider well, in communing with his soul, whether he has made the best use of his powers. The Duties of the Heart, by Rabbi Bachye, tr. by Edward Collins, [1909], at sacred-texts.com

THE GATE OF LOVE

THE intention of all separation from the world is only so that one may concentrate the whole of his mind on God.

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 they who love God will do all that is right, without the hope of reward, and will forsake all else.

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(FROM THE SECOND GATE, THE GATE OF INVESTIGATION AND CONTEMPLATION--CHAP. II.)

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

THAT investigation and careful study of all created beings and things is a duty binding upon every man.

[p. 50]

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 [**] over the dumb creature [**+] c

[p. 51]

pipe, and wine are at their feasts: but they look not at the work of the Eternal, neither

Footnotes

^50:* Hammedabbayr, the being who can put words in order, the speaking and reasoning being

^50:+ Sheayno medabbayer, who cannot put words in order.

^50:++ This is the meaning, beenah, understanding; compare bayn, between.

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(FROM THE GATE OF REPENTANCE. [**])

WHAT IS REPENTANCE?

WHAT is meant by repentance is when a man sets himself to the service of the Creator, after
[p. 52]

passions having prevailed over his reason, or blinded him to his duties, or because evil c

.

If his departure from the service of the Creator has consisted only in neglect of what is

.

It is as if a man who has become ill from taking insufficient food of a nourishing kind, o

He will have to eat abundantly--perhaps almost to excess--of nourishing food suitable to h

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

[p. 53]

his reason, and he does not refrain from sin, and only then, when he has finished his sinf

The second kind of repentance is that of him who repents in his heart and in his physical

The third kind of repentance is when a man fulfils

[p. 54]

the conditions of repentance [**] and causes his intellect to prevail over his desires, an

Footnotes

^51:* The only Hebrew word for repentance is teshubah, from shub, to return.

^53:* The word that I have here translated soul is nefesh, a word generally so rendered in

^54:* Bachye devotes a long chapter to describing these conditions.

^54:+ See footnote, <page 53>.

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THE MOTIVES TO REPENTANCE.

THE first and chief motive to repentance is when a man comes to recognise the nature of hi

[p. 55]

in this way it will be found that in every age and in all countries there will never be wa

The third motive to repentance is . . . when a man returns to God because of trials and fe
The fourth motive to repentance is when a man is only awakened to repent when he is shaken
But happy is he who is moved to repentance in the first manner.

Footnotes

⁵⁴++ Talmud, Kedoshin, 70b.

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ON THE POSSIBILITY OF REPENTANCE.

THE question may be asked, "Is it possible to make atonement by repentance [^{**}] for every
[p. 56]

deed. But in the case of sins against our fellow men there are many circumstances that mak
But if the repentant one is truly repentant, and does all that is at all possible to repai
[p. 57]

investments or his public works and charities, and so forth.

Repentance and atonement are only withheld from the sinner when his inward, secret thought
.

But know this, that repentance is only capable of fulfilment in deeds:--in works, and not
Footnotes

⁵⁵* Literally, to return from.

⁵⁵+ See <page 18>, last paragraph, and top of <page 19>.

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(FROM CHAP. VII. OF THE GATE OF LOVE.)

(See also <page 47>.)

HABITS OF THOSE THAT LOVE GOD.

THE customs of the lovers of the Eternal are too numerous to recount. Nevertheless, I will
These men have learned to know their God with a practical and fruitful knowledge. [^{**}] . .
[p. 58]

flow as a gentle stream, [**] and that it is He who nourishes and supports them. They have

.

Even where they cannot show in actual deed the carrying out of their good intentions, and

The longing after pleasures is rooted out, because there has entered into them a longing t

[p. 59]

They are humble because of the fear of God. . . . When one speaks with them they are wise,

If thou lookest at them, light seems to have descended on them, and if you could look into

.

They find obedience to the commandments given in the Pentateuch inadequate to satisfy thei

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Footnotes

^57:* Yadang.

^58:* Hu menahelem.

^58:+ Literally, "made a stand against being," etc.

^58:++ Betach implies a kind of trust and confidence that gives rest and quiet contentment

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