

THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 5:5 - PART 2

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

As we've indicated, we "fall" for certain things when we're reticent about achieving spiritual excellence -- including negative ideas about concepts we've *always believed in* ... until the yetzer harah pipes up. But that's one of its wily ways, we're taught. For as we cited, the yetzer harah tends to "raise doubts about things you already believe in ... to confuse you about things already clear to you, and to befuddle you with false ideas and faulty reasoning".

Doubting your core beliefs is a very, very off-putting experience. Even more stunning and threatening perhaps than forgetting your address or even your own name must be for those who succumb to dementia (G-d forbid). And while the cynical among us would suggest that it's good to question your beliefs, the wise would challenge them to question *that* belief itself when it comes to G-d and His revelations.

Recall, though, that the yetzer harah doesn't present new ideas or offer broader perspectives on things that could indeed deepen your being and challenge you to grow -- the way a seasoned and well-intentioned adversary might. What the yetzer harah does is stick its foot out as you walk by to trip you, the way a coward would. For it -- that is, *your own doubting mind* -- wants you to fall (for spiritual mediocrity), and nothing else.

In any event, the beliefs that the yetzer harah would challenge you on would be the very most fundamental ones at first. Like your belief in the immortality of the soul. "After all," it would argue, "all we are is stone-cold and dust-dry body-dead when we pass away, so why grow spiritually? Just 'eat and drink -- for tomorrow we will die' (Isaiah 22:13)". But as we know and should argue, we *do* have immortal souls and it would be wise to "nourish" it other ways in this lifetime.

But the yetzer harah goes on from there when that ruse doesn't work. It first tries to make you doubt G-d's existence, and when that doesn't work it tries a number of other things in descending order of magnitude. It suggests that you really needn't serve G-d, that there never were prophets after all or an Oral Tradition, that G-d doesn't really doesn't reward and punish, and so forth.

The first point is that we've already contended with many of these issues earlier on in this work. And secondly, know for a certainty that there are indeed clear and convincing arguments against all the other disparaging suggestions. But at bottom the task at hand isn't to respond to arguments. What we're to do is recognize that these ideas aren't a function of truth-seeking so much as of out-and-out *discouragement* and of your own spiritual self-doubts.

Don't think, though, that your yetzer harah will stop there on this rather esoteric level, and won't go any further. For as we'll see, it will touch on every facet of your being as it tries to coerce you to settle for spiritual mediocrity.

[Subscribe](#) to *Spiritual Excellence* and receive the class via e-mail.