

# THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 5:5 - PART 4

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

It's common-enough, but most of us are dumbstruck by it nonetheless: the sight of a doctor smoking. The usual reaction is to wonder at the outright inanity of it. But the truth is that not a single one of us isn't just as foolish in our own way.

Yet that doctor and we often rationalize our absurdities with statements like, "What can I do? My head knows ... but my heart just won't accept it". So it's vitally important to be aware of the conflict between mind and heart, and reason and feelings, which is the realm within which our better self battles our yetzer harah.

But it's a fact of life that holds true in all spheres that there's always "another side to the story". For sometimes reason is misleading -- or even detrimental. After all, as Ibn Pakudah notes, reason "can either cure any disease if applied to correctly, or can itself be an all-encompassing, incurable disease". So we'd need to explore another cunning and unexpected ruse of the yetzer harah: its prodding us to depend on reason alone.

That most especially holds true when reason stands in audacious opposition to revelation, and to the sort of knowledge that transcends reason and logic.

It's fundamental to our faith that G-d revealed His will (the Torah) to Moses and some two to three million of our ancestors in the Sinai Desert; and that He also revealed the immortal spiritual tenets that underlie them. Yet logic (actually misperception, prejudice, and illogic, in this case) often argues against the Torah.

As such, some of its tenets have been deemed "acceptable" and "reasonable" at one point in time, and "objectionable" and "unreasonable" at another. The Torah was once considered far too liberal in regard to women, for example, when it came to certain familial rights and privileges in the past, while it's now seen as conservative. The whole idea of a full day of leisure each week -- the Shabbat -- was once anathema, but it's now a universal ideal. The fact that the Torah banned human sacrifice and temple prostitution was seen as *sacriligious* by ancient religious thinkers, though both practices are considered repulsive now, and on and on.

"So for your own sake," Ibn Pakudah warns us "be careful not to forsake the ways of your forefathers ... by relying on reason alone, by taking your own advice and reaching your own conclusions".

The point is we're never to imagine that we ourselves have a truer grasp on reality than our sages

did, for "has anything ever occurred to you that didn't already occur to them?" And while they were wise and far-sighted, we're often more myopic than we like to think.

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*This series is dedicated to the memory of Yitzchak Hehrsh ben Daniel z"l, and Sara Rivka bas Yaakov Dovid, z"l.*

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