

# THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 5:5 - PART 7

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

The next ruse the yetzer harah tries is to have you take yourself and your spiritual accomplishments more "seriously". It has you stand back and admire those achievements, and most especially your trusting in G-d alone (which it tried to trip you on the last time, but failed). But then it makes another point.

"It's not right for you to hide your piety from others", it says. "What you should do," it offers, "is show people what you do and reveal your heart to them", since you'll gain their respect that way.

Now, ordinarily a person of high spiritual stature wouldn't fall for that. After all, it smacks of egoism. But the yetzer harah's next trick often *does* work.

It suggests that if you let others know how hard you work at your being, that they'll "learn from your actions". That's an exemplary thing since good people *should* serve as role models and be more open and aboveboard than they often are. But the yetzer harah will also claim that the honor you'd get from doing that isn't only for others' sake -- it's for your own good as well.

Don't fall for it, Ibn Pakudah warns. It's vitally important to realize a couple of things. First, that few ever actually benefit from others' respect (though we pressure ourselves so to achieve it!); and second, that even the idea of influencing others to grow by your example can backfire if people begin to consider you a hypocrite (and perhaps for good reasons).

And besides -- a person truly in search of spiritual excellence would only want to do things for G-d's sake. (We'll get back to this point soon enough.)

Aside from that, even if you were to become famous for your piety, how would that matter in the end? How long would it last and how far would it go? For as Ibn Pakudah asks, "what is this world, anyway ... and what, after all, is a lifetime?"

He then counsels that we learn to be *stoical* about things -- that we come to the point where "praise and insult one and the same" to us. He depicts stoicism as "the highest form of piety" which we can certainly understand. But he likewise terms it "the ultimate pleasure", which is surprising. Because isn't a stoic someone who's never thrown one way or the other by circumstances, and always stays the course because he's sure of his convictions and is willing to withstand anything to achieve his goal? Wouldn't he be expected to shun pleasure -- to say nothing of "the ultimate pleasure"?

But only people like us would think that way, since our definition of "pleasure" is so earthbound and

egoistic. A stoic's sense of "the ultimate pleasure" would be drawing closer and closer yet to G-d. So if one does that by doing things for His sake alone (as we depicted it above), and one has to withstand the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" (a la "Hamlet") in order to achieve that, then it's worth it!

If only you and I would internalize so sublime an attitude ....

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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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