

# THE DUTIES OF THE HEART, GATE 5:5 - PART 14

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

The final frontier in our struggle to avoid the promptings of the yetzer harah lies in the oldest battle of all: "you" versus "me".

The truth be known, deep in the underbelly of every heart lies a simple equation that reads, "if you win, I lose; but if \*I\* win, then you lose". And in the case of spiritual seekers it's rooted in the misguided assumption that there's a finite amount of spiritual success to go around. But in truth, everyone can grow in his or her spirit, and nothing would please G-d more than everyone doing just that.

(In fact, we're taught at one point in the Torah that two sages -- Eldad and Medad -- were found to be prophesying in close proximity to Moses, which some others were put off by. But all Moses did was say, "Would that all G-d's people were prophets!", to his credit, and go on from there [see Numbers 11:24-28].)

So Ibn Pakudah warns us all here that there'll come a point when the yetzer harah will start to "exaggerate and overblow everything you do for G-d ... and makes you arrogant". And it will have you despise, belittle, and dismiss others' efforts as a consequence -- "even when they're likely better than you in G-d's eyes!", as he says.

On a deeper level what that comes to imply is that there will come a time when you'll notice the "competition" out there and feel threatened (as a consequence of the misguided belief cited above).

It might be found, for example, that someone will prove to be more devout than you, and so "the yetzer harah will incite you against him" and have you think that he's making you look bad. (Don't think for a moment, by the way, that people who have striven for spiritual excellence for years and years wouldn't fall for pettiness and foolishness, for they certainly could. It's just that they catch themselves at it, laugh, sigh, start all over again and go onward, while others tend not to.)

"What you should do," the yetzer harah goes on to say, is "wait until he stumbles, then ... spread false rumors about him that will ruin his reputation." Because, again, as the thinking goes, if he succeeds, you simply cannot.

But Ibn Pakudah sets out to get us back on course by reminding us once again of our overarching goal and by putting things in perspective.

"Respond to that thusly," he advises. Say to yourself something like, Now, wait a minute! -- "How

could I despise someone whom G-d loves and insult someone He praises? Dare I ... bear a grudge against him because he serves G-d?" After all, both he and you have the same aspirations and values. Remind yourself of that, of the fact that both of you can succeed, and that everyone would be better off if you both did, and you'll grow further yet in your being.

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