

NEPHESH HACHAIM 1:6

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

1.

But the idea that we ourselves actually "animate" and function as the *soul* behind "the body of the universe", so to speak, isn't to be taken literally. Because while the very instant a soul wants a part of its body to move, it does, yet we ourselves don't have that kind of sure, immediate, and definitive effect on things ¹.

It comes to this: G-d created man last ² so that he'd comprise and be a compendium of all the heavenly and earthly phenomena that preceded him, and so that all those phenomena would contribute to and be played out in his own makeup and component-parts ³.

Indeed, each of our elements and parts were to correspond to a specific celestial world and capacity, and we were to be a paradigm of heaven and earth, which were themselves to correspond to our makeup ⁴. But then Adam and Eve sinned and a lot of that was moderated ⁵.

2.

The mitzvah-system is also connected to its celestial roots and to the entirety of creation. And in fact each and every mitzvah is a compendium of millions of celestial capacities and lights ⁶.

As such, whenever someone performs a mitzvah he can either rectify things connected to the specific world and capacity relevant to that mitzvah, elevate them, or he can bolster their light or holiness -- but only to the degree that G-d wants us to.

But one's ability to affect such changes with his mitzvot depends on the quality of his performance of them, and on whether and to the degree to which he purifies his thoughts when he'd engaged in them, too. And that in turn adds holiness and vitality to that part of his being that's engaged in the mitzvah that corresponds to it ⁷.

3.

Were we to fulfill *all* of the mitzvot with all of their factors and conditions on the physical level, and were we to do that with pure and holy thoughts, we'd rectify all of the celestial worlds, would have become an intrinsic instrument of that ⁸, and we'd consequently be made holy and would be

constantly surrounded by G-d's Glory⁹.

But when we'd sin and sully one of our capacities and organs, that would reach up to the corresponding source of that celestial world and capacity, which could destroy it (G-d forbid!), lessen it, sully it, dim and diminish its pure light, as well as weaken and diminish its holiness -- depending on the particular sin we'd committed, how we'd committed it, and depending on the status of the world involved.

For not all the worlds can be affected the same way, in fact. The lower worlds could actually be destroyed (G-d forbid!), light could be withheld from higher ones, higher-yet worlds would be forced to emit less light or would be diminished somehow, while the arcane lights and holiness of the very highest worlds would be diminished¹⁰.

And that's because the impurity would touch upon the upper realms, since they're all incorporated in those upper realms and contribute to them intrinsically¹¹.

Footnotes:

¹R' Chaim presents the first of his several complex and important notes to this chapter here. In short, it offers an illustration of the fact that things don't instantaneously move to our "command" from the fact that the angels don't (see *Chullin* 91b).

That might seem to be a far-fetched proof but it isn't. For if it's angels who enable things to happen here (see *Derech Hashem* 2:5:3-4), it follows then that if they don't immediately respond to our order that we don't control them (and the functions of the universe) the way a soul controls a body.

²That is, He created man as the sum of all that preceded him. See our discussion of this in footnotes 14 and 18 to the previous chapter.

³R' Chaim cites *Zohar* 2:75b (which -- like most of the other sources cited here -- speaks to our having been created in G-d's image, which is of course the major theme of this Gate), 3:48a, 3:117a; *Idra Rabbah* 135a, 141a; *Reiya Mehemena*, 3:238b; *Tikkunei Zohar Chadash* 2:97a; *Zohar Chadash*, 1:64b, 2:23b, 58b; *Eitz Chaim* 26:1, and Ari's *Likkutei Torah*, *Ki Tissah* and *Ha'azinu*.

⁴This will be expanded upon in 2:5 below.

⁵The point about Adam and Eve's sin was offered in R' Chaim's second footnote here (rather than in the text itself as we laid it out, though it's not clear why.).

This footnote offers a lot of R' Chaim's insights into Jewish Thought, so we'll take each point separately.

A. He offers that Adam and Eve were originally made up of only holy component parts (also see Ramchal's *Adir Bamarom* p. 11, and *Leshem, Deah* 2:3:1). And that wrong thus originally stood *outside of their beings*.

Thus while they were free and able to choose to do wrong by enabling it to enter their beings, their doing it was only as likely as one of us freely choosing to walk into fire (i.e., they certainly *could* have, but *why would they want to?*).

B. It was only after they sinned that wrong became a part of their -- and our own -- inner being, and then entered the universe's system, too, given that man and the universe mirror each other. That's when things began to be negatively affected by human actions.

(It's thus vitally important to recognize that everything cited in this chapter and beyond takes place in the less than perfect world that resulted from their sin.)

C. By now, though, wrong is such a part of our inner being that we mistakenly think its promptings are coming from our very own selves, and it seems to us as if we ourselves want to do wrong. But it's not us *per se* so much as those internalized forces of wrong that are "speaking" to us (R' Chaim directs our attention to *Eitz Chaim*, *Sha'ar Kelipot Nogah* 2; *Sha'ar Gilgulim* 1; and *Berachot* 17a, *Shabbat* 146a. See *Chovot Halevovot* 5:5, and *Hilchot Geirushin* 2:20, as well).

(This last point is a very telling insight into our own misunderstanding of things. It offers that we tend to "misread" our hearts, for it's not we ourselves who want to sin but rather the forces of un-holiness using our own voices like unholy ventriloquists!)

D. All of that thus brings about a great admixture of things in our hearts so that we're sometimes righteous and other times wrongful. In fact, even our deeds can be somewhat right and sometimes wrong at the very same time (see Rambam's remarks at the end of his commentary to the *Mishnayot of Makkot*). As such, no one is utterly righteous and no one is utterly wrongful (see *Hilchot Teshuva* 3:2), as we all have imperfect intentions from time to time.

E. The state of affairs in which wrong entered our beings as a consequence of Adam and Eve's sin continued on until the time we received the Torah at Mount Sinai (*Shabbat* 146a, also see 3:11 below), though it tragically returned when we constructed the golden calf (*Ibid.* 89a).

F. The statement that Adam and Eve would die if they sinned (Genesis 2:7) wasn't *a threat of punishment* so much as a warning that they'd internalize impurity by sinning and that the only thing that could rectify that would be the decomposition of their body and the subsequent purification of their beings (see *Derech Hashem* 1:3 and *Da'at Tevunot* 72).

G. In any event, death and human impurity will continue until the End of Days, when death will be undone (Isaiah 25:8) and the spirit of impurity will be removed (Zachariah 13:2) (also see *Ma'amarim* 5).

(The central point here seems to be that now that we're in this less-than-perfect situation, whatever we do is a combination of right and wrong, thus we affect the universe both for the better and for the worse. So, R' Chaim's point at the beginning of the chapter that we don't really serve as the "soul" of the universe -- which he'll address in the very next chapter in another light -- could also be explained this way: we're not exactly the world's "soul" because we're no longer on the level we'd need to be. After all, how could the world's "body-parts" respond to us immediately if we're at one and the same time telling them to do one thing [i.e., the right thing] and its opposite [i.e., the wrong thing]? And the repetition in this chapter of a lot of what's offered in 1:4 above about our capabilities and inner makeup likewise serves to make the point that those factors are now on a lower status.)

⁶ Cited are Zohar 2:85b 165b; *Tikkunei Zohar* 129b-130a; and *Eitz Chaim, Sha'ar Hayichudim* 2. See 4:29-30 below.

⁷ But, again, we can no longer affect them to the degree we could have had Adam and Eve not sinned and had our ancestors not erected the golden calf.

R' Chaim offers another note here that is likewise full of insights into Jewish Thought.

A. As soon as someone has it in mind to perform a mitzvah something of a "trace" (i.e., an impression) of that mitzvah is implanted in its celestial source above -- even before the person actually performs it. And that enables a "surrounding light" to shine down upon him, and for a degree of holiness to encompass him (cited are Zohar 2:31b, 2:86b, 2: 128a, 3:122a. Also see 1:12 below and *Ma'amarim* 29).

(Notice the reintroduction of the idea of one thing encompassing another, the way bodies encompass souls of course, G-d's being encompasses the universe -- and how upper worlds encompass the lower worlds they control as discussed in note 4 to 1:5 above. Along the same lines, see 7C below which discusses being encompassed by the Garden of Eden, 7D about being encompassed by holiness, and 7E about being encompassed by *Gehenom*.)

B. That holiness and the encompassing lights then enable that person to "attach himself onto G-d", if one could say as much, in his lifetime.

C. The "encompassing light" then helps him to actually fulfill the mitzvah, which then strengthens that light. And that then gives him the wherewithal to fulfill yet other mitzvot given that he's "literally sitting in the Garden of Eden" then (as R' Chaim puts it. See 1:12 below, *Ruach Chaim* 6, and *Ma'amarim* 2 at end) where the *yetzer harah* has no power to thwart him (see *Ma'amarim* 20, 24).

D. You can actually sense the holiness you're surrounded by at that time if you concentrate, and can thus grow in your soul.

E. The opposite is true, too, though. For when you sin -- not just *think* about sinning (see *Kiddushin* 39b where it's pointed out that one would have to actually commit a sin for harm to be done, and yet would only have to think of fulfilling a mitzvah to reap the benefits of that) -- you draw a spirit of

impurity down upon yourself (see Zohar 2:31b and 2:86b cited above), become surrounded by an impure spirit, and the very "air of *Gehenom* surrounds you" even though you're alive (see *Avodah Zara* 5a).

⁸The term used here is *merkava* or "chariot". That's to say that you'd be the "driver behind the wheels" of the instrument that accomplished all of that.

⁹R' Chaim cites Zohar 2:155a; and *Raiyah Mehemna*, 3:239a. See 4:15 below.

¹⁰R' Chaim cites Zohar 2:85b, *Tikkunei Zohar* 129b.

¹¹R' Chaim's final note to this chapter is presented at this point. It cites the fact that the idea that the upper realms are all connected to man can be found in *Tikkunei Zohar Chadash* 97a; *Raiyah Mehemna*, 3:219b; as well as in *Sha'arei Kedusha* 3:2; *Likkutei Torah, Ki Tisa* and *Ha'azinu*; and in *Bereishit Rabba* 8:3 and *Kohelet Rabba* 2:12.