

## CHAPTER 3:2 HUMANKIND

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

### *Derech Hashem* - The Way of G-d 1:3:2

A certain cosmic condition had to exist if we were ever to achieve perfection on our own and to thus draw close to G-d, though. We humans had to have been comprised of two disparate phenomena: a body and a soul <sup>1</sup>. Ramchal depicts the body as "earthly" <sup>2</sup> and "murky", and the soul as "intelligent" <sup>3</sup> and "clear" <sup>4</sup>.

And each phenomenon would have to do its best to hold sway over us if we're to have free will, and to provide ammunition for the battle we'd need to wage to have the soul eventually dominate.

The final point here is that once the soul dominates the body, *both* are then elevated and the individual eventually achieves perfection, whereas when the body dominates the soul, both are denigrated, and the individual is denied his or her perfection and is even said to be rejected by G-d <sup>5</sup>. How daunting a thought!

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> In fact, not only are we comprised of the two separate phenomena of soul and a body, we're likewise comprised of two separate *proclivities*: a body-orientation and a soul-orientation. The former inclines toward sin and the *yetzer harah*, and the latter toward goodness and the *yetzer hatov* (see 1:3:1).

Many would argue that the idea that we're part-this and part-that is spurious. "We aren't partly soul-oriented, partly body-oriented", they'd insist, "we're in fact both *body and soul* oriented." While the point is well taken, it's nonetheless misguided. The truth be known, if we were to pull back and look at humanity from a great distance -- say from a "G-d's eye-view" -- we'd determine that we're indeed body and soul oriented, that the breakdown into two opposing realms isn't real, and that from that fuller perspective we're indeed whole beings comprised of a body-soul. (Many make reference to this idea when they speak of the "mind-body connection", by the way.)

But despite the utter truth of that, looking at things from that perspective is misleading -- and counterproductive. For we don't experience ourselves from a "G-d's eye-view"; our very real, very human struggles, and our victories, too, are based on the fact that we experience a very real and compelling split in ourselves. One huge and electric part of us experiences ourselves as wholly of

this earth, while another experiences ourselves as transcendent. So the point about our being both of body and soul at the same time is wasted.

Granted, there are great and holy individuals who *know* there isn't a split, and don't struggle within their beings. But the great preponderance of us simply don't experience that. So it would be best to accept the reality we now know if we're ever to encounter and cooperate with utter reality as we're bidden to in this life.

See 3:1:1-2 below where Ramchal refers to the various levels of the soul. Also see *Da'at Tevunot* 69-70, *Derech Eitz Chaim*, and *Klallim Rishonim* 28 for discussions on the combination of body and soul.

<sup>2</sup> Or what we'd term "down to earth" and "practical".

<sup>3</sup> Or what we'd term "theoretical" and "idealistic".

<sup>4</sup> On one level the body is termed "earthly" because it's comprised of the same elements everything else on earth is. And the soul is termed "intelligent" because the least earthly thing we experience is pure abstract thought.

The two other depictions of body and soul -- "murky" and "clear" -- offer another insight. For we find that while murkiness and clarity are indeed two points on an illumination continuum, still and all, neither is an extreme. For were we to draw such a continuum we'd lay it out thusly (with an infinite number of degrees in between): Pitch black -- murky -- clear -- glaringly bright.

Ramchal's point thus seems to be that being body-oriented (i.e., "murky") isn't at all the most material you can be -- being "pitch black" or evil is. And that being soul-oriented (i.e., "clear") isn't at all the most spiritual you can be -- being "glaringly bright" or G-dly is. The argument would then be that we'd each do well to determine just where we lie on the extended line over-all, and to strive higher.

<sup>5</sup> As Ramchal put it in *Messilat Yesharim* (Ch. 1), "The world was created for our usage. But we stand in the midst of a great balance: should we be attracted to the world and distanced from our Creator, both we and the world with us would be damaged; but if we would master ourselves and clutch onto our Creator, and make use of the world's things to help us in our Divine service, both we and the world with us will be elevated".

Also see 1:3:12 below regarding the soul's effect on the body, as well as *Da'at Tevunot* 126.

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