

CHAPTER 3:11 HUMANKIND

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Derech Hashem - The Way of G-d 1:3:11

Body and soul each go their own way at death. The body returns to the dust from which it was made¹, and the soul goes to The Soul World².

That is, the soul doesn't just passively anticipate its true and infinite reward in The World to Come while the body decomposes, is purified, and then returns to the soul³. It enjoys *something* of the delight it will enjoy in The World to Come⁴, according to the merits it will have earned in the physical world there in The Soul World (just as the delight it will experience in The World to Come will correspond to its merits)⁵. Nonetheless, as we said⁶, true and fulsome reward and delight will ultimately be experienced by the body and soul together.

Notes:

¹ "For you are dust, and you will return to the dust" (Genesis 3: 19).

² In fact, the soul returns to its source as well: it revisits the Soul World from which it actually originated. See *Tanchuma Pikudei* 3 for the details of the soul's experience before birth, also see Zohar 1:91b.

As to the posthumous experience of The Soul World, also known as "The Garden of Eden" or "Heaven", there are several Traditional discussions of it. See *Emunot v'De'ot* 6:7, *Moreh Nevuchim* 1:70, *Ikkarim* 4:30, *Torat HaAdam* (*Sha'ar HaGemul*). Also see *Shabbos* 152b, *Chagigah* 12b, *Tosephot* (*Rosh Hashanah* 16b, "leyom hadin"), *Vayikra Rabbah* 18:1, *Kohelet Rabbah* 12:7.

The point, though, is that this Soul World isn't the ultimate reach or the definitive end -- The World to Come, which is far more arcane and profound an experience, is. The idea that there is something beyond the death experience and its mysteries is one of the points that sets Judaism apart from many other religions and world-views.

³ The body doesn't just decompose in the dust, though: it has other experiences there. See *Da'at Tevunot* 72 and *Adir Bamarom* pp. 123, 198 where the cleansing process is discussed, and *Derech Eitz Chaim* (as well as Ari's *Sha'ar Hagilgul* 23:3 and *Reishit Chochma*, *Sha'ar HaYirah* Ch. 12) for reference

to *Chibut HaKever* ("the purgatory of the grave").

⁴ See Ramchal's *Ma'amar HaChochma*, "*B'gemul*".

⁵ See 1:3:10.

⁶ See 1:3:7, 10.

Rabbi Yaakov Feldman has translated and commented upon "The Gates of Repentance", "The Path of the Just", and "The Duties of the Heart" (Jason Aronson Publishers). His works are available in bookstores and in various locations on the Web.