

## CHAPTER 2: THE SPIRITUAL WORLD □ PART 6

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

Most of us have barely an inkling of the depths of our souls. People think their souls are their hearts perhaps, or their personalities, dreams, drives, deepest thoughts, heritage or the like. But our souls are none of that: they're far, far deeper, and much more complex and esoteric.

For while our hearts, personalities, dreams and the like are all part of the rich and nuanced shades of our being, as well as essential parts of the twists and turns of our psyche -- our souls aren't. They're part of the nebulous and profound "underbelly" of Heaven that's far, far beyond all that, which connects us to it. Because, don't forget, our souls existed "out there" before we ourselves did, and they'll go on when we're gone; so they're clearly not of this world. And besides, souls have functions that go way beyond the here-and-now.

For as Ramchal puts it, "souls are spiritual beings that are designed to enter bodies and to be attached to them" indeed. But each soul "has characteristics that are unique to its situation" and role in the cosmos, both "outside the body and within it".

(We grant you that, as Ramchal has pointed out in other works, there are in fact five levels of the soul -- termed Yechidah, Chaya, Neshama, Ruach, and Nephesh in descending order -- and that they go all the way from being the element of our beings that are at one with G-d [the Yechidah] to being the impetus behind our daily actions and the source of our life-energy [the Nephesh], and that our hearts, personalities, dreams, drives etc. have to do with the Ruach; and we grant you that all five levels can legitimately be translated the "soul", but that's all beside the point here.)

And so we've learned that there are three prime spiritual entities: Transcendent Forces, angels, and souls. There are other, lesser spiritual entities as well. One of them (termed Shadim in the plural) crosses the line between physical and spiritual entities and expresses characteristics of both or either, depending on its function at the time. There's another group of essential elements, though: the stars and constellations. For everything that cascades down to our souls and selves from the Transcendent Forces and angels must filter through them and is colored by them.

In any event, each of these spiritual (and quasi-spiritual) wonders has been granted the ability to affect the sorts of changes only it can, and to forestall the laws of nature when that's called for (either when G-d dictates, or when the holy ones here on earth who can manage such things encourage it for good reasons).

At bottom, though, the point is that, there's nothing in this world that doesn't have a counterpart up

above either on a transcendent, angelic, or soul level steering it on, arranging for all its circumstances and experiences -- as decreed by G-d Almighty. And the whole of that can be said to be the great, albeit muted, backdrop to the cosmos.

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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.