

CHAPTER 8: THE REDEMPTION - PART 3

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

After all the revelation and jubilation of the Messianic Era; after all the piety achieved and the great, unending spiritual elevation that will come about in order to prepare everyone for the World to Come, the time will come for everyone there to die ... then be brought back to life. So, let's delve now into the classical understanding of Techiyat Hameitim, the revival of the dead.

The promise of such a phenomenon was first expressed by the prophet Daniel who said, "Many who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake; some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2- 3). The idea had been alluded to earlier on as well. We were told that "G- d brings to death and brings to life; He brings (people) down to the netherworld and raises (them) up (afterwards)" (I Samuel 2:6), and we were shown instances of it when the prophets Elijah and Elisha revived the dead (see 1 Kings 17:7-24 and 2 Kings 4:1-7).

But at bottom we're assured that it will indeed come about. In fact, belief in Techiyat Hameitim is one of the fundamental tenets of the Jewish Faith as Rambam lays it out (comments to Mishna Sanhedrin Ch. 10), and which has come to be worded in the Ani Ma'amin prayer thusly: "I believe with complete faith that there will be a revival of the dead, whenever G-d wills it". And we affirm our belief in it three times a day, in the second blessing of the Sh'mone Esrai prayer.

Now, some wonder how all the elements of a decomposed body could ever be gathered, lumped together and joined with a soul, but that would be no more miraculous in fact than the wonder of conception, where thousands of spermatozoa vie for the chance to be attached onto an egg to form a life while only one manages to make it.

At any rate, Ramchal goes on to explain the rationale behind the body rejoining the soul in the future. As he put it in another work, "When G-d created man (with) body and soul to serve (Him) together ... (through the) Torah and mitzvot that He gave him, it was only fitting that they should also be rewarded eternally together. For it cannot be that the body would toil and have nothing of its own (to take from that, in the end), for as we learn, 'G-d never denies anyone His creatures their rewards' (Babba Kama 38a)" (Da'at Tevunot 68).

He also explained at another point just why the body would have to suffer death before being rejoined by the soul. As he put it, "Had Adam not sinned, his body would have been become pure and would have been perfected in a moment. But because of his sin, impurity came to be a part of man's body, and thus the soul cannot join with it in a perfect unity"; for it's only after physical death,

when the body decomposes and all its impurities are undone, " that the body can be rebuilt in purity ... and the soul can then enter it (again) and remain in the body ... forever and to all eternity, radiating light after light to it, until it will ascend to the highest level appropriate to it" (Klach Pitchei Chochma 41).

Ramchal goes on here to lay out the events that will come about after Techiyat Hameitim. Everyone will then endure a Day of Judgment, and while the fundamentally evil will be annihilated (and there are few of them), the rest of us will then be readied for the ultimate reward in the World to Come, which we'll focus on next.

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.