

EIGHT CHAPTERS □ CHAPTER 1:1

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

What drives us, at bottom? Most would say it's our motivations, dreams, fears, surroundings, and the like. But the truth is that it's our Spirit ("nephesh" in Hebrew) that drives us. But -- what's our spirit after all? The short answer is that it's our psyche, but there's a lot more to it as we'll learn. For one thing, though, it's not the immortal soul that wafts aloft to heaven when we pass (though the two are inexorably linked ... but that's a subject unto itself).

So let's explore the makeup of our Spirit as Rambam explains it and come to see what we're made of along the way.

Rambam is emphatic about the fact that we each only have one Spirit, which nonetheless has many different capacities. He apparently needs to emphasize that since many of the physicians and philosophers who were respected in antiquity claimed that we each have three, termed the "native", "dynamic", and "transcendent" spirits respectively. However, Rambam's larger point is that despite its complexity (which we'll explore) and regardless of our many inner contradictions, we each have only one Spirit.

The truth is even we in modernity tend to think we have more than one Spirit, as when we say things like, "I was *beside* myself" and "I took a deep look inside myself", etc. which seem to imply multiple spirits that are each separate and independent of each other. But the truth is that we're each of one Spirit -- which is decidedly multilayered and dynamic.

Now, it's especially important for us to know that, Rambam emphasizes, since self-refinement and spiritual excellence only come about when one "heals his Spirit and its capacities", and because we can only do that after first becoming familiar enough with the makeup of our Spirit to know what makes its "ill" in the first place and what would then "heal" it.

So we'll have to settle right now for the notion that our one Spirit is comprised of five "component parts": the digestive system, the senses, the imagination, the emotions, and the intellect. We'll explain that next time.

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