

EIGHT CHAPTERS □ CHAPTER 1:2

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Let's delve into our beings now by beginning to explore the five parts of our Spirit as Rambam depicts them.

But first it's important for our purposes to understand that we'll be discussing our own, the human, Spirit rather than animals', plants', or other entities' spirits. For while each and every thing has the sort of unique impelling, animating force we're talking about, we're interested in knowing what makes *us* "tick" in order to grow.

Besides, "the human digestive system, for one, isn't the same as a horse or donkey's" as Rambam points out, which is also true of the other parts of the Spirit aside from the digestive system. Since we humans "are nourished by the human digestive system, while donkeys are nourished by the donkey digestive system", and other entities are nourished by theirs.

Now, that's clear enough and no one would argue with the matter, but Rambam then steps aside to make a very important point.

He says that even though "the term 'digestion' is used for all three, ... (nevertheless) the different systems are only analogous to each other and the terms don't refer to the same thing." That means to say that even though we, animals, and plants are all said to "digest" things in order to function and grow, still and all, animals' and plants' digestive systems are different from ours, and they're all only called by the same name for the sake of convenience. (Have patience, though; we'll soon see what all this has to do with spiritual growth.)

He'd have us compare the three different digestive systems to "three dark rooms, the first of which was illuminated by sunlight, the second by moonlight, and the third by candlelight". The point is that even though all three rooms can be said to be "illuminated", in fact "the source and generator of light in the first (room) was the sun, the second was the moon, and the third was a flame."

"In much the same way," Rambam continues (while drawing closer to our spiritual well-being), "what generates human senses is a human Spirit, what generates a donkey's is a donkey Spirit", etc., and "the only thing they have in common is an analogous term" -- i.e., they're all said to be kept alive by a Spirit. Now, this obviously isn't the place to discuss human versus animal or vegetable digestion and nutrition, but suffice it to say that Rambam's overarching statement is that sometimes the very same term is used for two or more very different, though similar things.

But why would Rambam consider it necessary to make that point? It comes down to this: He'll be differentiating between different instances of goodness, (spiritual and ethical) health, piety and the like in the course of this work. For you see, one of his central themes here is the idea that we really don't understand what's good, healthy, and pious; so we'd need to differentiate between good and bad instances of each if we're ever to be truly spiritually excellent. That's also to say that we're not to fall for appearances. For, since our spiritual makeup often isn't what it seems to be, it's essential for us to avoid applying terms lightly.

For while some derive their *so-called* goodness, health, and piety from "candlelight" (to use the above illustration), meaning to say, from synthetic sources; and others from "moonlight", meaning to say, from derivative sources; we're expected to derive true goodness, health, and piety from "sunlight" -- from trustworthy, inspired sources.

We'll determine later on, by the way, that this idea also touches on some intriguing things, like our understanding of G-d, on what in this world matters and what doesn't, and the like.

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