

EIGHT CHAPTERS □ CHAPTER 1:3

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Let's return now to our subject at hand: an exploration of the parts of the human Spirit in order to know what we're all about and how we can change for the better. As we'd said, our one Spirit is comprised of five component parts: the digestive system, the senses, the imagination, the emotions, and the intellect.

Now, as most of us know, in Rambam's words, "the digestive system encompasses the processes of ingestion, retention, digestion per se, excretion of waste, growth, procreation, and metabolism". We obviously won't be getting into the physiology and biology involved, since that's beside our point. And it's also well known that our senses include the senses of sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch. What *will* concern us about these, though, is the role they play in our free choices, which we'll discuss later on.

What's less known or perhaps less thought about is the make-up of our imaginations. Rambam defines it as "the capacity to retain impressions of experiences (in our minds) when they're out of range of the senses involved, and to compare and contrast some to others", which is straightforward enough.

But the imagination is also what enables us to "combine certain experiences (we'd) had along with others (we'd) never had nor ever could", which is significant for our subject. Because it's this aspect of our imagination that can get us into trouble. For it sometimes enables us to "imagine" what isn't there, rather than "envision" what very well could be, but isn't yet. The distinction will prove to be vital when it comes to using our imaginations toward personal growth.

Our emotions, as we all know, "encompass the capacity to either love something or despise it", or feel somewhere in between about it. What's especially significant about our emotions, though, when it comes to our spiritual well being is that it's also "the capacity that enables (us) to seek something out or avoid it, to be sympathetic toward something or have reservations about it, and to become angry or satisfied, fearful or brave, cruel or compassionate, loving or hateful, and the like". That's to say that it's our emotions that have us *react* one way or another to what's before us, and it's often enough under our control. This will matter a lot when it comes to acting out on our impulses or not, as we'll see.

Our intellect also affects the way we react to things, since it encompasses our ability to "reason, speculate, acquire knowledge, and differentiate between good and bad behavior". It's just that, as

most of us know, intellect-based reactions tend to be more dispassionate and detached. And this too will play an important role in our search for spiritual excellence.

The intellect, of course, also has more practical applications in that it enables us to "acquire skills like carpentry, agriculture, medicine, or navigation" and the like, and it also allows us to "think about when to do something (we'd) like to do, whether it's feasible or not, and how to do it", but that's basically besides our concerns here.

Rambam then treads very delicately upon a rather recondite idea about the Spirit, as we'll see.

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