

# EIGHT CHAPTERS □ CHAPTER 2:2

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

Those of us in search of spiritual excellence would naturally want to acquire virtues and avoid flaws. But we'd need to define just what true spirit-based virtues and flaws encompass rather than material ones. For while being "good" or "bad" at one's job or social interests, for example, certainly matters, it doesn't touch on our quest.

So we're taught that there are two sorts of virtues and flaws germane here: those touching on our ideas (which obviously affect our intellects) and those relevant to our character (which affect our emotions and senses, as we'll learn). Let's concentrate here on the first. Since we don't tend to think of ideas as being "virtuous" per se (though we do speak of "flawed ideas", interestingly), so we'll just label them "lofty".

Rambam contends that it's lofty to learn how to determine the cause-and-effect relationship between things (i.e., knowing which of these two brought the other about and is thus more significant). It's likewise lofty to hone and purify our reasoning processes, and to think adroitly and swiftly. Contrarily, our thinking, and thus we ourselves, would be flawed if we dwelt on incidentals, if we allowed our minds to stagnate, or if our thinking was muddled and sluggish.

Though he doesn't speak of it until much later in the work, Rambam also maintains that lofty thoughts are ones that are in tune with the ultimate truth about our situation in this world and in a relationship to G-d, and it also has to do with understanding certain truisms about Him.

Without spending too much time on it at this juncture, suffice it to say that those with lofty minds come to know that we're expected to try to grasp as much as we can about G-d; that with notable exception, as we'll see, we've each been granted the freedom to act as we see fit based on our own judgment; and that it would behoove us to use that freedom to draw close to G-d. They also know that though G-d is basically unfathomable in His essence, there are certainly things that we can say about Him from our perspective, including the facts that He's Omniscient and Almighty. But this will be explained as we go along.

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