EIGHT CHAPTERS CHAPTER 2:3

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

As everyone knows, the busiest, noisiest, and most complex aspect of our beings is our emotional center. Everything we do, experience, think about, and yearn for passes through it and leaves its mark. Though most are dim and mundane, some of the marks left there are quite stunning and affect us on a very deep, recondite level. The lot of them, though, are the stuff out of which our characters are made.

For as we learned above, our emotions are the one aspect of our Spirit that are most directly related to our ethical and Torah-based choices that touch on character virtues and flaws. (We also learn that our senses, the final aspect of our Spirit, merely feed our emotions, as when we hear something off-putting and either respond angrily or with equanimity, etc.)

Now, there's an overabundance of emotional traits open to us, including but certainly not limited to the ones Rambam will be concentrating on here: temperance, generosity, justice, patience, humility, goodwill, courage, and sensitivity. None is inherently good or bad (though some are better than others), and all can serve either good or bad ends. In any event Rambam's major contention throughout this work is that a character trait is flawed only when it's either overdone or underdone -- when too minimal or exaggerated. We'll delve into this at great length later on.

The underlying point for now, though, is that our free choices are more relevant to our emotions than to any other aspect of our being.

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