

CHABAD LUBAVITCH OF CHAUTAUQUA

23 Vincent Avenue Chautauqua, NY 14722 T: (716) 357 - 3467 W: www.cocweb.org E: rabbi@cocweb.org

Maimonides on Ethics – Faculties of the Soul – Week 2 – 2021

1. **CHAPTER 1:** KNOW that the human soul is one, but that it has many diversified activities. Some of these activities have, indeed, been called souls, which has given rise to the opinion that man has many souls, as was the belief of the physicians, with the result that the most distinguished of them states in the introduction of his book that there are three souls, the natural, the vital, and the psychical (spiritual). These activities are called faculties and parts, so that the phrase "parts of the soul," frequently employed by philosophers, is commonly used. By the word "parts", however, they do not intend to imply that the soul is divided into parts as are bodies, but they merely enumerate the its different activities, as belonging to the general soul, as parts of that which is comprised from these parts.
2. You know, that the improvement of the moral qualities is brought about by the healing of the soul and its faculties. Therefore, just as the physician, who endeavors to cure the human body, must have a perfect knowledge of it in its entirety and its individual parts, just as he must know what causes sickness that it may be avoided, and must also be acquainted with the means by which a patient may be cured, so, likewise, a healer who tries to cure the soul, and one who wishes to improve the moral qualities, must have a knowledge of the soul in its totality and its parts, must know what causes it to become diseased, and how to heal it.
3. Consequently, I say that the soul has five 'parts' [faculties]; 1) the nutritive [also known as the "growing" faculty], 2) the sensitive, 3) the imaginative, 4) the responsive [arousal], and 5) the rational.
4. We have already stated in this chapter that our words concern themselves only with the human soul; for the nutritive faculty by which man is nourished is not the same, for instance, as that of the ass or the horse. Man is sustained by the nutritive faculty of the human soul, the ass thrives by means of the nutritive faculty of its soul, and the palm-tree flourishes by the nutritive faculty peculiar to its soul. Although we apply the same term nutrition to all of them indiscriminately, nevertheless, its signification is by no means the same. ...Mark well this point, for it is very important, as many so-called philosophers have fallen into error regarding it, in consequence of which they have been driven to absurdities and fallacies.
5. Returning to our subject of the faculties of the soul, let me say that the nutritive faculty consists of (1) the power of attracting nourishment to the body, (2) the retention of the same, (3) its digestion (assimilation), (4) the repulsion of superfluities, (5) growth, (6) procreation, and (7) the differentiation of the nutritive juices that are necessary for sustenance from those which are to be expelled. The detailed discussion of these seven faculties the means by which and how they perform their functions, in which organs of the body their operations are most visible and perceptible, which of them are always present, and which disappear within a given time belongs to the science of medicine, and need not be taken up here.
6. The faculty of sensation consists of the five well-known senses of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and feeling, the last of which is found over the whole surface of the body, not being confined to any special organ, as are the other four faculties.
7. The imagination is that faculty which retains impressions of things perceptible to the mind, after they have ceased from the senses which conceived them. This faculty, combining some of these impressions and separating others from one another, thus constructs out of originally perceived ideas some of which it has never received any impression, and which it could not possibly have perceived. For instance, one may imagine an iron ship floating in the air, or a man whose head reaches the heaven and whose feet rest on the earth, or an animal with a thousand eyes, and many other similar impossibilities which the imagination may construct and endow with an existence that is fanciful...
8. The responsive [arousal] is that faculty by which a man desires, or loathes a thing, and from which there arise the following activities: the pursuit of an object or flight from it, choosing something and its avoidance, anger and affection, fear and courage, cruelty and compassion, love and hate, and many other similar psychic qualities. All parts of the body are subservient to these activities, as the ability of the hand to grasp or touch, that of the foot to walk, that of the eye to see, and that of the heart to make one bold or timid. Similarly, the other organs of the body, whether external or internal, are instruments of the responsive [arousal] faculty.
9. Reason, that faculty that a human has, which enables him to understand, reflect, acquire knowledge of the sciences, and to discriminate between proper and improper actions. Its functions are partly practical and partly academic. The practical being, either instinctual [mechanical] or thoughtful [mindful]. By means of the academic power, man knows things as they really are, and which, by their nature, are not subject to change. These are called the sciences in general.

The mechanical power is that by which the arts, such as architecture [carpentry], agriculture, medicine, and navigation are acquired. The thoughtful power is that by which one, when he intends to do an act, reflects upon what he has premeditated, considers the possibility of performing it, and, if he thinks it possible, decides how it should be done. This is all we have deemed it necessary to say in this regard concerning the soul.

10. Know, however, that this one soul, whose faculties and parts we have described above, may be compared to matter in that it likewise has a form, which is reason. If the form (reason) does not communicate its impression to the soul, then the disposition existing in the soul to receive that form is of no avail, and exists to no purpose, as Solomon says, (Proverbs 19:2) *"It is also not good that a soul be without knowledge"*. This means that if a soul has not attained a form but remains without intelligence, its existence is not a good one. However, this is not the place for us to discuss such problems as that of form, matter, and the number of different kinds of intelligence, and their means of acquisition; nor is it necessary for what we have to say concerning the subject of ethics, but is more appropriately to be discussed in the Book on Prophecy, which we mention (elsewhere)...
11. For I will not contend forever, neither will I be wroth to eternity, when the spirit that envelops is from Me, and souls I have made.(Isaiah 57:16)
12. ...righteous or wicked, possesses two souls, as it is written, (Isaiah 57:16) "And neshamot (souls) I have made." (Shaar HaKedushah and Etz Chayim, Portal 5, ch. 2)
13. *These are two nefashot — two souls and life-forces. One soul originates in the kelipah and sitra achra...It is this nefesh (which originates in the kelipah and sitra achra) that is clothed in the blood of a human being, giving life to the body; as it is written, (Leviticus, 17:11) "For the nefesh of the flesh (i.e., the nefesh that sustains physical and corporeal life) is in the blood."... The second ...soul is truly "a part of G-d above" (Job, 31:2). (Tanya Ch. 1 and 2)*
14. *And thou shalt love the L-rd thy G-d with all thy heart etc. (Deuteronomy 6:5) 'with all thy heart, means with thy two impulses, the evil impulse as well as the good impulse; (Mishnah, Brachot 9:1)*
15. ...the human soul, which is divided in two— *sechel* (intellect) and *middot*(emotional attributes). The intellect includes *chochmah*, *binah* and *da at* (ChaBaD), whilst the *middot* are love of G-d, dread and awe of Him, glorification of Him, and so forth. ChaBaD [the intellectual faculties] are called "mothers" and source of the *middot*, for the latter are "offspring" of the former... Just as the divine soul consists of ten holy *Sefirot* and is clothed in three holy garments, so does the soul which is derived from the *sitra achra* of the *kelipat nogah*, which is clothed in man's blood, consist of ten "crowns of impurity." These are the seven evil *middot* which stem from the four evil elements mentioned above, and the intellect begetting them which is subdivided into three, viz., wisdom, understanding and knowledge, the source of the *middot*. For the *middot* are according to the quality of the intellect. Hence a child desires and loves petty things of inferior worth, for his intellect is too immature and deficient to appreciate things that are much more precious. Likewise, is he provoked to anger and vexation over trivial things; so, too, with boasting and other *middot*. (Tanya Chapter 3 and 6)
16. *This refutes a common error. When a foreign thought occurs to some people during prayer, they mistakenly conclude that their prayer is worthless, for if one prayed properly and correctly, so they mistakenly believe, no foreign thoughts would arise in his mind. They would be correct if there would be but one soul within a person, the same soul that prays being also the one that thinks and ponders on the foreign thoughts. For in this case, if the G-dly soul were truly immersed in the prayers, there would be no room within it for foreign thoughts. but in fact there are two souls, each waging war against the other in the person's mind. Each of them wishes and desires to rule and pervade the mind exclusively... But if there are indeed two separate souls, why should the extraneous thoughts of one interfere with the devotions of the other? — They would not interfere, except that the G-dly soul is clothed within it — within the animal soul. Therefore, the G-dly soul cannot ignore foreign thoughts rising from the animal soul; and thus, foreign thoughts disturb one's devotion in prayer. (Ibid Ch. 28)*

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Jerome A. Shaffer (4/2/1929 – 11/17/2016) Philosopher and Therapist.**