

Kabbalah And The Inner Spirit

According to Kabbalistic thought, the human soul consists of three parts: Nefesh, Ruach, and Neshama. The first component of the soul, nefesh, is present in every person from birth. The nefesh is the fount of the physical and psychological aspects of the human nature. The ruach and the neshama are not inborn and can only be attained through the intentions and actions of the individual. Kabbalistic thought holds that these two elements of the soul come into full flower only in people who have spiritual enlightenment. Here is an explanation of the three elements that comprise the human soul according to kabbalistic thought:

Three Elements

*Nefesh-This part of the soul is considered with the lowest level of the soul, and is something animal-like. The nefesh concerns itself with physical desire and instinct.

*Ruach-This is the middle level of the soul and translates as "spirit." The ruach is the part of the soul which can distinguish between good and evil.

*Neshama-This aspect of the soul is specific to man and elevates him above other forms of life. Through the neshama, we realize our intellect and attain the awareness of God. The neshama lives on after death.

Two More

The Zohar also expands on the fourth and fifth parts of the human soul in the section known as the Raava Maheimna. The first mention of these parts of the soul, the Chaya and the Yechida, is contained in the Midrash Rabbah. Modern kabbalist Gershom Scholem wrote that these aspects of the soul represented the highest level of intuitive understanding and that only a special few individuals might attain these elements for themselves. These two parts of the soul remain external to the body and therefore receive only rare mention in other sections of the Zohar. Here is an explanation of these two aspects of the human soul:

*Chaya-This is the aspect of the soul that gives one the consciousness of the divine life force.

*Yechida-This is the highest level the soul can reach. The soul achieves full union with God.

Three More

Other states of the soul are mentioned in both the rabbinic and the kabbalistic literature. These states are not considered to be permanent states but are developed according to need. These states of the soul play no part in the afterlife. Here is an explanation of these special circumstantial elements of the human soul.

*Ruach HaKodesh (spirit of holiness)-This state of the soul is connected to the ability to prophecy. According to Jewish tradition, upon the passing of the age of classical prophecy, no one outside of the land of Israel now has the ability to attain this level of the soul. The kabbalist Abraham Abulafia is the dissenting opinion on this viewpoint.

*Neshama Yeteira (extra soul)-Jews are said to attain a supplemental soul on the Jewish Sabbath. This soul helps enhance the spiritual enjoyment of the day. This aspect of the soul only visits those who observe the Sabbath to the strictest letter of the law.

*Neshama Kedosha-This soul is attained by Jews upon the age of maturity—13 years for boys, 12 years for girls—and is related to the observance and study of the Torah. One can gain or lose this aspect of the soul in relation to the level of observance and time spent in study.