



UNDERSTANDING HUMAN SOUL- ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE.

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ABSTRACT

The Muslim researchers down the ages since the initiation of the Quran have pondered the idea of mind or illm-al Nafs and have contributed abundantly in understanding the brain and conduct of people. The early Muslim researchers may appear to depend vigorously on the Greek and Hellenistic idea of self. By the by, when found in the glare of Quran and Hadith, the entire thought of Nafs glimmered and gelled with a light of learning one of a kind to it, and in the meantime introduced a very much created investigation of brain science. To put it plainly, what was gathered from masterpiece of Muslim researchers made ready and filled in as a forerunner to present day idea of mind. What is fascinating, in any case, is that a considerable measure of what the Muslim researchers composed was mixed with Islamic logic and religious thoughts, wherein the term Nafs (self or soul) was utilized to mean individual identity and the term fitrah for human instinct. Indeed, even the Quranic verses and Hadith of prophet of Islam utilizes the word Nafs to envelop a wide scope of points like – the Soul, the Qulb (heart), the Ruh (soul), the aql (judgment) and irada (will). The creator analyses the idea of mind from the Homeric, the

pre-Platonic, the Platonic, the Aristotelian perspective when all is said in done and its transformation amid the Islamic brilliant age from eighth fifteenth hundreds of years specifically through the crystal of Quranic verses and Hadith.

Key Words: Nafs, Rational, Non-rational, Death, Barzakh

Definition and Meaning of Soul

Afzali and Ghasempourdefine the soul as “... the first stage of ideal form for an organic natural body with potential existence”¹.The philosophers that have tried to describe what the soul is do not confine the soul to human soul. Several authors and philosophers while describing the concept of soul tend attribute the soul to all living beings. Thus, the soul according to a number of philosophers is regarded as the initial stage of all natural organic bodies². Therefore, various living organisms or species are categorised into three main groups depending on their souls. The three main groups of species based on soul include human beings, plants and animals. Plants are regarded by some philosophers as living organisms that have soul the same way human beings do. Plants in that regarded are not capable of survival without the presence of the vegetative soul. The same applies to animals since they cannot exist without a soul. Human beings likewise are not capable of surviving without the human rational soul³.

Considering the survival of living organisms, emphasis is based on natural body, which implies exclusion of the artificial body. Artificial body is realized by intervention of external factors and such body does not enjoy internal unity, as is the case with the natural body. Natural entities or organisms like human beings, animals and plants tend to maintain typical real nature. The form of manmade structures such as a chair for instance, although being ideal at its initial stage cannot be regarded as the soul. The attribute of organic, which living organisms that have soulposses suggest that the mentioned rational body need to apply mechanism as well as potentialities under the control of ideal forms while doing different actions.

¹.Afzali, Ali, & Ghasempour Fatemeg. (2014). Gendering the Human's soul in Islamic philosophy: An analytical reading on Mulla Sadra. *International Journal of Women's Research*, Vol 3, No.1, Spring& Summer, pp. 1-7

².Syed, Ibrahim. (2012). The nature of soul: Islamic and scientific views. 2012, http://www.irfi.org/articles/articles_51_100/nature_of_soul.htm Accessed 8 May 2017.

³.Alaikum, Salamum. (2012). The Quran and its Message. Joseph A Islam, 2012.

According to Mulla Sadra, the soul is defined as "... an existence whose emergence (origination) depends on the existence of the body, but this dependence vanishes in the state of permanence". Mulla developed a theory that stipulates, "The soul is of corporeal origination and spiritual permanence."⁴ Based on Mulla's theory, the souls is not pre-eternal but it has an origin and it is produced. The origin of soul according to the philosopher is not spiritual but physical. Based on Mulla's theory, the soul enjoys spiritual permanence. Thus, corporeality of origination and spirituality of permanence are rooted on analogy of existence, doctrines of principality and substantial motion. According to Mulla every physical entity, which include an embryo inside a womb evolve by means of some substantial motion, which enable them to ascend toward stage of spirituality. Consequently, substantial motion plays a role in actualizing the potentiality of transforming from material corporality to the spiritual permanence also regarded as immortality⁵. Based on such school of thought, in the beginning, the soul is regarded as potentiality that has the capability of being actualized by means of substantial motion.

Contrary to Plato's school of thought, Mulla defines the soul as material truth, which develops into a divine and vice versa does not apply. This implies that when a living organism has passed all complementary stages of elemental, solid, animal and vegetative evolution then such organisms is deemed to have attained a divine spiritual perfection known as rational soul. Thus, in the eyes of Mulla, the soul is a physical form originated in the body at its very emergence. The soul according to Mulla is the lowest stage of existential grading and the soul is also potential in every human being.

4.Aminrazavi Mehdi and Nasr Seyyed. (2013). The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia.

5. Al-Meshhedany, Amna, & Al-Sammerai, Nabihah. (2010). Facing finality: Cognitive and cultural studies on death and dying Arabic culture. *English Language Teaching*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2010.

After accomplishment of this stage, substantial motion tends to increase existential intensification of the soul which in turn leads it “beyond the world of materiality to the world of metaphysics, to the purgatorial abstraction, to the rational abstraction and finally to the over abstraction”⁶. This implies that instead of the soul descending into the body, it is the body, which ascends the soul. The ascension of the body towards the soul does not necessarily mean that the soul tends to wait in order to possess the body as a predetermined form but instead it signifies the continual development of the body through substantial motion from eternal evanescence to emergence. Such phenomenon explains the manner in which the world matter as well as the world of ideas precedes each other as natural sequences.

Soul of Human Beings, Animals and Plants

A lot of debate has taken place on whether plants and animals have souls the same as human beings. There is a school of thought that all living organisms have souls. Living organisms are grouped into three main classes of plants, animals and human beings depending on their souls. For instance, plants are regarded by some philosophers as living organisms that have souls the same way human beings do. Therefore, plants are not capable of survival without the presence of the vegetative soul and the same applies to animals since they cannot exist without a soul. In addition, human beings likewise are not capable of surviving without the human rational soul. Therefore, qualities gained after the survival of various species of living organisms are regarded as second quality like the impacts the organisms have on their environment.

⁶Afzali, Ali, & Ghasempour Fatemeh. (2014). Gendering the Human’s soul in Islamic philosophy: An analytical reading on Mulla Sadra. *International Journal of Women’s Research*, Vol 3, No.1, Spring & Summer, pp. 1-7

Prominent Muslim philosophers such as Ibn Rushd, Ibn Sina, Al-kindi have addressed the subject of the soul. One important subject about the soul that philosopher tend to address is the existence of the soul. The mind of human beings is also confronted with subject of the existence of the soul, making the knowledge about the existence of the soul quite significant. Ibn Sina asserts that the existence of the soul is manifested in certain actions such as growth, reproduction, perceiving, movement and taking nourishment⁷. Such nature according to the philosopher is devoid of will and therefore does not belong to the nature of body. Thus, it follows that activities such as growth, reproduction, perceiving, movement and taking nourishment belong to given principle other than the body. The philosophers call such principle the soul. Such argument is accorded great significance since it tries to explain the existence of the soul. The argument does not only explain the soul of human beings but it is also used to explain the soul of plants and soul of animals. Thus, the soul is regarded as the source of acts carried out by the will inasmuch as it is the principle not substance of such acts **Error! Bookmark not defined.** Rational soul on the other hand, does not necessarily have to look outside itself in order to infer its existence.

Nature of Soul

Muslim philosophers are concerned mostly with the terrestrial soul as opposed to the Greek philosopher that has conviction and understanding of both. In Islamic philosophy, the term soul also known as nafs is used in more than one sense. For instance, in Islamic philosophy nafs is used in referring to the rational part, the animal or sensitive part, the plant or vegetative part and the totality of all the three parts. Animal or sensitive part and plant or vegetative are regarded as non-rational soul while totality that incorporates all the three is referred to as human soul.

⁷Panjwani, Sibtain, and PanjwaniImranali. (2011). The soul and Spirit in animal-human experimentations: A Shi'a Muslim Metaphysical perspective. Journal for Interdisciplinary research on religion and Science, 8, pp. 85-113

The soul has a relation to the body as indicated by the Islamic philosophers. Thus, the soul is a form for the body, which is the perfection of the body. The soul is regarded as a form since natural body is made up of both form and matter, which in the case of animals entails soul and body. However, as earlier indicated that the soul has no matter but it is the source of the will of living organisms, the soul remains a form. There are two types of perfection namely, primary and secondary perfection. Secondary perfection is regarded as an act, which is necessitated by nature of a species. Soul is primary perfection of natural body that have the capability of performing secondary perfections, which are in turn necessitated by primary perfections. Both the soul and the body make up the material substance. The soul is regarded as perfection even though it makes the natural body into rational being, an animal or a plant. Definition of the soul as a perfection does not give clue on what the soul is actually. The body is important in defining soul since without relating it to the body defining soul would not be possible.

The soul relates to the body at the lowest stages in plant soul, regarded as primary perfection for organic natural body. Plant body has the capability of taking nourishment, reproduction and growth. Both animals and human beings share the soul of plants. For instances, since the body together with soul is animal, thus the soul develops into animal soul, which is a primary perfection for an organic natural body even though the animal body has movement and sensation through will. Therefore, such soul includes plant soul and it has locomotive as well as sensitive power. Regarding the sensitive power, it has both external and internal senses. The external senses are five in number namely, sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. The sense of touch, smell and tastes are considered significant for the survival of living organisms while the sense of sight and hearing plays an important role in ensure the wellbeing of the organism. External senses according to the Philosopher Ibn Rushd, may be in potentiality as in sleep and infancy while they are in actuality through daily use in seeing and hearing. The philosopher further observed that a sixth sense above the mentioned five would be useless as there would be no use of such senses.

Islamic Perspective of Death of the Soul

Based in the teachings in Islam every creature be it human beings, animals or plants are destined to die. Therefore, in the context of Islam, death is regarded as a permanent separation of the soul from the body. Holy Quran, Al-Zumar, Verse 43 states, “Allah takes away the souls of men at the time of their death, and of those also that are not yet dead, during their sleep. And then He withholds those against which He has decreed death, and sends back others till an appointed term. In that, surely, are signs for a people who reflect”⁸. Quran clearly indicate that the body has its own entity and that any living human being has both soul and body. When a person dies according to Islamic religion, the soul leaves the body permanently never to return. Thus, the permanent departure of the soul renders the body obsolete and is buried thereafter. Thus, to understand the destiny of soul, it is imperative to know where from the soul comes into the body.

The religion of Islamic religion holds to the belief that everything including the soul is a product of God’s creation⁹. According to *Holy Qur’an*, Al-Mu’minun, Verses 116-117 “What! Did you think that we had created you without purpose, and that you would not be brought back to us? Exalted be Allah the True King”. The above verse of Holy Quran dispels the existence of any form of ambiguity with respect to the purpose of man. God created man with a purpose and the purpose is not to destroy man after 10s of years of living on planet earth. This verse implies therefore that the soul of man has to live even after death to achieve greater purpose as intended by the creator.

⁸The Holy Qur’an. (2017). *Translation. Sahih International Version*. online at <http://quran.com/>

⁹.Ashton, John and Whyte, Tom. (2001). *The Quest for Paradise*. San Francisco,

Soul after Death

After death, what happens to the soul is important in understanding the state of the soul after death in Islam. The Quran clearly indicate in *Holy Qur’an*, ‘Abasa, Verses 18-23 that Allah, God the creator assigns graves to all people that die. Thus in this context, the grave here does not

literally mean the graves dug by men since people die different kinds of deaths and are not necessarily buried in all instances. For instance, while some bodies are cremated, other corpses are devoured by vulture in instances where people die in battlefield or in the wilderness with no one to bury them. Some people are drowned in the seas and rivers never to be found for burial purposes. Therefore, not everybody that dies is buried in a grave. According Holy Quran and Islam a place where the soul lives after death is called 'Barzakh' known as barrier. *Holy Qur'an*, Al-Mu'minun, Verses 100-101 states, "Until, when death comes to one of them, he says entreating repeatedly, 'My Lord, send me back that I may do righteous deeds in the life that I have left behind.' That cannot be! It is only a word that he utters.

When one dies, the soul of the individual leaves the physical body and it is invested in a new body according Islamic religion. The new body shows a representation of once life here on earth with respect to actions of an individual whether bad or good. There will be a clear distinction between the good people and the bad people in the hereafter as indicated in the Holy Quran. *Holy Qur'an*, Al Imran, Verse 107 states, "On the day when some faces shall be white, and some faces shall be black"**Error! Bookmark not defined.** The verse indicate that while the righteous will have bright body, a reflection of their good work on earthly life, the wicked will have dark bodies, a clear contrast to that of the righteous. Philosophical teachings of Islam according to Holy founder of Ahmadiyya Jama'at, Hazrat Ahmad stated that he was able to observe people that had died. According to him, the bodies of the misguided and the wicked ones were quite dark. They looked like they had been smoked. Thus after death there is a reward for both evildoers and the righteous. The grave or Barzakh therefore is regarded in Islam as an immediate state, which represents the imminent punishment or rewards of hell or heaven that awaits souls after death. *Holy Qur'an*, Al Imran, Verses 107-108 supports the position by stating that "As for those whose faces shall be black, it will be said to them: 'Did you disbelieve after believing? Taste, then, the punishment because you disbelieved. And as for those whose faces will be white, they will be in the mercy of Allah, therein shall they abide"**Error! Bookmark not defined.** Human beings therefore, have the capability of determining the destiny of their souls in

the present life on earth. Doing good and believing in Islamic doctrine has a reward of abiding by Allah for all eternity while for evildoers, theirs is punishment for disbelief and evil deeds.

The ward and punishment after death follows shortly after a person's demise. Therefore, when one dies he or she starts experiencing either the reward or punishment after death depending on how the individual lived his earthly life as indicated in *Holy Qur'an*, Al Nahl, verses 29-30. *Holy Qur'an*, Al Nahl, Verses 29-30 states, "Those whom the angels cause to die while they are wronging their souls, will offer submission, pleading, 'We used not to do any evil'. It will be said to them, 'Nay, surely, Allah knows well what you used to do. So enter the gates of Hell to abide therein. Evil indeed is the abode of the arrogant". When evil doers will behold the punishment that awaits them, they will cry and ask Allah to pardon them but they will not receive mercy.

On the other hand, the righteous will receive peace and will enjoy eternity with Allah in heaven as stated in *Holy Qur'an*, Al Nahl, Verse 33 "Peace be unto you. Enter Heaven because of what you used to do". The teachings of the Holy Prophet also indicate clearly the destiny of soul after death. According to the Holy Prophet, the grave is regarded as the gardens of Paradise for the righteous and one of the pits of Fire for evildoers. All these teaching in Islam, show clearly that after the state of grave, Barzakh or tomb, there will be resurrection for both the wicked and the righteous. The resurrection after death can be likened to rebirth of a child and Barzakh as the first stage is equated to gestation. Upon resurrection, the newly acquired body will be more endowed since it will be able to perceive the full knowledge of Allah. The soul is able after resurrection to experience its recompense. At the state of Barzakh, the body is capable of experiencing such partly.

Eternity of Soul

Understanding the destiny of the soul in Islam require background of Cosmology of Islam. The Holy Quran clearly stipulates that Allah created the seven heavens and the earth. It is not appropriate to image that the seven heavens represents seven different destinations for the

dead. The seven heavens denote spatial-temporal regions that are distinct from the earth. In Quran 2:35, Allah created both Eve and Adam in paradise, which is one of the seven heavens. Allah after creation of the first pair ordered angels to prostrate themselves before Adam since he was the pontifex of God Himself. One of the angels called Satan (Iblis) refused to prostrate himself before Adam as commanded by God. Such rebellion led to the expulsion of Satan from Paradise. But Satan pleaded with God to reprieve him from eternal punishment until after the day of judgement, which God granted. Satan promised to lead astray the people of God. Later, Adam and his wife Eve were also expelled from paradise after they ate the forbidden fruit. God promised the first parents that their offspring that would be religious and would believe would be returned to paradise where they will dwell throughout eternity. However, to those that would not believe and choose the life of wickedness will suffer in hell fire for ages upon ages.

God according to Islamic belief is the determinant of the life span of man here on earth. After death follows judgement, which the dead must wait before being vindicated or condemned depending on how, they lived on earth. The Day of Judgment also known as the day of resurrection is when both the righteous and the wicked dead will be resurrected. Coward states "...an article of faith that there is a Day of Resurrection and of Judgment on which the living and the dead shall answer for their thoughts and actions". In the resurrection day or judgement day, every human being that ever lived on earth will be put to task to answer for their actions as well as thoughts while they lived on planet earth. Qur'an 84: 7-8, 10-11 states, "Then as for he who is given his record in his right hand; he will be judged with an easy account...But as for he who is given his record behind his back; He will cry out for destruction"**Error! Bookmark not defined.**After pronouncing the judgement, the wicked and the righteous will be separated. The righteous will be taken to paradise while the wicked taken to hell which burns with ravaging fire.

The soul is a creation of God Almighty, blown to every human while still a foetus. The soul remains inside an individual until death, where it leaves the body. When the soul leaves one's body, it marks the end of life in the individual while marking the beginning of death. During the entire journey, the body and soul travel through four worlds namely, the womb, this

world, the grave and hereafter. The womb is where the soul joins the body. The world is where human beings live but for a limited period. The grave is what is termed as the Barzakh period between death and resurrection, and hereafter is the final destination of everybody.

The Holy Quran mentions two types of lives and deaths. Qur'an Al-Baqarah 2: 28 states, "How can you reject faith in Allah, seeing that you were dead and He gave you life. Then He will cause you to die, then He will bring you to life, then to Him will be your return". Thus, when the soul is first created it has no physical form and it is regarded as dead creature. At such state the soul is termed as the Ruh. Therefore, such state is the first death since it is Allah who creates even death as indicated in Qur'an Al Mulk 67: 2 "He is the one who created Death and life in order that He may try which of you is best in deeds, and He is the Exalted, the Forgiving". The soul of man according to Quran is older than Adam since the soul was created before the actual creation of Adam and Eve. Qur'an Al A'raaf:272 says "When your Lord drew forth from the loins of the children of Adam their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves: 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yes, we do testify.' This lest you should say on the Day of Judgement: 'We were not aware of this'".

The first life in human beings starts immediately the soul is breathed into the embryo in the womb of the mother. Once the soul is breathed into the embryo, Quran refers to it as Nafs and not Ruh. Islam religion prohibits abortion after the fourth month of conception. There is a belief in the religion that the angel of life blows the soul or nafs into a foetus when it is 120 days old, hence, abortion only under strict medical advice is permissible before the foetus reaches 4 months. Immediately the soul enters a foetus, then it becomes a living being and terminating the life of such being is murder and is prohibited in Islam.

The second death occurs when the soul leaves the body. This takes place at a pointed time here on earth. Qur'an Aal Imran 3: 185 says that every soul (Nafs) shall taste death. When one dies, the body is buried while the soul departs the body and ascends to heavens. The second life marks the beginning of eternity. On the day of judgement at resurrection, the soul shall be breathed into the bodies and they will become living souls once again and that marks the

beginning of eternal life. When the soul leaves the body, it enters a new world referred to as Barzakh. Hence, at death, the body is buried and the soul proceeds to a new world. At death, the dying person undergoes certain experiences, which the living people surrounding the dying person do not understand. The Prophet (saws) indicates that as a person dies, the soul leaves the body through the nostrils and the eyes of the dead tend to follow the soul. It is for such reason that the prophet advice that the eyes of dead need to be closed in order to make the appearance less ghastly. Concerning the moment of death, Allah in Qur'an Al-Waqiah 83-87 states, "Then why do you not intervene when the soul (of the dying man) reaches the throat. When one dies and enters a new world, it is said that a window, which opens into Akhirah, is opened for the individual to enable his soul to have a view of hell and heaven. People are then exposed to their wicked ways of life regarding their disbelief, denial of the existence of Allah, denial of the day of judgement and the rejection of the punishment of the grave. Therefore, after death, the people that lived carelessly and a life of disbelief feel the heat of the raging fire of hell that awaits them. It is at such moments that such soul begins to plead for a second chance to change their way of life on earth. The pleading of such soul will not be headed, which implies that one has to determine their destiny in the hereafter before death. Qur'an Al Mu'minun; 99-100 states, "Until, when death comes to one of them, he says, 'O my Lord. Send me back to life. In order that I may do good deeds in the things that I neglected.' By no means! It is but a word he says. And before them is a barzakh until the day they are raised up".

Place of Rest of the Soul

Barzakh is known as the period between death and resurrection. The messenger of Allah according to Tulipflower said, "The souls of the Believers are inside green birds in the trees of Paradise until Allah returns them to their bodies on the Day of Resurrection". Thus after death, the soul of the righteous shall be taken into heaven where they will live green birds until the day of the resurrection. According to Mohammad, "The believer's soul is a bird, which feeds upon the fruits of the trees of Paradise, until Allah returns it to its body on the Day he is resurrected". It is on the same day of resurrection when God will judge all the inhabitants of planet earth right

from Adam to the last human being on earth. On the other hand, the souls of evil doers will not have place in heaven. Instead, the soul of the wicked will stare at the judgement that awaits it. On the day of judgement, the righteous will be vindicated and taken to paradise where they will live happily thereafter in the presence of Allah. On the other hand, in the day of resurrections¹⁰, the soul of the wicked will return to their bodies and after judgement, they will receive their sentence of suffering in hell that rages with fire. Therefore, after day of judgement, Islam teaches that souls of the wicked will be tormented in hell for many ages while the souls of the righteous will enjoy the bliss of paradise where there is no worry, suffering and death.

¹⁰. Tulipflower777. (2017). The first night in the grave (Barzakj) Day of judgement and life after death. <http://turntoislam.com/community/threads/the-first-night-in-the-grave-barzakh-day-of-judgement-and-life-after-death.24213/>

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