

## Concept of Self (النفس) and Soul (الروح) Life and Death

### Greek philosophers views on Self and Soul

**Socrates** was convinced that, in addition to our physical bodies, each person possesses an immortal Self that lives on after the death of the body. **Aristotle** understood the Self as the life principle of a living being. It is all that makes you alive not dead.

**Plato's** theory divides the Self into three parts. There is an appetizing part that deals with bodily desires, and a lusty part that deals with more reflexive feelings, and the rational part which deals with reasoning and truth. Your self speaks of your inner life in relation to your own experience: your mind, your heart, your will, and your imagination. Also include your thoughts, desires, passions, and dreams. But your soul speaks of the same inner life in relation to God: your faith, your hope, your love, your character, your perseverance.

**Brain neurologists** say: the Self is where emotion and impulse reside, where mental activity occurs, and is realized, sensations, memories are stored, thinking and decision-making occur. There is an organ that already performs these functions: the brain.

### **Philosophers of Islam views on Self and soul**

The Holy Qur'an overflows with verses that talk about the Self in its immortality, reward and punishment, just as it overflows with phenomena that are consistent with modern spiritual science, and the same is the noble prophetic hadiths..

**Al-Farabi** tried to reconcile Plato's and Aristotle's definition of the Self. He says, like Plato, that the rational Self is the essence of man upon realization, and that it does not perish with the annihilation of the body, and that true knowledge is the way to ascend to the upper world...

And here is the physician-philosopher **Ibn Sina**, who is considered the leader of Muslim philosophers in the study of the soul, evaluating the many evidences of the existence of the Self and its immortality after death.

Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali... we find him talking about the soul and the Self and distinguishing between them: In a way very close to what Plato did, he even went to the fact that the second world is a shadow and an illusion of the first world. He says that the divine mercy made the world of testimony to balance the world of the kingdom, because there is nothing in the first world that is not an example of something from that world, and perhaps the one thing is an

example for things from the world of the kingdom, and perhaps a single thing from the world of the kingdom has many examples from the world of testimony.”...

**bn Rushd** explicitly sided with Imam Al-Ghazali, saying: "What this man says is good... We must make it clear that the Self is not mortal, as indicated by the rational and legal evidences. And he explains that what returns after death are the likes of the bodies that were in this life, but not the same. He talks about the etheric body, which is like the physical body, and which will host the preserved Self in the other world.

Early Muslim Scholars say: God - Glory be to Him - It is He who takes Self at the time of death, and this is the greatest death, the death at the end of the term of one's life. And He takes the one who did not die during sleep, which is the lesser death, and from these two, he holds the Self that death decreed, , and he sends the other Self to complete its life and provision, by returning it to the body of its owner.

**Ibn al-Qayyim** said: "If a person dies, he will be in bliss or torment, and that this happens to his Self and body. Thus, the Self remains after leaving the body in blessing or torment, and that it sometimes connects to the body and both experience the bliss or torment together. Then, on the Day of Resurrection, the souls will be restored to the bodies that rose from their graves to the Lord of the Worlds. As for the question of the grave, some held that it applies to the Self only without returning to the body, and the majority disagreed with them, and they said: The Self is returned to the body or part of it, even if the accountability was on the Self only, the body is also involved. According to a hadith on the authority of Uthman, he said: The Prophet, (PBUH) when he finishes burying the dead, would stand over him and say: "Seek forgiveness for your brother and ask him for confirmation, for he is now being questioned." (Narrated by Abu Dawud and Al-Hakim) And another hadith on the authority of Ibn Abbas that the Prophet (PBUH) passed by the graves of Medina, so he turned to them with his face and said: "Peace be upon you, O people of the graves, may God forgive us and you".

In another explanation, **Dr. Shahrour** says: We have to differentiate between death of the body and death of the Self. Death for the body, refers to what is buried in the grave, or drowned in the sea, or eaten by beasts, or burned; while death is for the human Self, is a dream during asleep or during death. It is a scene like a dream that a person sees at the moment of death, when there is

no return to the world, and this scene can be comforting or disturbing, depending on the person's actions. This is what God Almighty mentioned: (Why, then, when [the last breath] comes up to the throat [of a dying man], the while you are [helplessly] looking on..... And if he (the departed person) belongs to those who have attained nearness (to God and are His chosen ones), Then (he will have) happiness, comfort and plenty and Garden of Bliss.....) Al-Waqiah 83-88.

And His saying:( (Before) the Fire they shall be exposed morning and evening, and on the Day when the Hour comes, (it will be said): 'Admit the family of Pharaoh into the most terrible punishment!') . It explains that the reckoning, reward, and punishment are on the Day of Judgment, but the image of fate remains constant, and all of that for the dead is like sleep.

### **In the opinion of researcher Samer Islambouli**

**Death:** is the loss of potency and self-movement. As in God saying: {And a sign for them is the dead land that We have given it life and brought forth grain from it, of which they eat} Yasin 33. So, the revival of the earth is the restoration of its activity and production. And **death** appears in two forms:

- Material: such as stopping the life and effectiveness of a thing completely without human intervention.
- Morale: like a person who is ineffective and crippled by thinking and senses, for he is alive in his body, dead in his Self.

**Life:** a word denoting self-efficacy and a disciplined, productive movement. It appears in two forms:

- Material life: related to the validity and efficacy of the thing itself. Like other living things.
- Spiritual life: related to human activity culturally and productively in a righteous and positive way,

**Body:** The expression is used when a person is **alive**

**Corpse:** The expression is used when a person is dead

So; the body died, and the Self died also and exited the body, then there will be two funerals:

- One: People go out carrying the body to the cemetery (the earthen cemetery) to bury it in the dirt, and then the body decomposes into its first earthy elements, from soil to soil.

- The second: The angels carry the Self and take it to the Barzakh cemetery (a repository for the Self) and it is preserved until the Day of Resurrection.

Accordingly, the soul does not perish, or disintegrate into the elements of its creation, but rather remains in a state of slumber and waiting at the Barzakh without feeling the passage of time.

**Conclusion:** human existence passes through several stages:

- The life stage of the world: it is the stage of caliphate, trial and test.

- The stage of death: which is the exit from the life of this world to the stage of waiting and hibernation.

- The stage of resurrection, and reckoning: which is the stage of returning Self to new bodies, so that active, conscious life can return to the Self, and the reckoning begins.

- The fourth and final stage: It is the stage of reward and punishment represented in Paradise or Hell

Based on the above explanation, the one who dies in the cause of God is not dead, but rather he is alive and is provided with sustenance with his Lord in a life of Barzakh that is different from the life of this world, and he is now outside the life of this world and cut off from any communication, and he will die later by the divine order with the general death of all living beings.

The second stage of a person after leaving the life of this world is different in its forms according to the means of leaving the person from the life of this world. Whoever goes out killed for the sake of God, moves from life to life, and from an earthy body to a Barzakh body that is suitable for the current stage to be used in receiving sustenance and living with it.

But, for others like: Pharaoh and his followers, the criminals are not asked about their sins due to their obvious, malicious, severe harm to people, and the appearance of their effects in society. They are not respected, have no rights of protection, and mercy does not extend to them.

As for the disobedient among the general public, they see their actions and their results, their ugliness and their badness, and they are afflicted with grief and

sadness, and this ugly image is fixed in their souls while they are in a state of hibernation in their Barzakh grave Until God authorizes the Hour.

On the other side, the believers and the righteous, see the results of their deeds and their goodness, so they feel joy and happiness, and this picture stays until God authorizes the Hour. The bliss and torment of the dead person are inflicted on his Self in the Barzakh grave and not in the earthen grave.

*( end of the opinion of the researcher, Samer Al-Islambouli, )*

As we can see, there is a difference in the interpretation of the verses related to this topic. After contemplating these and other interpretations, I see that each of them dealt with the subject from a specific angle, and its interpretation can be considered close to correct from that angle, but I believe that the subject of theSelf must be studied from several angles that include the process of learning, data acquisition, processing, analyzing, and linking it together to lead in the end to make decisions that determine behavior and actions.

Whereas the subject of Self and soul , reckoning and the Day of Resurrection is one of the unseen things that the final and absolute knowledge is with Him, Glory be to Him, the All-Knowing, the All-Aware, and since what was mentioned about it in the Quran falls under the ambiguous verses whose interpretation can benefit from the findings of science, reason and logic within the system of the Qur'anic approach, I present here what I reached of understanding. I believe that it has a good degree of merit.

I start by studying the findings of medical science and then present the results against what was mentioned in the Qur'an to see if science provides evidence that helps to understand the interpretation of the verses.

### **1) From the point of view of human medicine:**

a) God created man in the best form. He equipped him with organs that qualify him to carry out the functions needed to carry out the responsibility of the caliphate on earth: the digestive system, the circulatory system of the heart and blood vessels, the respiratory system, the vocal system, the nervous system, ..... and others. We will focus on the nervous system because of its relevance to our research.

b) **The nervous system**, which is the control system in the body, which controls the process of understanding information and decision-making, and regulate

the functions of the body by controlling the internal processes in the muscles and glands.. Let's take a closer look at the brain.

c) **The brain** is the main organ of the nervous system, and it is the largest and most complex organ in the body. It contains 100 billion neurons and weighs 1.5 kilograms. Neurons are cells within the nervous system that transmit information to nerve, muscle, or gland cells. Most neurons contain a cell body, an axon, and extended branches. The brain is divided into three parts: the cerebrum, the brainstem, and the cerebellum

**المخ (Cerebrum):** It is the largest part of the brain. It fills most of the skull and is divided into two halves: the right and the left. Various processes take place in the brain, most notably: conscious thinking and decision-making, memory, language, communication and perception.

### **How does the brain store information?**

The brain stores information in memory in two ways. One is called short-term memory. Information stored in short-term memory is processed in the frontal part of the brain, specifically in the pre-frontal lobe. The short-term memory is then translated into long-term memory in the hippocampus, a region located deep in the human brain. The hippocampus takes in synchronized memories from different sensory areas in the brain and link them within one part of the memory. Thus, memory is formed, and then information begins to flow from the cortex, which is a brain region rich in neurons, to the hippocampus, which represents the central switching point for memories in the brain. But when we try to retrieve some information from our memory, it will be directed in the opposite direction, that is, from the hippocampus towards the cortex. Acquisition and recall occur when one is awake. But most of the integration and consolidation of information occurs during sleep. And in the latest discovery, while studying what happens in the brain at the moments of death, they discovered the presence of brain waves of a dying person showing that he is experiencing what looks like a dream before death. Although the study was on one patient, this discovery motivates scientists to conduct more studies.

### **What is the memory storage capacity of the human brain?**

The human brain's memory storage capacity is large; It can store nearly several trillion pieces of information. According to a study published by the electronic newspaper "e-Life" - the human brain can store more than one million gigabytes of data, which is estimated at 4.7 billion books, or 670 million web pages.

## **How does the brain process its information?**

Information processing begins in the brain from the starting point, where the organs responsible for translating physical stimuli such as touch, heat, sound waves, or photons of light, and converting them into electrochemical signals. Sensory information is repeatedly transferred in the brain in both directions from top to bottom and bottom to top.

### **Decision making process:**

Receiving information:

- From external sources through the five senses:

Sensor organs: ear, eye, nose, skin, tongue

Functions: hearing, sight, smell, touch, taste

- From internal sources: Information previously stored in the brain memory

Stimuli from each sensor in the body are transmitted to different parts of the brain through different pathways. So it begins from the prefrontal cortex, which lies directly under the forehead, and ends at the parietal cortex above the ears.

The human frontal cortex helps mediate working memory, a system used for temporary storage and processing of information and involved in many higher cognitive functions. The frontal lobe helps people sort and categorize information and distinguish one item from another. Stimuli from each sensor in the body are transmitted to different parts of the brain through different pathways. Sensory information is transmitted from the peripheral nervous system to the central nervous system. A brain structure called the thalamus receives most sensory signals and passes them on to the appropriate area of the cerebral cortex for processing.

## **Understanding the verses of the Qur'an**

1. Terms in the Holy Quran:

**Al-Lawh Al-Mahfooz:** It is like the program of the laws regulating the universe, according to the Almighty's saying: {In fact, it is a glorious Qur'an \* in a Preserved Tablet} (Al-Buruj 21-22)

**Al-Imam al-Mubeen:** It is the archive of humanity from the day God Almighty created it until the Day of Judgment, i.e. the archive of individual and collective human historical events until the Day of Resurrection, for the Almighty said:

{Indeed, We give life to the dead, and We write what they have sent forward and their traces, and everything that We have enumerated. A clear leader}  
(Yasin 12)

**Soul:** Like the programs controlling Universe, God has also established laws governing the human lives. When the Almighty said, "And I breathed into him of My Soul," that is, I gave man the commands and instructions that regulate his life.

The question that comes to mind: In what format are these programs and records are kept?

We don't know. It may be in the form of sound waves, electromagnetic or electrochemical pulses, but God knows best.

2. There is a mention in the Qur'an about some organs of the body, as well as the functions of some of the organs. A distinction must be made in the way these terms are used: the ear's function is hearing, the eye's function is sight, and the heart is an organ whose function is to pump blood through the body. The word heart also indicates a function in the sense of the process of turning things and thoughts over, which is one of the functions of the brain.

3. There are vocabulary mentioned in Quran in the form of verbs that indicate a process such as "يعقلون" that is derived from the root "عَقَلَ" meaning linking and tying. Thus, the word mind **العقل** and reasoning indicate the process of linking information and related things to each other. And like "they contemplate **التفكر** " from the root (**فَكَرَ**) , in the sense of dismantling intertwined information. Thought disassembles and the mind connects to reach a conclusion. All these and similar processes are functions of the brain.

4. After the brain receives the inputs through the senses from the frontal lobe, the process of converting them into electrochemical signals begins, then the process of tabulating the raw data coming from several senses immediately begins classifying them, distinguishing one element from another, resolving contradictions and purifying them from impurities in order to extract the useful information (doing so is similar to the process of extracting the precious metal from the soil, where you melt the raw soil to get rid of the impurities in order to get the useful). Results are stored in the short-term memory to use it in facing situations that require immediate action without waiting for the later stages of reasoning and thinking. This function was called in the Qur'an the term Foad (**الفؤاد**).

5. After that, the brain structure called the thalamus (المهاد) receives the result of the cardio process, and passes it to the appropriate area of the cerebral cortex to be stored in long-term memory and processed by neurons that analyze it and link it with the prior information they have to making decisions that determine behavior and appropriate actions. Decisions and actions are also stored in memory for use in similar situations in the future. Thus, long-term memory contains the archive of human life, preserved in the form of electrochemical impulses for a person's life, representing his personality, including his feelings, , emotions, and actions throughout his life, and this is what is called the term Self (النفس) .

6. The relationship between the Soul and the Self is the relationship the program and the information that has been archived in the brain.

### **Conclusion: life, death and mortality**

1. Before humanization: Humans were equipped with organs that qualified them to collect what they needed to carry out the function of succession on earth. The human brain was the main organ of the nervous system, and it is the largest and most complex organ in the body. It consists of 100 billion neurons (neurons) and weighs 1.5 kilograms. Most neurons contain a cell body, an axon, and branches that transmit information to neurons, muscle, or gland cells. The human body has all these un-activated potential energies.
2. The stage of humanization: A breath of God's Soul provided humans with a program of orders and instructions regulating this living human (the operating system). This program activated the neurons, so that a person became able to distinguish, receive and process information, and make decisions. The more he experiences in life, the more this system develops by activating more neurons.
3. The following are the cases that a person goes through:
  - The human being is **alive and awake**:

He receives information through the senses from the frontal lobe, convert it into electrochemical signals. Relevant information is recalled from memory, so the cardio process begins with processing and making immediate decisions if necessary. For example: If your hand comes close to the fire, then the (الغُوداد) instinctively and momentarily issues the command to remove your hand and does not wait to send information to the back of the brain for extensive analysis.

Like, what happened with Umm Musa, peace be upon him, when she put the child in the basket and threw it into the river and began to move away from it, she felt very afraid. She was about to act instinctively to get her son back thus exposing herself and endangering the child life. So, the Almighty inspired her to be patient so that the brain cells can analyze the situation and its consequences, and then she realized that God is his protector.

Then the information is transmitted to long-term memory for later use by communicating with neurons to face any possibilities, and then to determine action and behavior. This continues day after day throughout life. Information about human actions is recorded and stored at the moment they occur.

This is what the Almighty referred to: (And We created man, and We know what his Self whisper to him, and We are closer to him than his jugular vein. The Angels sit on the right and on the left. He does not utter a word but will be recorded by strong watcher) Surah Qaf 16 -18.

- There are no angels on human shoulders. And due to the inability of man to understand the scientific truth at that time, the Almighty personified the situation so that man could understand the symbolic meaning, which is that God placed these cells in the brain to record the actions of the servants in the form of electrochemical impulses forming (the Book of Reckoning). And it is this record that God Almighty referred to in saying:

“And the book has been set, and you see the criminals apprehensive of what is in it and they say, “Woe upon us! And they found what they did present, and your Lord does not wrong anyone.” [Al-Kahf: 49. The book is mentioned with this meaning in many verses.

- Thus, the brain is a reservoir for all the actions and feelings of the individual, and thus this file (the archive of life / Self) is stored in the neurons representing the entire personality of this individual. It is this Self that is subject to reckoning according to what was mentioned in the book of reckoning. It is part of the Archive of Life, which is concerned with the actions of the Self.

- The reckoning is based on actions and does not include intentions and fantasies that have not been transformed into actions.

- The brain continues to work on arranging information within the archives of life in the long-term memory, and continues to communicate with

short-term memory and cardiac processes, and from the results of analysis and the processes of remembering and reasoning, the operating system that controls the human being reviews and presents what the Self has done, and compares those actions with what it has from divine instructions Concerning what is permissible and forbidden, and obedience to God. Then he reaches an assessment of the Self as to whether it is satisfied and reassured, or if it is inclined to evil, or if it is confused and reproachful.

### **The case of a sleeping person:**

- The brain internally continues to work on arranging information and cleaning it from impurities.
- Dreams, thoughts and fantasies that a person sees during sleep are not recorded in the Book of Reckoning.

### **The state of death when the term comes.**

- For the Almighty's saying: "And for every nation there is a term, so when their term comes, they will not delay it by an hour, nor will they advance it" (Al-A'raf 34).
- And the Almighty said: "And it is not for a Self to die except by the permission of God, at a decree at once. We will give him the reward of the Hereafter, and We will reward the grateful." Al-Imran: 145

There are three cases:

- (Exit of the soul) The operating system stops working
- (death of the body) the body turns into a corpse that is placed in the grave and disintegrates into dust as it began. As in the Almighty's saying, "From it We created you, and to it We will return you, and from it We will bring you out at another time" Taha 55.
- (Death of the Self): The angels are the ones that take the Self by Allah's permission, as in His saying, the Most High, in many verses:
  - "And if you could see when those who disbelieve died, the angels strike their faces and their backs, saying taste the torment of burning." Al-Anfal 50
  - "Those whom the angels take in good deeds, they say: Peace be upon you. Enter Paradise for what you used to do." Surah An-Nahl 32

We know that angels are luminous energy creatures that we do not see, and we do not know how they are or how they communicate with man. We believe in their ability to adapt and communicate with man, as the Almighty told us in many verses about revelation to the prophets, when the Angel addressed Lady Mary, and Angel inspiration to the mother of Moses, with patience.

### **How does the Self of person die?**

- The angels of death come to those whose term has expired.
- The Angel extracts the book of Reckoning file from the archives of the brain, and presents it to the dying person in her own way that only God knows.
- If the dying person feels that the outcome of his actions is positive, then he feels reassured.
- If the dying person feels that the outcome of his actions is negative, he feels distress and sadness and tries to dialogue with the Angels and make excuses.
- The angels extract the file of the archive of life stored in the form of electrochemical impulses in the brain cells that represent the human personality, and return it to where it remains preserved in the Clear Imam Book (الإمام المبين) until the Day of Resurrection and Judgment.
  - The image displayed to him from his Book of Reckoning of himself will remain with him until the Day of Judgment.
  - This image may be pleasant and comforting, or it may be an image of fire and torment.

Based on the above explanation:

- There is no such thing as a minor death during sleep. The brain remains alive and active during sleep
- There is no torment in the grave, as the body is dissolved into dust
- There is no life for the Self after death, for the Self is a record of a person's life that is preserved in the clear imam book. It is not an entity that drinks or eats.

On the Day of Resurrection, God will create heaven and earth different than the heavens and earth that we know, and He will create heaven and hell, and He will resurrect the dead again to life in a form other than the form in the life of this

world (God knows best in what form) to match life in Paradise, where there is no death after. With His power, the Most High, the Self will be installed in Man in his new image with the same personality that he had in his first life, which was preserved in the clear Imam, and is subject to reckoning in the light of his deeds record.

In conclusion, I affirm that all these interpretations bear right and wrong to varying degrees, and that the reader chooses what he finds supported by stronger evidence within the methodology of contemplating the verses of the Holy Qur'an and what is compatible with objective reality.