

Soul and Resurrection



Soul

According to the Platonic school, a human being carries within himself a portion of a noble entity called the **soul**. "The soul existed **before** birth and belongs to the spiritual world. For now the soul is confined within the material body that composes us, but ultimately it leaves the body and reunites with the divine. The soul is immortal; through it, human beings join a greater life." 1)

In the Old Testament, **nephesh** (often rendered "soul") is used to mean **mind** (when it appears alone), **character** (when paired with "heart"), or simply **life** or a **person**. **Breath** is rendered as **ghost** or **spirit** (ruach). None of these denote a spirit that departs to an afterworld; rather, they are alternate ways of speaking about the **mental activity** distinct from the body, or the **life-force/vital energy**.

"Judaism's 'spirit' is also linked to the afterlife as other religions are. The *Zohar*, a key text of Kabbalah, teaches: '**Nefesh** remains by the corpse as long as a year; **ruach** goes to purgatory to be purged of sins committed in this life; **neshamah**

goes to heaven to enjoy the supreme blessedness of union with the Throne [Yahweh]. **Chayah** and **yehidah**, being more exalted, go to a higher heaven.' We believe that after death the soul does not become severed from the life of this world, and that an intimate bond exists between the souls of the dead and of the living." 2) Similarly, "Greek philosophers define death as the separation of **body and soul**, and what they call 'soul' includes **mind**, just as in Judaism." 3)

Catholic doctrine resembles the Greeks'. "In 1999 Pope John Paul II confirmed that **heaven and hell are not places with physical extension** but states of the soul in **communion** (or not) with God. The 'heaven' or 'happiness' we encounter there is not a locale among the clouds nor an abstract idea; it means a living, personal relationship with the Trinity." 4)

Judaism and Catholicism claim that after death it is **not** the body but the **soul**—a spiritual entity—that goes to the next world. Yet mind is the result of the body's intimate **interaction** with itself and with the world; when the body disappears, the **mind** should disappear with it. If body and mind are gone, the "pure soul" that remains would have **no bodily or mental qualities**. Ultimately, a "thinking spirit" **without** a body **cannot exist**; thought is a response to **bodily** stimuli. With the body—the medium of sensation—excluded, a thinking soul is impossible.

Through the lips of the dying Socrates, Plato says that true philosophers, after death, "are released from the folly of the body and attain to purity, becoming companions of other pure souls; we shall know ourselves as a clear light present everywhere—**the light of truth**." 5)

Socrates' interlocutor **Cebes**, however, voices what many suspect: "As to the soul,

people are easily skeptical; they think that when the soul leaves the body it has no place to go, and at the moment of death it is **dispersed** like smoke or air, becoming **nothing**, destroyed and annihilated.” 6) In fact, the soul returns to just such a state. As we came from **nothing**, so it is natural to return to **nothing**.

But the state we come from and return to is **not absolute nothingness**; it is **mu-yu** (無有), “**Nosome**” (a portmanteau of “Nothing but Something”), and it shares the attributes of the divine. *Nosome* denotes the condition at the moment of the **Big Bang**, when atoms were not yet formed and only **vibration** existed—what we might understand as **sub-atomic** levels (below the proton). From this **Nosome**, atoms arise, and eventually **all things**.

“Paul claims that **spirit** searches everything, even ‘the **deep** things of God’ (1 Cor 2:10). For Paul, spirit is not only the deepest dimension of the **human** but also the deepest dimension of **God**. This is astonishing: the very Spirit of God is also **in us**. ... Jesus made clear that **spirit** is the center of all life. Hence Paul concludes that the human **body** is ‘a **temple of the Holy Spirit**’ (1 Cor 6:19). The physical temple in Jerusalem—made by human hands—was built as an earthly **dwelling** for a supernatural, external deity (Yahweh). Now Paul says God’s new dwelling is not beyond the heavens but **within each of us**.” 7)

Thus in 1 Corinthians 3:16 Paul says, “Do you not know that **you** are God’s temple and that God’s **Spirit dwells in you**?” The Spirit does **not** inhere in **inanimate** things or in the **man-made structure** called a church; the truth is that it abides **equally in all living beings**.

If God created the earth and living things, then at life’s end the natural provision

would be to return to the **pre-birth** state—and from there to seek the next life. All things **arose** from **Nosome** and ultimately **converge** upon it. It is more rational and reasonable to infer: **death** is merely a **change of state** by which a being takes on another form; the **essence** of being does not vanish.

Some, finding it implausible that we should have bodies in the hereafter, say we will exist only as **disembodied spirits**. But to exist only as a **shade** without a body is also unreasonable: **without** a body there can be no **new** sensation, thought, or memory beyond what one had in this life. Mind **cannot** exist apart from body; consciousness arises through the body's encounters with its environment. A "spirit" without a body—and any interaction it might claim to have—can only be a **cognitive mistake**. Even if, granting a hundred concessions, a shade were to persist, it would hold only a **single time-slice** of memory. Existence in such a state would be **meaningless**; the claim has little practical force.

Resurrection

Some people believe in the **resurrection of the body**: when a person dies, he lies in the grave until a future moment when the **kingdom of God** unfolds on earth and the dead are **summoned**, judged, and selected for that world—a fanciful notion. Hence some who believe in bodily resurrection oppose **cremation** and advocate **burial**.

It was **Paul** who systematized the concept of resurrection as **doctrine**. Along with his claim to have come to faith through an **encounter** with Jesus, he shows a strong fixation on the **heavenly** form of the risen Jesus he says he saw.



Even if resurrection were possible, imagine the consequences: if, after rising, humans go to **heaven or hell**—on earth or elsewhere—and **live bodily** there, life in those places would be **miserable**. Bodily resurrection implies an entirely **new body**. If not, we face insoluble problems: how to restore the bodies of those **buried** and of those **cremated** to their original state? To reconstitute the person's life and awareness, body and mind would have to be restored to their **pre-death** condition—meaning everyone would return at the **age they died**. Then those living in heaven or hell would mostly be **very old**. If, to mitigate such senescence, the body were restored to **youth** while the mind remained at its **moment-of-death** state, we create another contradiction; if restored to youth **in both**, who bears moral responsibility for sins committed in later years?



If, moreover, there is a separate “heaven,” it would have to be far larger than the **half-a-United-States**—sized locale described in **Revelation**; it would have to exceed the earth in area. But however vast, if bodily resurrection occurs **here** and those who pass the judgment gather **together**, then countless generations would crowd the same place **at once**. Even now the earth is cramped; how will there be room simply to **sit**?

“From 50,000 BC to AD 2017 some **108 billion** humans were born; **7.5 billion** are alive now. Excluding the living, about **100 billion** have died, a ratio of **14.4 to 1** dead to living.” 8) If you died today and went to the next world, you would find human beings there numbering **thirteen times** the current population of the earth. Imagine living cheek by jowl with them; however vast the space, such a life would be uncomfortable in many ways.

As for **when** resurrection might occur, no one can speak with confidence. Many self-styled **prophets** have duped their followers into preparing, but every case has proved a **fraud**. To claim to **know the day** is a preposterous assertion without meaning.

If only **humans** rise but **animals** and **plants** do not, that too creates problems: how will resources suffice to feed the resurrected? Famine is inevitable. And will all the risen live in **equal freedom**? Or will there still be **clergy and laity**, with, above them, an **Absolute** and the circling **angels** asserting an even more fearsome authority and privilege? Far better, perhaps, to enact here the teachings of **Buddha** and **Jesus**—mutual yielding, love, and the making of this world livable.

We should revisit what **eternal life** means in John's Gospel. "Whoever believes in me, **though he die, yet shall he live**; and everyone who lives and believes in me **shall never die**" (John 11:25–26) does not refer to the **human body or mind**. Rather, it can be understood as speaking of the **essential property of being**—call it **spirit**, **atom**, or **Nosome**. Jesus teaches that if we rightly grasp this, the distinction between **life and death** disappears: awakened to this truth, one **lives even in dying**, and **fears not death** but receives it with humility.

Sources

1. Earl Doherty, **The Jesus Puzzle**, Canadian Humanist Publications, 1999, p. 33.
2. **The Talmud**, A. Parry, Alpha Books, 2004, p. 261 (edited with translator's notes).
3. Plato, **Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo**, Prometheus Books, 1988, pp. 76–78.
4. Michael Shermer, **Heavens on Earth**, Henry Holt and Company, 2018, p. 57.
5. Plato, **Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo**, Prometheus Books, 1988, p. 80.
6. Plato, **Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo**, Prometheus Books, 1988, p. 83.
7. John Shelby Spong, **Why Christianity Must Change or Die** (Korean trans.), Korea Institute for Christian Studies, 2001, p. 143.
8. Michael Shermer, **Heavens on Earth**, Henry Holt and Company, 2018, p. 1.