

## The Difference between 'Spirit' and 'Soul' in Hebrew

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### Introduction

The words 'spirit' and 'soul' have no significant difference in usage in the Bible. Some argue that they are interchangeable. However, from a perspective of Hebrew language, it shows that both come from different primitive roots and they are essentially distinct in concept.

### About 'Spirit'

The Hebrew word 'spirit' (רוח) first appears in Genesis,

"וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֵהוֹ וְכָהוּ וְחָשֶׁךְ עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמָּיִם:" (Gen1:2),

which can be divided into three parts:

"וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֵהוֹ וְכָהוּ" (Gen1:2 a)

"וְחָשֶׁךְ עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹם" (Gen1:2 b)

"וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמָּיִם:" (Gen1:2 c)

The First Appearance of Hebrew Words (yellow) in the Scripture.

#	@	Hebrew	Transl	English	Type	Notes
1	a	הָיָה	<i>haya</i>	be, become	v	הָיָה
2	a	תֵהוֹ	<i>tohu</i>	vain, confusion, formless, waste, empty	adj	From an unused root meaning to lie waste
3	a	כָהוּ	<i>bohu</i>	emptiness, void, waste	adj	Unused root
4	b	חָשֶׁךְ	<i>hosheh</i>	darkness, obscurity, secret place	n	From primitive root חָשַׁךְ darken
5	b	פְּנִים	<i>penim</i>	Face, upon	n	From פָּנָה turn, prepare
6	b	תְהוֹם	<i>tehome</i>	deep places, abyss, the deep, sea.	n	From רָגַם rang, make a noise, distract
7	c	רוּחַ	<i>ruah</i>	Spirit or spirit, wind, breath, side, mind, blast, vain, air, anger, cool, courage, miscellaneous.	n	From a primitive root רָיַח smell (8x), touch (1x), quick understanding (1x), accept (1x).
8	c	רָחַף	<i>rahav</i>	move	v	A primitive root
9	c	מַיִם	<i>hayim</i>	water, waters	n	Dual of a primitive noun (but used in a singular sense)

## Analysis

1. (b) and (c) are parallel. The opposite mirror of 'spirit' is 'darkness.' The opposite of 'water' is 'sea' or 'deep place.'
2. The noun 'spirit' has two adjectives: 'Elohim' and 'moving', which means 'spirit' can be of different kinds. There is a tendency that other kind of spirit is translated as 'ghost' to differentiate from the holy spirit.
3. The spirit from God is the divine spirit. The spirit moving on water (Gen1:2c) and 'darkness' (Gen1:2b) refers to Jesus talking on water at night between 1-3pm (Mat14:25, Mark6:48). The 'spirit' in Gen1:2(b,c) shows that initially the spirit refers the triune spirit.

## About 'Soul'

The Hebrew word 'soul (נֶפֶשׁ) first appears in Genesis,

" וַיֵּצֵר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן-הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפֹּחַ בְּאַפָּיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה: " (Gen2:7)

which can be divided into three parts:

" וַיֵּצֵר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן-הָאֲדָמָה " (Gen2:7a)

" וַיִּפֹּחַ בְּאַפָּיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים " (Gen2:7b)

" וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה: " (Gen2:7c)

The First Appearance of Hebrew Words (yellow) in the Scripture.

#	sec	Hebrew	Sound	English	type	Notes
1	a	יָצַר	yaza	formed, made, created,	v	בָּרָא created (Gen1:1, 21, 27) עָשָׂה made (Gen1:7, 11,12,16,25,26,2:2)
2	a	יְהוָה	yhwh	the LORD.	n	God,
3	a	עָפָר	afar	dust	n	Fr primitive root עָפָר, gray dust
4	b	נָפַח	nafar	blow	v	A primitive root.
5	b	אַף	af	nostril, nose	n	Fr primitive root אָנַף (anaf, anger)
6	b	נִשְׁמָה	nashama	breath, spirit	n	Fr primitive root נָשַׁם, pant, of a woman in travail or labour.
7	c	נֶפֶשׁ	nefesh	soul	n	Fr primitive root נָפַשׁ breath.

## Analysis

1. Item (1) and (2) share common alphabet ר which shed the light on the difference between the יָצַר and עָשָׂה or בָּרָא in that יָצַר is related to ‘dust’ whereas עָשָׂה is related to ‘image’ and בָּרָא is related to ‘blessing.’
2. Item (3), (4) and (5) share common alphabet פּ which shed the light on the connection among the dust, nose and breath. They also sound similar in pronunciation (*af*).
3. Item (6) come from the primitive root נָשַׁם, which means ‘pant’ and ‘of a woman in travail or labor.’ It is related to the delivery of woman, or a new life.
4. Item (6) and (7) share common letter נּ and שׁ which sheds the light on the connection between the breath and soul. The word ‘soul’ can be considered as the combination of ‘delivery of woman’ and פּ which represents the ‘dust,’ ‘nostril’ and ‘blow.’

### Comparison between ‘Spirit’ and ‘Soul’

Items	Spirit	Soul	Notes
Hebrew	רוּחַ	נֶפֶשׁ	
Transliterated	<i>ruah</i>	<i>nafesh</i>	Distinct pronunciation
Order	Gen1:2	Gen2:7	‘spirit’ firstly appears before ‘soul.’
Count	378x	573x	
	Spirit or spirit (232x), wind (92x), breath (27x), side (6x), <b>mind</b> (5x), blast (4x), vain (2x), air (1x), anger (1x), cool (1x), courage (1x), miscellaneous (6x).	soul (475x), life (117x), person (29x), heart (15x), <b>mind</b> (15x), creature (9x), body (8x), himself (8x), yourselves (6x), dead (5x), will (4x), desire (4x), man (3x), themselves (3x), any (3x), appetite (2x), miscellaneous (47x).	Common in mind, invisible
Primitive Root	רִיחַ 12x smell (8x), touch (1x), quick understanding (1x), accept (1x).	נָפַשׁ 3x refreshed (3x).	Distinct roots
associated	water	dust	Distinct materials
form property	wind,	gray ground,	Distinct directions

	Heaven, transparent, clear	Earth, life (baby or elder)	Ecc3:21
existence	eternal existence. Omnipresent	being created, Reproduction.	
types	Two, good vs evil.	One.	
connection	<i>Elohim</i>	<i>Elohim Yhwh</i>	
usage	interchangeable	interchangeable	Ecc3:21

## Conclusion

1. In Hebrew, ‘spirit’ (רוח *ruah*) and ‘soul’ (נֶפֶשׁ *nafesh*) come from different primitive roots. The essential difference between them is that ‘soul’ is created by God during the process of creation with dust and breath related to reproduction of woman. Whereas ‘spirit’ eternally exists in the beginning with triune God (Gen1:2).
2. Spirit can be of different kinds. The holy spirit is the triune spirit. There is a tendency in English that other kinds of spirits are translated as ‘ghost.’ Although spirit usually belongs to God and soul belongs to individual, both are closely associated with life, connected to mind, thoughts, heart or emotions, and attribute to the invisible spiritual world rather than the physical materials.
3. The Hebrew Scripture shows that when Adam was initially created, he had soul but without the holy spirit (Gen2:7). It could be a reason that God said that it is not good for Adam to live alone (Gen2:18). However, God did not give Adam the holy spirit but Eve until Jesus came into the world.