

## 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 distinct primitive roots and they are essentially different in concept.

### About 'Spirit'

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

"והָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תִּהְיוֹ וְחָשֶׁךְ עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם:" (Gen1:2),

which can be divided into three parts:

"וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תִּהְיוֹ וְחָשֶׁךְ" (Gen1:2 a)

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

"וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם:" (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	תִּהְיוֹ	<i>tohu</i>	vain, confusion, formless, waste, empty	adj	From an unused root meaning to lie waste
3	a	בִּהְיוֹ	<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	פָּנִים	<i>penim</i>	Face, upon	n	From פָּנָה turn, prepare
6	b	תְּהוֹם	<i>tehome</i>	deep places, abyss, the deep, sea.	n	From תָּהַם 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,

" וַיִּצְרָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן-הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפֹּחַ בְּאַפִּיו נְשָׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה: " (Gen2:7)

which can be divided into three parts:

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

" וַיִּפֹּחַ בְּאַפִּיו נְשָׁמַת 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	אָרָא 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

- 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.’
- Item (3), (4) and (5) share common alphabet פָּ which shed the light on the connection among the dust, nose and breath. They also sound similar in pronunciation (*af*).
- 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.
- Item (6) and (7) share common letter נָ 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 פָּ 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	רוּחַ 12x smell (8x), touch (1x), quick understanding (1x), accept (1x).	נֶפֶשׁ 3x refreshed (3x).	Distinct roots
associated	water	dust	Distinct materials

form property	wind, Heaven, transparent, clear	gray ground, Earth, life (baby or elder)	Distinct directions 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’ (רוּחַ *ruah*) and ‘soul’ (נֶפֶשׁ *nafesh*) come from distinct 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 the travail of woman. Whereas ‘spirit’ eternally exists in the beginning with triune God (Gen1:2). 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.’
2. Although spirit usually belongs to God and soul belongs to its individual, both are closely associated with life, related to mind, thoughts, heart or emotions, and belong 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). Although God gave Adam a woman, God did not give him the holy spirit until Jesus came into the world. Today, man can freely accept the triune spirit to satisfy his soul with the living water. It is because of His grace and mercy.