

## Difference between Instinct and *Fitrah* | Do Humans Have Instincts?

### What Does *Fitrah* Mean? What Is the Difference between Instinct and *Fitrah*?

Who teaches a newborn to suck milk from her mother's breast?

How does an apple seed know how to become an apple tree?

Where did the bee learn to build a hive and produce honey?

If we carefully look at the world around us, we will notice a mysterious intelligence that covers the entire system of existence. It is as if all the phenomena are coded and moving towards development in an organized, collective, and coherent manner. But who put this intelligence in the essence of creatures and how?

All phenomena of the world have a kind of inner guidance, which guides them towards the purpose of their creation, that is, achieving perfection. This type of guidance is involuntary and includes all creatures: a baby needs no training to suckle, a honeybee needs no instruction to build a hive, and an apple tree requires no training to bear fruit. The growth and development of embryos and plant seeds, and the movement of different spheres in the solar system, etc., are all examples of this inner guidance. This type of guidance is called "existential or universal guidance."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>. Hidayat-E Takwini

Based on existential guidance, God has placed special effects and qualities in the essence and nature of every creature, which are in accordance with the existential structure and the purpose of creation of that being. These qualities are not separable from a creature. They are not acquired, changeable, and perishable, and they are universal among all individuals and species of that being. Such qualities are called "nature" in inanimate objects and plants, "instinct" in animals, and "*fitrah*" in humans. In this article, we are going to explain each of these terms and answer the following questions:

- What does *fitrah* mean, and what are *fitri* tendencies?
- What is the difference between instinct and *fitrah*?
- Does instinct exist only in animals, or is it also present in humans?

### **Material Nature in Inanimate Objects and Plants**

The structure of salt is such that it tastes salty, but sugar is sweet. Electrons and protons are created in a way that attract each other, but two protons repel each other, and two electrons also repel each other. Water wets, and oxygen is flammable. It is in the nature of plants to grow and reproduce, and so on.

We use the term "material nature" to refer to these inherent qualities of inanimate objects and plants. For example, we say that it is in the nature of water to wet, or the nature of oxygen is flammable, and so on. In fact, "material nature" is another term which is used to refer to the inherent qualities of inanimate objects and plants, which we have already discussed in the topics related to inherent qualities and perfection.

The term material nature is also used for animals and humans in addition to inanimate objects and plants. But it is mostly used for the inanimate and vegetative dimensions of animals and humans.

### **Instinct in Animals**

In animals, in addition to material nature, there are more complex tendencies that involve a kind of weak and inconscient consciousness. For example, quadrupedal newborns try to stand on their feet from the first minutes of birth, without anyone having taught them to stand. Although the baby kangaroo has no eyes and no legs at birth, five minutes after birth, it reaches its mother's pouch, finds her breast, and starts to feed from her. A species of fish, when threatened by larger predators, gather together and form a ball-like community, so that fewer fish are at risk. Such behaviors are called "instinct" in animals. In general, any behavior and reaction that preserves animal life is considered an instinct.

The term instinct is also another expression used to refer to animal qualities. In addition to animals, it is sometimes used to describe the animal dimension of human existence.

### ***Fitrah* in Human Beings**

From the moment of birth and without being educated and influenced by environmental factors, all of us have a series of original and fundamental tendencies such as seeking the truth, love for beauty, perfectionism, a sense

of worship and bowing to the Absolute Perfect, creativity and innovation, seeking justice, etc. These tendencies arise from our supra-rational faculty; as a result, they are reserved only for us humans, and animals do not have them. Such tendencies are called "*fitrah*." So, in addition to material nature, which is related to the inanimate and vegetative dimensions of our being, and instinct, which is related to our animal dimension, we also have *fitrah* or *fitri* tendencies. *Fitrah* is one of the qualities of the non-material dimension of our existence. In other words, the human dimension of our existence is like a container that contains *fitri* tendencies.

The interesting thing about *fitri* desires and tendencies is that they are all a subset of perfectionism. In fact, the main tendency of *fitrah* is perfectionism, and if we are inclined towards beauty, justice, creativity, etc., it is because of the perfection that we find in them; if we hate something, it is because of a flaw we find in it.

*Fitri* tendencies potentially exist in the essence of all human beings, but their actualization is contingent upon the efforts of the individuals themselves. In simpler words, God has inspired all human beings with good, evil, and perfection based on existential guidance,<sup>2</sup> but whether we listen to the call of our *fitrah* or not depends entirely on our own determination and free will. *Fitrah* is never forgotten, but if it is constantly suppressed, it remains weak and does not get a chance to manifest itself.

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<sup>2</sup>. Holy Quran, 91:8

## The Difference between Instinct and *Fitrah* in Humans

As we said, instinct and *fitrah* are both innate and non-acquired qualities of human beings, which are not changeable and decaying, and in this sense, they are similar to each other. But the most important difference between instinct and *fitrah* is that *fitrah* is related to our human dimension, and instinct is related to the animal dimension of our being. These two have other differences as follows:

1. The first difference between instinct and *fitrah* is their actuality. Instinct is active from the beginning of life and does not need education and training to manifest itself. For example, a baby has a desire for food by instinct, or the sexual instinct develops spontaneously during puberty. But *fitri* tendencies need education and training to flourish.
2. The second difference between instinct and *fitrah* is related to their level of consciousness. Instinct is semi-conscious, while *fitrah* is more conscious compared to instinct.
3. Another difference between instinct and *fitrah* is related to their origin, i.e., the faculties of the soul. Instinct originates from the animal faculties of the soul, i.e. sense perception, imagination, and estimation. But *fitri* tendencies originate from the intellect and especially supra-rational faculty.

In this article, by knowing the difference between instinct and *fitrah* in human existence, we took one step further in humanology. Of course, we had previously introduced these concepts in other forms and within the framework of inherent qualities and perfections. But it seemed necessary to deal with this subject in a separate article due to its importance. We hope that

by reading this lesson, your questions about what *fitrah* is and the difference between instinct and *fitrah* have been answered. However, if you still have any uncertainty, please let us know in the comments section.

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