

Soul or Spirit

Is the Spirit the Same as Interactions in the Brain?

What Is the Spirit, and What Is Its Relation to the Body?

What is your perception of the spirit?¹ The first image that comes to your mind when you hear this word is probably similar to what many people around the world think: a white ghost that passes through walls, moves objects, makes strange noises, and harms individuals! This fantastical image, often shaped by watching movies and reading fiction books, makes the spirit a terrifying and mysterious phenomenon, leading us to avoid contemplating what the spirit truly is. Due to these influences, we perceive the spirit as an external entity separate from ourselves, which is why we fear it. However, it is interesting to note that when we fear the spirit, we actually fear ourselves because we ourselves are spirits, and our spirit is not something separate from us. In other words, it is our spirit, not the body, which commands us to fear, get angry, laugh, etc. Yet since we cannot see our spirit, we assume that these actions are performed by the body. Right now, it is your spirit that is reading and analyzing this article, not your body; a body without the spirit is a lifeless entity, akin to stone or wood, and cannot be the source of any effect.

- What is the spirit, and where is it located in the body? Is the spirit material? Is it the result of the physical and chemical functions of the brain?

1. *Ruh* in Arabic

- What is the relationship between the body and the spirit? Are the body and the spirit two separate phenomena, or are they related?
- What is the difference between the spirit, the heart, and the soul? Is the soul the same as the spirit?

Is the Spirit Shaped by Genetic Traits or the Result of Brain Interactions?

There is no doubt that the human being possesses a spirit and that all his actions, feelings, and thoughts come from his spirit. Even materialist schools of thought that deny the metaphysical realm acknowledge the existence of the spirit and do not deny it. However, the answer they provide to the question “What is the spirit?” differs significantly from that of divine schools of thought, especially Islam. Materialist schools believe that the spirit is a characteristic of the brain and that all actions and feelings attributed to the spirit are actually due to interactions occurring within the brain. But can this claim be accepted?

If we accept that our body's command center is the brain and that our thoughts and feelings are the result of chemical functions in the brain, we would also accept that all humans in identical conditions should exhibit completely identical behaviors because the brain structure of all individuals is the same, and their chemical reactions should also be similar. According to the laws of chemistry, identical reactions produce identical results; thus, when angry, joyful, fearful, etc., all individuals should behave exactly alike since identical reactions occur in their brains. However, this is not the case, and individuals' behaviors in such situations are completely different.

Interestingly, we cannot attribute these differences in behavior in similar situations to chromosomal and genetic differences either, because if that were the case, identical twins must exhibit completely identical thoughts and behaviors at all times and in every situation. However, there are often significant differences between twins in terms of behavior and perspective. So what is the reason for this difference? Those who do not accept the spirit as a reality separate from the body are unable to answer this question.

What Is the Spirit, and What Does It Mean That the Spirit Is Immaterial?

What is the spirit? We can doubt the existence of anything, but we cannot doubt our own existence. Our understanding of ourselves is an intuitive understanding; that is, we are present with ourselves, and we are not separate from ourselves. We are never outside or beside ourselves. Our “self” is something constant, unchanging – the same person we were yesterday, twenty years ago, and will be tomorrow.

Obviously, this self is different from the body; our body has changed significantly from childhood until now, while there has been no change in our identity. We are still who we were as children, and when we refer to our ‘self’ by saying ‘I,’ we point to the same identity we referred to as children. Furthermore, we relate all parts of our body—even our brain—to our ‘self,’ saying **my** brain, **my** hand, **my** foot, etc. Thus the ‘self’ is a non-material entity that is not the same as the body and brain interactions; rather it is essential for the life of the body and all its parts, including the brain. If this entity is separated from the body, the body ceases to function, and that is what we call death.

The separation of the 'self' from the body is something we experience every night to some extent when we go to bed and sleep after a day of activity. During sleep, our 'self' separates from our body; while it is not a complete separation, it is enough for our voluntary and conscious activities to cease, allowing the body to rest. During this time, the 'true self' remains active and does not sleep. This is why, upon waking, we recall parts of our activities while the body was asleep; this is what we refer to as "dreaming." Thus our essence or truth is always alive, awake, and active and does not perish with death. This reality is known as the 'spirit' in religious teachings.

The spirit is immaterial in essence. It does not possess any of the properties of matter such as volume, weight, length, quantity, or spatial presence, nor can it be divided or decomposed. However, it requires the material world to do things. In other words, if the spirit wishes to perform an action, it has no choice but to use the material tools of the body to achieve its goals.

What Is the Soul, and Does It Differ from the Spirit?

How do the soul, the heart, and the spirit differ from one another? The soul, the spirit, and the heart are not three separate and distinct concepts; rather, they all refer to a single truth: the immaterial dimension of human existence or the 'true self.' The immaterial dimension of the human being, prior to its attachment to the body and after its separation from it, is called the 'spirit.' When it is associated with the body and manages its affairs, it is referred to as the 'soul,' and because it is the source of transformation, change, and emotions, it is called the 'heart.' In essence, all three terms have a unified meaning and refer to the true self; however, each

points to a specific aspect of that truth. Therefore, if we want to answer the question of what distinguishes the soul from the spirit, we must say that the soul is essentially the spirit that has attached itself to the body, giving it life and managing it. In this sense, the body is the lowest and most inferior level of the soul and acts as a tool in the hands of the soul.

The life of the body depends on the soul; if the soul separates from the body, it will no longer be alive and cannot perform any actions. This is precisely what happens at death. Thus when we say that we did something or enjoyed something, we are actually referring to our soul, not our body. We are the soul, and our body is merely one aspect or level of the soul, which is called the “inanimate dimension.” Besides the inanimate dimension, our soul has other dimensions as well, such as vegetative, animal, intellective, and supra-rational dimensions, that have been discussed in detail previously.

The soul and the body have a close relationship; as philosophers say, the soul and the body are united and affect each other. This connection is established through the ‘faculties of the soul.’ For example, when you hear a terrifying sound, your soul perceives this sound through the power of hearing and then instructs various organs of the body to be on alert. As a result, a significant amount of adrenaline is released into your bloodstream, preparing your body to face danger. Essentially, in such situations, it is your soul that feels the fear; however, the message of fear reaches the soul through the ear. Similarly, when you think about something, it is your soul that thinks but does so through the brain.

The relationship between the soul and the body is complex and significant. Every action we perform with our body affects the soul, and the soul absorbs it. The

health or unhealthiness of these acquisitions becomes evident after death when the body ceases to exist. Consequently, these acquisitions of the soul have a profound impact on our eternal life.

So far, we have learned about the essence of the spirit, its relationship to the body, and how it manages the body. In future lessons, we will discuss the characteristics of the spirit or the soul and how the body influences it in more detail.

If you have any questions or thoughts about what the spirit is, do not hesitate to share them in the comments section! We are here to discuss and explore these concepts together.