

The Quran and its Message

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سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

DO ANIMALS HAVE SOULS?

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To answer this question effectively from a Quranic perspective, one would have to be willing to divorce themselves from popular Muslim thought and to unlearn what has been conventionally understood.

Many epithets are advanced to describe the non-physical essence of a human which characterises emotion, identity, personality, volition and character. These include spirit, soul, psyche, energy etc. Many Muslims consider the 'ruh' to be synonymous with the human soul.

What may come as a surprise to many is that the Quran never uses the word 'ruh' as something which is present within human beings or as being synonymous to a human soul. The word 'ruh' has only been used in the Quran to signify Divine energy or the Holy Spirit. **(Please see related article [1] below).**

RUH

015:029

"So when I have made him complete (fashioned him) and breathed into him of My spirit (**Arabic: ruhi**), fall down prostrating to him"

021.091

"And she who guarded her chastity so We breathed into her of Our spirit (**Arabic: ruhina**), and We made her and her son a sign for all peoples"

042:052

"And thus did We reveal to you an inspiration by Our command (**Arabic: ruhan min-amr**). You did not know what the Book was, nor the faith, but We made it a light, guiding thereby whom We please of Our servants; and most surely you show the way to the right path"

016.102

"Say, the Holy Spirit (**Arabic: Ruh al-qudoos**) has brought the revelation from your Lord in truth, in order to strengthen those who believe, and as a guide and glad tidings to Muslims"

002.087 (part)

"And indeed, We gave Moses the Book and followed him up with a succession of messengers; And We gave Jesus the son of Mary Clear (Signs) and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit (**Arabic: Ruh al-qudoos**)..."

078.038

"The day on which the spirit (**Arabic: Ruhu**) and the angels (**Arabic: Malaikatu**) shall stand in ranks; they shall not speak except he whom the Most Gracious permits and who speaks (what is) correct"

NAFS

The word used in the Quran to signify a human's innate non-physical essence or soul, is 'nafs', not 'ruh'.

004:001

"O mankind! Fear your Lord, Who created you from a single soul (**Arabic: nafs**) and created from out of it its mate and spread from these two, many men and women; and fear God, by Whom you demand one of another (your rights), and (to) the ties of relationship; surely God ever watches over you"

082.019

"(It will be) the Day when no soul (**Arabic: nafs**) shall have power (to do) anything for another soul (**Arabic: linafs**): For the command, that Day, will be (wholly) with God"

The human 'nafs' has been granted innate knowledge as to what is wrong for it and what is right for it.

091:007-10

"And a soul (**Arabic: Nafs**) and Him Who perfected / proportioned it. And inspired it (with conscience of) what is wrong for it and (what is) right for it. He is indeed successful who causes it to grow (purifies it), and he is indeed a failure who corrupts it (buries it)"

ANIMALS

With regards animals, the Quran does not describe the exact nature of what has been granted to them. However, this absence of description does not translate as being an absence of some sense of energy or volition. This would amount to an unwarranted extrapolation. Albeit, 'nafs' is specific to humans, it is perfectly plausible to assert that God could have granted a similar non-physical essence as part of the process of forming animals into a 'living' entity. This may indeed constitute something similar to the human 'nafs', but in various capacities depending on the creation in question.

An interesting analogy can be drawn with the following verses where Prophet Jesus ^(pbuh) blows something into clay birds to make them into living entities.

003:049 (Part)

"...'I have come to you, with a Sign from your Lord, in that I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by God's leave..."

Some volition is also inferred by the following verse which speaks of the animal kingdom in general.

006.038

"There is not an animal in the earth, nor a bird that flies with its wings, but (are) **communities like you**. Nothing have we neglected from the Book, **and they (all) shall be gathered to their Lord**"

This is further elucidated in the following verse in which the Hoopoe bird seems to have the ability to exercise volition.

027.020-21

"And he inspected the birds (**Arabic tayra**), then said: "Why is it I see not the hoopoe (**Arabic: hud'huda**) or is it that he is of the absent? I will certainly punish him with a severe penalty, or execute him, unless he bring me a clear reason (for absence).""

Furthermore, analogies with the valley of the ants are also applicable and provide further insight.

027.018

"Till, when they reached the Valley of the Ants, an ant (female) exclaimed: O ants! Enter your dwellings lest Solomon and his armies crush you, unperceiving"

Albeit some Muslims attempt to explain the above verses containing the speech of animals in metonymical terms, I have not yet found a single convincing alternative explanation which exercises intellectual honesty with the usage of the Arabic terms, context and grammar. It is always better to allow the Quran to speak and say what it says, rather than to exercise intellectual dishonesty and infer words into translations that do not exist in the scripture.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The commonly understood 'ruh' to denote human souls is not supported by the Quran. Something of God's energy (ruh) was breathed into humans to make them living entities (15:29). This possibly granted them certain faculties such as intellect, volition, emotion, knowledge of right and wrong, a sense of justice, mercy etc. All these faculties constitute the human 'nafs' and an innate non-physical essence which is usually understood as a soul. However, the exact nature of the Divine 'breath', 'spirit', or 'energy' (ruh) and what it constitutes, is not elucidated by the Quran.

017.085

"And they ask you concerning the Spirit (**Arabic: Ruh**). Say: "The Spirit (**Arabic: Ruh**) is by command of my Lord: and you are not given aught of knowledge but a little"

Furthermore, there is Quranic silence as to the nature of what was breathed into other creations of God in order to make them living entities. This does not imply however, that these living entities are devoid of any innate non-physical essence, similar to the human 'nafs' or soul. Indeed, such an essence may exist within the animal kingdom but of a wholly different nature.

As has already been noted, some of the examples cited by the Quran with regards the Hoopoe bird and the ants seems to suggest, that there is some ability to exercise choice within the animal kingdom.

Please see the following videos in light of the article above.

A LEOPARD AND A BABY BABOON

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=Gpvykeo0KBc

A DOG RISKS HIS OWN LIFE TO SAVE ANOTHER

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wv351fMZJt0&feature=youtu.be>

BATTLE AT KRUGER

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=LU8DDYz68kM

Related Article:

- (1) [What is the Quranic Ruh \(Spirit\)](#)

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