

RUH, SOUL AND CONSCIOUSNESS

Introduction:

Ruh or soul or spirit has been a subject of debate for many centuries among clergymen, philosophers and scientists. It is something so apparent and equally so discrete that people who said they know what it is couldn't give an intellectually definitive explanation. Our attempt is not to solve this age old question but to understand how the Quran present the Ruh. To avoid any confusion, the term 'soul' is used for ruh that was breathed into Adam and transformed him completely. Since scientists suggest it was consciousness that transformed man, we will study consciousness from scientific perspective to see if there is some compatibility between soul and consciousness

Ruh is commonly understood as the spirit of Allah breathed into Adam after he was fashioned from clay. But if we read Quran, ruh appears to be much more than just the life giving soul. Quran uses Ruh to define three distinct beings

1. Ruh as Gabriel
2. Ruh as Wahi
3. Ruh as Soul

Ruh as Gabriel:

Quran makes a distinction between angels and ruh in many places where ruh is understood to be Gabriel. Consider the following ayahs

The angels and the RUH will ascend to Him during a Day the extent of which is fifty thousand years. Al-Ma'arij 04

The Day that the RUH and the angels will stand in rows, they will not speak except for one whom the Most Merciful permits, and he will say what is correct. Al-Naba 38

The angels and the RUH descend therein by permission of their Lord for every matter. Al-Qadr 04

Gabriel is also mentioned as Ruh al Qudus, the holy spirit or the most exalted ruh in many places. See *Al-Baqara 87 & 253, Al-Maida 110 and Al-Nahal 102.*

Ruh Al ameen is another title of Gabriel in the Quran. *Surah Al-Shu'ara 192-93*

This special status of Gabriel is due the RUH that is a part of him hence distinguishing him from the ranks of angels and earning him the title of ruh al qudus. Christianity understood Gabriel as part of God since he has the 'spirit' of God, the holy spirit.

Ruh as Wahi:

Allah uses the word 'ruh' to define revelation in many places in the Quran. In this context ruh is mentioned as part of His Amr or Spirit of His Command.

He sends down the angels, with the spirit of His command, upon whom He wills of His servants, [telling them], "Warn that there is no deity except Me; so fear Me." Al-Nahal 02

Also see Surah Al-Gafir 15 and surah Al-Shura 52.

Ruh as the Soul:

Quran mentions that Allah breathed part of His ruh into Adam and as result Adam became aware of himself and his creator and was also able to understand the knowledge given to him. Read the following sequence of ayahs

And [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority." They said, "Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?" Allah said, "Indeed, I know that which you do not know." Al-Baqarah 30

And when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My ruh, then fall down to him in prostration." Al-Hijr 29

Then He proportioned him (Adam)and breathed into him from His Ruh and made for you hearing and vision and hearts; little are you grateful. Al-Sajdah 09

And He taught Adam the names - all of them. Then He showed them to the angels and said, "Inform Me of the names of these, if you are truthful.They said, "Exalted are You; we have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed, it is You who is the Knowing, the Wise.He said, "O Adam, inform them of their names." And when he had informed them of their names, He said, "Did I not tell you that I know the unseen [aspects] of the heavens and the earth? And I know what you reveal and what you have concealed. And [mention] when We said to the angels, "Prostrate before Adam"; so they prostrated. Al-Baqarah 31-33 & part of 34

In conclusion, it is evident that Quran uses one word 'Ruh' to define Gabriel, Wahi and the Soul, 3 different beings who bear no external resemblance. This only means that the inner truth of these entities is one and it is from Allah Himself.

But what is this ruh? This question puzzled many scholars since the dawn of civilization but despite the works of the best minds of humanity, the answer still eludes us. Perhaps, we are looking in the wrong direction and perhaps answer is simply that we cannot know. Ruh present as Gabriel or wahi or as the life giving soul, it is part of Allah and He is beyond this universe. Man is limited by this universe and its laws and hence cannot go beyond its boundary even if the boundary is infinity.

And they ask you, [O Muhammad], about the Ruh. Say, "The Ruh is of the affair of my Lord. And mankind have not been given of knowledge except a little." Al-Isra 85

Soul as Consciousness:

It is clear from the above ayahs that after Allah breathed part of His ruh or the soul, human being became conscious of himself, Allah and His revelation. He became able to use his senses in a more meaningful way. Without the soul or consciousness he would have used his appointment as vicegerent of Allah to spread corruption and blood shed on earth, as suspected by angels.

Just like the personality of Allah cannot be understood except through His attributes, similarly soul can only be explained via consciousness. It is the only attribute of the soul that we can appreciate in the physical world of ours. Consciousness explains all the practical aspects of soul like ability to act against our basic instincts due to moral obligations, understanding of good and evil, superiority of human race over other species, taking responsibility for actions and retribution on the day of judgement. Therefore, we can say that soul is nothing but consciousness. Soul and consciousness have been used synonymously for centuries either knowingly or unknowingly. Every description of soul given by greeks, hindus or even muslim scholars revolves around the fact that man's awareness of himself and the world around him is a proof of existence of the soul. These explanations differ in metaphysical details merely due to dogmatic differences.

Consciousness and Science

After renaissance, every idea or belief became object of inquiry. Writings of thinkers like Voltaire, Rousseau, Francis Bacon, Karl Marx, Russell, Nietzsche & Hume gave rise to the ideology of skepticism. Experimental data became the revelation of the age, differentiating between right and wrong. Consciousness couldn't escape this changing paradigm.

Human brain or mind instead of the heart is found to be the seat of consciousness. Scientists have been studying the brain for decades but it is only until recently that the invention of more sophisticated research methods and tools has enabled scientists to peak inside the brain to understand how it works and how does it create consciousness. Human brain is an amazing structure. It makes human beings so different in minds that no 2 are alike and yet so similar in bodily functions that studying one body is enough to understand the other 6 billion of them.

Brain is composed of neurons and these neurons form inter-neuronal connections. Consciousness is believed to emerge when a certain level of complexity in neural connections is achieved. This theory is tied to evolution, humans evolved from animals and the brain slowly made more and more connections to withstand more complex functions to ensure survival. The evolutionary leap for humans was much bigger than other animals. Therefore, as human lives became more and more complex, so did the brain and at some point on the evolutionary clock, the brain became conscious of itself and its environment.

This theory doesn't explain at what level of complexity consciousness emerged. It looks at the brain as nothing but as a very advanced computational machine, a super computer. But the human brain doesn't perform computations only, it feels, gets hurt, falls in love, gets jealous, etc. Feelings are a result of balance of certain chemicals, the neurotransmitters. Misbalance of these neurotransmitters causes psychiatric illnesses like depression, schizophrenia, etc. How emotions tie up with consciousness is yet to be discovered.

Consciousness and Free Will:

Religions, all throughout human history, have explained purpose of giving human being consciousness is to enable him to use free will in this world. Free will remained the strongest evidence for the existence of God, religion, morality and retribution. The idea of free will is now challenged by science and its existence is more doubtful than ever before.

By the late 19th century, Freud and his colleagues popularized the idea that human behavior is predictable because it is largely dependent upon person's past experiences. Later, more and more research conducted and many studies showed direct impact of past events onto human decision making in a given situation. Some psychologists were brave enough to declare that since human behavior is not independent therefore there is no free will. Overall this idea is rejected by many and even ridiculed. But the evidence presented sparked the interest of neuroscientists. Many experiments were conducted to see if free will exists or not.

There was a problem though. It was dependent on answers from human subjects and consequently results were not equal neither completely reproducible. The invention of brain wave recordings and, especially, fMRI (functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging) solved this problem. It shows brain activity in real time by using changes in blood flow. So scientist can see which part of the brain, a person is using to solve a particular problem.

New experiments using the fMRIs and brain wave recordings showed that human behavior is predictable. Scientists were able to predict the answer to a given question approximately 6 seconds before a person consciously arrived to an answer. It proved that our subconscious brain makes a decision and then creates the illusion that this decision is made by us. In reality, consciousness becomes aware of a decision much later but perceives it to be personal. Six-seconds sounds small but it is a long period of time when we consider brain functions.

How can brain make us believe in something? Consider these examples. When we are walking, the sight and feel of our feet moving on the ground appear to be simultaneous. In reality, the nerve pathways responsible for touch are much slower than vision. Hence, it is not possible to see our feet and feel the ground at the same time. But our brain creates the illusion that they are simultaneous. We can sharply see only about 1-2 inches in an image but the brain creates the rest of it. It explains why people see colors differently or appreciate some detail more than others or completely miss something altogether. If it was a constant process then we would be able to see every image similarly and there would be no art or artistic sense. The out of body experience, mostly reported by near-death survivors, is reproducible using certain hallucino-

genic drugs. A person taking the drug feels that he himself is also standing next to himself. This illusion is created by the brain, making something that does not exist, exist.

Conclusion:

The only part of the divine ruh we can understand in this world is consciousness. It makes us human and muslim. Science has discovered that all that we believe in for centuries is nothing but a mirage and we have been chasing this mirage all along. There is no free will therefore no Adam was ever created and then deceived by Satan. Moses, Jesus and Muhammad never walked on this earth. Torah, bible and the Quran are nothing but conjecture.

Science explains 'how' nature exists and religion answers 'why' nature exists. Science discovers facts about nature and derives certain conclusions. These results change with the discovery of more facts. Once matter was indestructible, it changed the religious beliefs of thousands of people including muslims. Future discoveries changed this conclusion.

Muslims generally perceive scientific research as anti-religion. If the true nature of matter was discovered by muslims then the faith of thousands could have been saved. Similarly, science will discover that there is a free will and hence there is a day of judgment but till that time comes, our future generations will only pay lip service to Islam and follow some social rituals.

Nature and religion are harmonious otherwise how could nature be an evidence for a creator? We are the people Allah spoke too and He will never speak again. Therefore it is our and ours only responsibility to pave the way for the human race to believe in Islam or not to believe but with evidence.

Allah might accomplish a matter already destined - that those who perished [through disbelief] would perish upon evidence and those who lived [in faith] would live upon evidence; and indeed, Allah is Hearing and Knowing. Al-Anfal 42