

Qalb, Nafs, and Ruh

From the Qur'an and Hadith

Allah SWT has granted us a material based body consisting of brain, limbs, eyes, ears, tongue and internal organs. Besides these, He has granted us non-material or spiritual faculties, including *Qalb, Nafs, and Ruh*.

These spiritual faculties are invisible; they cannot be touched, seen, pictured, or visualized. As a result the knowledge about them is limited.

Allamah Tabatabai in Al Mizan states that *Qalb, Nafs* and *Ruh* are one. He probably means that they belong to the same category of non-material or spiritual faculties.

QALB (Heart)

Qalb is a non-physical human faculty. The word has been used in the Qur'an about 140+ times.

There is another word for heart in the Qur'an which is ***Afidah***.

Some examples of use of Heart (*Qalb*) in the Qur'an verses:

- *God has set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing. 2:7*
- *In their hearts is a sickness, and God has increased their sickness. 2:10*
- *Then your hearts became hardened thereafter. 2:74*
- *We Lay veils upon their hearts lest they understand it. 6:25*
- *Those only are believers who, when God is mentioned, their hearts quake. 8:2*
- *Illa man Atallaha bi Qalbin Saleem. 26:89. Translation. Except who comes to Allah with a submissive (pure) heart.*

Imam Ali A.S. In **Dua as- Sabah** at the end recites, "*Ilaahi Qalbi Mahjubun wa Nafsi Ma'yubun.*"

Translation: O Allah my heart (*Qalb*) is covered (remorseful) and my *Nafs* is overcome (tarnished)."

Here Imam Ali A.S. here is making a distinction between *Qalb and Nafs*.

As-Sabah is a famous and beautiful Dua of Imam Ali A.S.

A Sufi account of Qalb: "The whole world cannot contain Allah, but Allah can enter a Mu'min's heart." Here the heart needs to be empty of all worldly desires, reserved only for Allah.

AFIDAH (Heart): It is used in the Qur'an about 16 times. Examples of the word Afidah used in the Qur'an:

- *We shall turnabout hearts and their eyes. 6:110*
- *We relate unto thee the story of the messengers whereby We strengthen thy heart. 11:120*
- *He appointed for you hearing, and sight, and hearts. 16:78*
- *He who produced you, and appointed for you your hearing, and sight and hearts. 67:23*

Question. What is the difference between the two words *Qalb* and *Afidah*? Why Allah uses these two different names? It certainly is not a random use, because everything in the Qur'an is precise.

Heart is the seat of love compassion hate, Imaan, Kufr, hypocrisy, etc. It is associated with love, hate, soft, hard, generous, stingy etc. These are all different states of the heart. However it is interesting to note that Nafs is associated with being purified or corrupted

An interesting passage is quoted here about heart from the Golden Medical dissertation. It is part of **Tibb al-Imam al Rida** of Imam Ali Rida A.S. He wrote it upon the request of the Abbasside ruler Mamoon al Rasheed. Mamoon appreciated it so much that he had it written with gold.

Imam Al-Rida S.A. has said: "Man's body is just like a kingdom; the heart is the king of the body; the blood vessels, the limbs, and the brain are the workers. Its land (empire) is the body; the helpers are the hands, legs, and abdomen. The chamberlain (Treasurer) is his chest. The hands are two helpers which bring things near or take it away, and they work as the king reveals (orders). The legs carry the king wherever it likes. The eyes lead to that which disappears (far away) from him. The king is behind a curtain and works through them. There are two lamps (eyes) which are protected in a well-fortified place. The ears do not bring to the king except that which agrees with it. They only bring what the king inspires them. He then silently listens to them, and then replies through the organs of speech, which are tongue, lips, air passage, and lungs. The lips have no strength except from the man, and they are in need of each other (work together). "

The Nafs. (Soul).

The Nafs is the reality of human being. Nufus (Plural of *Nafs*) were created in the *Alam e Zarr* in a realm and time unknown to us. Allah commanded the *Nufus* to testify in His Tawheed, testify to the prophets, especially the last Prophet Muhammad (p) and the

Wilayah of Imam Ali and other Imams from his progeny. Some testified and others did not. Those who testified to all three were the Shias of Imam Ali, in whom the love of the fourteen masumeen was made to enter in their hearts.

Some examples of use of the word *Nafs* in the Qur'an:

- *And a soul and Him who perfected it, and inspired it (with conscience of) what is wrong for it and (What is) right for it. 91: 7, 8*
- *But O' thou Soul at peace. Return to Thy Lord, content in His good pleasure. 89: 27, 28*
- *Every Soul shall come, and with it a driver and a witness. 50:21*
- *Every Soul shall taste death. 3: 185*
- *Every soul shall be paid in full; what it has earned. 2:281*

An interesting *Riwayat*. It is attributed to Imam Ali. A Syrian man came and told Imam Ali during his rule that he loved him. Imam Ali told him that he was lying. The man insisted. Imam informed him that he does not see the sign on his face (forehead), implying that the man did not testify to his wilayah in *Alam e Zarr*. The man quietly left.

While the baby is in the mother's womb with heart beating and blood circulating and receiving nourishment from mother (*Ruh* at work); at a certain stage Allah makes the specific *Nafs* to enter its earthly body and makes it a predestined and complete human being.

A Verse about *Nafs* in the Qur'an. Allah says this in *Surah Ash-Shams*: "*Wa nafsiwm wama sawwaha. Fa Al hamaha fujuraha wa taqwaha. Qad Aflaha man Zakkaha. wa Qad khaba man dassaha.*"

Translation: By the Soul and Him who perfected it. And inspired it with what is evil and what is good. Verily he succeeds who purifies it. Verily he fails who corrupts it. (91: 7-10)

It is my understanding that the information is fed to the *Nafs* through the *Qalb*.

On the Day of Judgment Allah will give a new type of body to the soul or *Nafs*. It will answer for its deeds and rewarded or punished accordingly.

The word *Nafs* is used in the Qur'an about 300 times.

The States of *Nafs*.

- ***Nafs al Ammarah.*** Qur'an: *Innan Nafsal Ammarah.* The soul that urges to evil. 12: 53
- ***Nafs e Lawwamah.*** Qur'an: *Walaa uqsimu bin Nafsil Lawwamah.* Nay, I swear by the self-accusing soul. 75: 2
- ***Nafs e Mutmainnah.*** The soul tranquil (at peace). Qur'an: *Yaa ayyatuhan Nafsul Mutmainnah.* O' you tranquil soul. 89: 27

Tuesday Dua of Imam Zainul Abedin A.S.” I seek refuge with Him from the evil in my soul (Nafs), for surely, my soul commands me to evil, save by the Mercy of my Lord. I seek refuge with Him from the evil of Satan, who adds sins to my sins.

It is the understanding of this presenter that Qalb (Heart) provides information to the soul, which may be good or evil. The soul decides to accept it or reject it, and be answerable for it.

RUH or SPIRIT.

Majority of scholars believe Ruh and Nafs are same. A minority of scholars believe they are two different nonphysical entities. This presenter agrees with the latter.

In the Qur'an Allah says, *“It is Allah who takes souls at death, and who do not die, takes the souls during their sleep. Then He withholds those souls whom He has decreed death, and sends them back (to their bodies) for an appointed term.”* (39: 42)

When man is sleeping, he is without soul, but he is still alive. The heart is beating, blood is running, and he is breathing. I believe this is due to the Ruh or spirit.

When both Soul and Ruh leave the body then the person dies for real.

This is an indication that the soul and Ruh are two different entities. However there seems to be some overlap in their attributes.

There are more than one types of Ruh.

(1) One is present in every living person or being that bestows life.

(2) The second is higher than Angel Jibraeel. **Qur'an.** *“Descends therein angels and the Ruh with the permission of their Lord.”* 97: 4

(3) The third is **Ruh ul Quds**. That was sent to Hazrat Eisa.

The word Ruh is used in the Qur'an about 21 times.

Some examples of the verses of the Qur'an that used the word Ruh or spirit.

- In Surah al Qadr it says *“Tanazzalat Malaaiatu war Ruhu, Feeha bi izni Rabbihim min kulli Amr. Salaamun Hiyya hatta matlail Fajr.* 97:4

Translation: *The angels and Ruh descend therein by the permission of their Lord, with (Decrees) for all affairs. Peace, till the break of the Dawn.* 97: 4

- *They ask you about the spirit (Ruh). Say “The spirit is from the command of my Lord, and you have been given the knowledge of it but a little.”* 17: 85
- *“On the Day whereon the spirit (Ruh) and angels stand arrayed; “* 78: 38
- *“When I strengthened you (Jesus) with Holy Spirit (Ruh ul Qudus), (so that) you spoke to the people in the cradle and when grown up.* 5:110

The Ruh was also sent by Allah to protect the prophets, Prophet Muhammad (sawas) and the Imams. It might be the same that was sent to Hazrat Eisa.

Conclusion. It is this presenter's humble opinion that *Nafs* is the reality of a human being and *Qalb* makes choices good or bad and feeds them to *Nafs*. Finally the *Nafs* has to answer for its beliefs and actions, and be rewarded or punished. Since we are dealing with nonmaterial entities, our knowledge is limited. Yet these are important spiritual faculties of man which endure, while the earthly body perishes.

Allah knows the truth.

To summarize the topics discussed.

- *Qalb*, *Nafs*, and *Ruh*, the non-physical faculties and their interrelationships.
- *Nafs* is the reality of a human being and was created in the *Alam e Zarr*
- *Qalb* and *Nafs* have different descriptions, but there is some overlap of functions.
- *Ruh* and *Nafs* are different entities according to the belief of some scholars and this presenter. Qur'anic evidence was given.
- Excerpts from the text of the Golden Medical dissertation of Imam Ali Rida A.S. regarding Heart (*Qalb*). Imam considered it as the King of the body.

The above is a simplified presentation of the human faculties of *Qalb*, *Nafs*, and *Ruh*. There is room for further research on this topic.

I end with the Qur'anic Dua, "*Rabbi Zidni Ilma.*" My Lord, increase me in knowledge.

(20:114)

(The End)

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