

Readings: Different Ideas of the Soul

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Native Americans' Beliefs on Burials and Souls. "Opposing Views" by Meg English, Ph.D.

Although Native Americans represent a large and diverse group, they hold some common beliefs regarding burials and the proliferation of souls in the afterlife. According to many Native groups, the spirit never dies. Rather, death is the beginning of a journey to another world. Prior to beginning this final journey, the deceased's spirit typically travels to places it has known on earth. This earthly journey may take up to four days, sometimes longer. If the spirit does not have a good journey, the soul may return to haunt the living. Ghost stories are common in Native American folklore, although ghosts are not necessarily seen as malicious.

Funerary Rites and the Spirit: Typically the funeral takes place in a place that is considered spiritually significant for the group. According to traditional beliefs, extended grieving periods gives the spirit time to complete its earthly journey before continuing on to the final afterlife. Children are included in all aspects of the rite in order to teach them that death is an integral part of life to be accepted and learned. The medicine man or native spiritual leader may lead the ritual and the deceased is not to be left alone as his spirit needs the comfort of having familiar people close by. Native practices often differed based on the tribe and its geographical location. The Plains and Pacific Northwest tribes practiced above-ground burials; tribes in the Mississippi River area build chambered mounds; Southwest and Southeast tribes used earthenware jars for cremation. The internment place is chosen to reflect a place where the deceased will be "comfortable." Burial sites are often decorated with memorabilia to help the deceased on their journey. It is still common to see food, jewelry, tools, weapons, and personal possessions at the internment sites.

Ensoulment: Wikipedia.org

The moment at which a human being gains a soul. Some religions say that a soul is newly created within a developing child, and others, especially those that believe in reincarnation, believe the soul is pre-existing and added at a particular stage of development. In the time of Aristotle, it was widely believed that the human soul entered the forming body at 40 days (males) or 90 days (females) and quickening was in indication of the presence of a soul. Other religious views are that ensoulment happens at the moment of conception or when the child takes the first breath after being born, at the formation of the nervous system and brain; or when the fetus is able to survive independently of the uterus. This concept is closely related to debates on the morality of abortion as well as the morality of contraception.

The Soul and its Mechanism by Alice A. Bailey

Webster's Dictionary, Edition 1923: "Some conceptions state that the soul is the whole unitary, spiritual process in conjunction with the whole unitary bodily process. This stands mid-way between idealistic and materialistic views."

First: The soul has been treated as an entity or subject, manifested especially in man's volitional thinking activities; it is the subject of the experience meditated by the body; it is not the mind, but that which thinks and wills.

Second: The soul is identified with the mind or with conscious experience; this is the usual sense of the word in psychology, and is the general conceptions of idealists.

Third: the soul is treated as a function or the sum of the functions of the brain, ie. the brain secretes thought as the stomach digests food.

The Egyptians held the soul was a divine ray, acting through a peculiar fluid-like compound, whilst the Jews regarded it as the vital principle. The Hindus teach that the human soul is a portion of an immutable Principle, the Soul of the World, the Anima Mundi, the all-pervading Ether (Akasa) of space. This Ether is simply the conductor of certain types of energy and serves at the interrelating medium between essential spirit and tangible matter. Pythagoras who did so much in his day to link the Eastern and Western philosophies gave the same teaching. In China, Lao-tse taught that the spiritual soul is united to the semi-material vital soul and between them they animate the physical body. The Greeks in

their turn held that the soul (with all the mental faculties) was separable from the body, while the Romans regarded the soul as a triplicity—a spiritual soul, and intellectual soul, or the mind, and a vital body. Theophrastus regarded it as the “real principle of passion.”

Plato believed the soul had three parts: One, an immortal or rational part, coming from God; another a mortal, animal or sensitive part, the seat of appetite and sensation belong to the body, and third, lying between these making their interaction possible—will or spirit—by means of which reason conquered desire. Plants have the lowest part, animals the two lower, but the rational part is exclusively human. Aristotle regarded the soul as the sum of the vital principles and as being to the body what vision is to the eye. The soul was to him the true Being in the body, and with him Plotinus was in agreement. He regarded the soul as the living sentiency of the body, belonging to a higher degree of being than matter.

Ancient Theories of Soul: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

By 399 BCE (Socrates' death) the soul is standardly thought and spoken of as the distinguishing mark of living things, as something that is subject of emotional states, and that is responsible for planning and practical thinking, and the bearer of virtues such as courage and justice. It is probably true that in mainstream Greek culture at this time, belief in an afterlife of the soul was weak and unclear.

In 380 BCE, according to Plato in the *Republic*, the soul is made up of three parts: 1) the logical, the spirited, and the appetitive. The logical is the thinking part of the soul which loves the truth and seeks to learn it. This would be the smallest part of the soul (as the rulers would be the smallest population within the Republic): 2) the spirited is part of the soul by which we are angry or get into a temper. In the just soul, the spirited aligns with the logical and resists the desires of the appetitive: 3) the appetitive is the part of the soul by which we experience carnal erotic love, hunger, thirst and desires opposed to the logical. This part of the soul is identified with the pleasure involved in human reproduction.

Stoicism maintained that the living animal soul was received only at birth, through contact with the outer air and was transformed into a rational soul only at fourteen years of age. Epicureanism saw the origin of the soul (considered to consist of only a small number of atoms even in adults) as simultaneous with conception. Pythagoreanism also considered ensoulment to occur at conception.

The Soul and its Mechanism. Alice A. Bailey The early Christian fathers were tremendously influenced by Greek ideas as to the soul, and their teachings were later colored by Gnosticism and Manicheanism. By them, the soul was regarded as light and the body as darkness; light must irradiate the body and eventually be liberated from the body. Tertullian divided the soul into two parts, a vital and a rational principle, as did St. Gregory. Most of the Oriental schools regard the soul as the self, the individual, and Christian mysticism is concerned with the elaboration of the teaching of St. Paul, that there dwells in each human being a potentiality which is called by him “Christ in you” and which through its presence, enables every human eventually to attain the status of the Christ. A close comparison of Christian and Oriental teachings leads to the conclusion that the terms, Self, Soul, Christ, connote the same state of being or consciousness, and indicate the subjective reality in every human.

Aristotle's epigenetic view of successive life principles (souls) in a developing human embryo was the prevailing view among early Christians, including Tertullian, Augustine, and Jerome. Christianity had absorbed the Pythagorean Greek view that the soul was infused at the moment of conception. Though this view was confirmed by St. Gregory of Nyssa in the fourth century, it was rejected in favor of the Greek notion that only a formed fetus possessed a human soul. Thomas Aquinas adopted the view of Aristotle about “delayed hominization” of the soul. Though the early embryo did not yet have a human soul, abortion was not seen as murder, although it was condemned nonetheless. *For, though the opinion of Aristotle or similar speculations, regarding the time when the rational soul is infused into the embryo, were practically accepted for many centuries still it was always held by the Church that he who destroyed what was to be a man was guilty of destroying a human life. (Catholic Encyclopedia).*

Judaism and the Soul. What is a Soul: Yanki Tauber. Every created entity possesses a soul. Animals have souls, as do plants and inanimate objects. A soul is not just the engine of life; it also embodies the why of a thing's existence, its meaning and purpose. The human soul is the most complex. She is called by five names: Nefesh (soul), Ruach (spirit), Neshamah (breath), Chayah (life) and Yechidah (singularity with God). The Divine essence of the human soul is what sets the human being above and apart from all other creations, even the angels. The angel may be more spiritual, but the human being is more Godly. No creation can possess true freedom of choice—a creation, by definition, has and consists of only what its creator has imparted to it; this is its “nature.” And its every inclination and action will be dictated by that nature. It is only in the human soul that the Creator imparted his own essence. The human soul is not limited by its own nature—a being that can transcend itself; a being that can choose to not merely react to its environment, but to act upon it; a being whose choices and actions are therefore of true significance.

Ensoulement, Wikipedia: Judaism The view of ensoulment as conceptions harmonizes with general lore among rabbis about conscious activity before birth. However, most of them did not apply the word *nefesh*, meaning soul or person, to a fetus still in the womb. The latter half of the Second Temple period saw increasing acceptance of the idea of the soul as joining the body at birth and leaving it again at death. One Jewish view put ensoulment even later than birth, saying that it occurs when the child first answers “Amen.” It has been suggested that the reason why they were not more concerned about the exact moment of ensoulment is that Judaism does not believe in strict separation of soul and body.

Islam and the soul: Introduction to Sufi Doctrine Nafs is an Arabic word occurring in the Qur'an and means self, psyche, ego, or soul. In the Qur'an, the word is used in both the individualistic and collective sense indicating that although humanity is united in possessing the qualities of a soul, they are individually responsible for exercising the agencies of their free will that it provides them. According to Sufi philosophies, the nafs in its unrefined state is the ego which they consider to be the lowest dimension of a person's inward existence, his animal and satanic nature. There are three principal stages of nafs in Sufi philosophy, just as there are three types of soul in Plato's tripartite theory of soul from which the Sufis borrowed the basic concept. 1) The inciting nafs: In its primitive stage the nafs incites us to commit evil; this is the nafs as the lower self, the base instincts. 2) The self-accusing nafs: This is the stage where the conscience is awakened and the self accuses one for listening to one's ego. One repents and asks for forgiveness. Here the nafs is inspired by one's heart. 3) The nafs at peace: This is the ideal stage of ego for Muslims. On this level one is firm in one's faith and leaves bad manners behind. The soul becomes tranquil, at peace. At this stage, followers of Sufism have relieved themselves of all materialism and worldly problems and are satisfied with the Will of God.

Core Beliefs of Hindus and the Soul by Amrutur V. Srinivasan A Hindu believes that the individual soul (atman) is neither created nor destroyed; it has been, it is, and it will be. Actions of the soul while residing in a body require that it reap the consequences of those actions in the next life—the same soul in a different body. The process of movement of the atman from one body to another is transmigration. The kind of body the soul inhabits next is determined by karma (actions accumulated in previous lives). The goal of the individual soul is moksha. Moksha is liberation: The soul's release from the cycle of death and rebirth. It occurs when the soul unites with Brahman by realizing its true nature. Several paths can lead to this realization and unity: the path of duty, the path of knowledge, and the path of devotion (unconditional surrender to God).

Not only Hinduism but also other major religions such as Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism also believe in the concept of “reincarnation.” This is the belief that the soul is immortal and death is experienced by the body only. As we change our old garments and put on new, the soul changes bodies and is reborn again. It travels from one body to another body until it becomes one with the Supreme Soul. *Basic Beliefs of Hinduism*