

4395 - A Christian asks about the nature and definition of the soul

the question

With regard to Islam, what is the soul? For instance, who created the soul, and what limitations does it have?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Allaah is the Creator of all things, and the soul is something that has been created just like everything else. The knowledge about its true essence is something that belongs exclusively to Allaah, may He be glorified and exalted. Allaah has kept this knowledge exclusively to Himself, as is stated in the hadeeth of Abd-Allaah ibn Masood (may Allaah be pleased with him), who said: Whilst I was with the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) on a farm, and he was resting on a palm branch stripped of its leaves, the Jews passed by, and some of them said to others, Ask him about the soul. Some of them said, What urges you to ask him about it? Others of them said, Dont ask him in case he says something you dislike. But they said, Ask him, so they asked him about the soul. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) kept quiet and did not respond to them, and I knew that he was receiving Revelation, so I stayed where I was. When the Revelation of the aayah was complete, he said (interpretation of the meaning): And they ask you [O Muhammad] concerning the rooh [the spirit]. Say: The rooh: it is one of the things, the knowledge of which is only with my Lord. And of knowledge, you (mankind) have been given only a little. [al-Isra 17:85]

(Reported by al-Bukhaari). The rooh (soul or spirit) has been described by Allaah in His Book and by the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) in his Sunnah, and various verbs and adjectives have been used in conjunction with the word rooh, such as seizing or grasping,

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taking (as in death), it may be fettered or shrouded, it comes and goes, it goes up and comes down, it may be pulled out like a hair being pulled out of dough It is obligatory (in Islam) to believe in these attributes which are narrated in the two Revelations (i.e., the Quraan and Sunnah), and also to realize that the soul is not like the body.

Allaah created Adam and breathed the soul into him, as is stated in the Quraan and in the hadeeth of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him): When Allaah created Adam and breathed the soul into him, he sneezed and said Al-hamdu-Lillah (Praise be to Allaah). He praised Allaah by His permission. Then his Lord said to him, May Allaah have mercy on you, O Adam. Go to those angels, to a group of them who are sitting, and say, As-salaamu alaykum (peace be upon you). They said, Wa alayka al-salaam wa rahmat-Allaah (and upon you be peace and the Mercy of Allaah). Then he went back to his Lord, who said, This is your greeting and the greeting of your descendants amongst themselves.

(Reported and classed as hasan by al-Tirmidhi. Sunan al-Tirmidhi, 3290).

Allaah sends the angel to breathe the soul into the foetus as was reported by Abd-Allaah ibn Masood, who said: The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), who is the most truthful (of human beings) and his being truthful (is a fact) told us: The constituents of one of you is gathered in his mothers womb for forty days, then it becomes a clot of blood within another period of forty days. Then it becomes a lump of flesh, and forty days later, Allaah sends His angel to it to breathe into it the soul. The angel comes with instructions concerning four things, so the angel writes down his livelihood, his death, his deeds and whether he will be doomed or blessed.

(Reported by Muslim, 1528).

The soul of the deceased is taken from the ends of the toes towards the top of the body, and when it reaches the throat, the death rattle sounds in the throat of the person who is about to die, and

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his eyes glaze over and roll upwards. Um Salamah said: The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) entered upon Abu Salamah (after he had died) and his eyes were open, so he closed them then said, When the soul is taken, the eyes follow it.

(Reported by Muslim, 1528).

The soul is met by the angels. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: The angels met the soul of a man from among the people who came before you, and said, Did you do anything good? He said, 'I used to tell my employees to postpone collection of payment or to let off anyone who was in difficulty. So it was said, Let him off.

(Reported by al-Bukhaari, 1935).

The soul is taken up to heaven by two angels after it is taken (i.e., after a person dies), as was reported in the hadeeth of Abu Hurayrah who said: When the soul of the believer is taken, it is met by two angels who take it up (The narrator said: then he mentioned its good fragrance and scent of musk). The people of heaven say, A good soul that has come from earth, may Allaah bless you and the body in which you used to dwell. Then they take it up to its Lord, may He be glorified and exalted, then He says, Roam with it until the end of the world. When the disbelievers soul comes out (the narrator mentioned its putrid smell and curses). The people of heaven say, An evil soul that has come from earth, then it is said, Roam with it until the end of the world. Abu Hurayrah said: then the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) put a piece of cloth over his nose, like this.

(Reported by Muslim, 5119).

More information about how the soul comes out (at death) was reported in the hadeeth of Imaam Ahmad (may Allaah have mercy on him) from al-Bara ibn Aazib who said: We went out with the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) for the funeral of a man from among the

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Ansaar, and we reached the grave whilst it was still being dug. The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) sat down and we sat down around him, and it was as if we had birds on our heads. In his hand was a stick with which he was scratching in the earth. He raised his head and said, Seek refuge with Allaah from the punishment of the grave, two or three times. Then he said, Verily, when the believing slave is about to depart this world and enter the Hereafter, there come down to him angels from heaven with white faces, as if their faces are the sun. They bring with them one of the shrouds of Paradise and some of the perfume of Paradise. They sit with him as far as the eye can see. Then the Angel of Death (peace be upon him) comes to him and sits by his head and says, O pure soul, come out to the forgiveness and pleasure of Allaah. Then his soul comes flowing out like a drop of water flowing from a cup. Then he takes the soul, and no sooner does he seize it but they take it and place it in that shroud and perfume. Then out of it comes the most excellent fragrance of musk to be found on the face of the earth. Then they ascend with it and they do not pass by any group of angels but the angels ask, Who is this pure soul? and they reply, It is So and so the son of So and so using the best names by which he was known on earth. Then they bring it to the lowest heaven, and ask for it to be opened, and it is opened for him. Those who are of high rank in each heaven accompany it until they approach the next heaven, and so it goes until it reaches the seventh heaven. Then Allaah, may He be glorified and exalted, says: Record the book of My slave in Illiyoon (the highest heaven) and take him back to the earth, for I created them from it, and I shall return them to it, then I shall take them out from it again. Then his soul is returned to his body and two angels come and make him sit up, and ask him, Who is your Lord. He says, Allaah. They ask, What is your religion? He says, My religion is Islam. They ask, Who is this man that was sent amongst you? He says, He is the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). They ask him, What knowledge do you have? He says, 'I read the Book of Allaah and I believed in it. Then a voice will call out from heaven, My slave has spoken the truth. Prepare for him a bed from Paradise and give him clothes from Paradise, and open for him a door to Paradise. And he will feel its breeze and smell its fragrance, and his grave will be widened for him as far as his eye can see. Then a man with a handsome face,

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beautiful clothes and a pleasant fragrance will come to him and say, Good news! This is the day that you were promised. He will say, Who are you? You face looks as if it brings good news. He will say, 'I am your good deeds. (The deceased) will say, O Lord, let the Hour come so that I may see my family and my wealth again.

When the disbelieving slave is about to depart this world and enter the Hereafter, there come down to him angels from heaven with black faces, bringing with them sackcloth. They sit with him as far as the eye can see. Then the Angel of Death comes to him and sits by his head and says, O evil soul, come out to the wrath and anger of Allaah. Then his soul disperses in his body and is dragged out like a skewer being pulled out of wet wool. Then he takes the soul, and no sooner does he seize it but they take it and place it in that sackcloth. Then out of it comes the most putrid stench of rotten flesh to be found on the face of the earth. Then they ascend with it and they do not pass by any group of angels but the angels ask, Who is this evil soul? and they reply, It is So and so the son of So and so using the worst names by which he was known on earth. Then they bring it to the lowest heaven, and ask for it to be opened, and it is not opened for him. Then the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) recited (interpretation of the meaning): For them the gates of heaven will not be opened, and they will not enter Paradise until the camel goes through the eye of the needle [al-Araaf 7:40]. Then he said, Then Allaah, may He be glorified and exalted, says: Record the book of My slave in Sijjeen (the lowest Hell) in the lowest earth. Then his soul is cast down. Then he recited (interpretation of the meaning): and whoever assigns partners to Allaah, it is as if he had fallen from the sky, and the birds had snatched him, or the wind had thrown him to a far off place. [al-Hajj 22:31]. He said, Then his soul is returned to his body and two angels come and make him sit up, and ask him, Who is your Lord. He says, Oh, oh, I dont know. They ask, What is your religion? He says, Oh, oh, I dont know. They ask, Who is this man that was sent amongst you? He says, Oh, oh, I dont know. Then a voice will call out from heaven, He is lying. Prepare for him a bed from Hell and open for him a door to Hell. And he will feel its hot winds and smell its stench, and his grave will be constricted for him until his ribs

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interlock. Then a man with an ugly face, ugly clothes and a horrible stench will come to him and say, Bad news! This is the day that you were warned about. He will say, Who are you? You face looks as if it brings bad news. He will say, 'I am your evil deeds. (The deceased) will say, O Lord, do not let the Hour come!

(Musnad al-Imaam Ahmad, 17803; this is a saheeh hadeeth).

At the end of time, Allaah will send a wind which will take the soul of every believer, as was reported in the hadeeth of al-Nawwaas ibn Samaan, who said: The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) mentioned (the coming of the Dajjaal [Antichrist] and the descent of Eesa [Jesus], peace be upon him, and the good life and happiness of mankind at the time of Jesus and afterwards). He said, And whilst the people are living like that, Allaah will send a good wind which will seize them under the armpits and will take the soul of every believer and every Muslim. The evil people will remain and they will behave like donkeys, then the Hour will come upon them.

(Reported by Muslim, 5228).

When people sleep (and sleep is the lesser death), the soul is taken, but not completely, so the sleeper is still alive. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): It is Allaah Who takes away the souls at the time of their death, and those that die not during their sleep, He keeps those (souls) for which He has ordained death and sends the rest for a term appointed. Verily, in this are signs for a people who think deeply. [al-Zumar 39:42]

The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) advised the Muslim, when he lies down to sleep, to say: Bismika Rabbee wadatu janbi wa bika arfauhu wa in amsakta nafsi farhamhaa wa in arsaltahaa fahfazhaa bimaa tuhfaz bihi ibaadika al-saaliheen (In Your name, my Lord, I lie down, and in Your name I rise. If You should take my soul then have mercy on it, and if You should return my soul then protect it as You protect Your righteous slaves). When the Muslim

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wakes up, he should say, Al-hamdu Lillaah alladhi aafaani fi jasadi wa radda alayya roohi wa adhina li bi dhikrihi (Praise be to Allaah Who has restored to me my health and returned my soul and has allowed me to remember Him). (Reported by al-Tirmidhi, 3323 He said, a hasan hadeeth).

These are a few of the aayaat and saheeh ahaadeeth which describe the soul. Maybe you will find in them information that will guide you to the way of truth, the Religion of Islam. Thank you for your question.