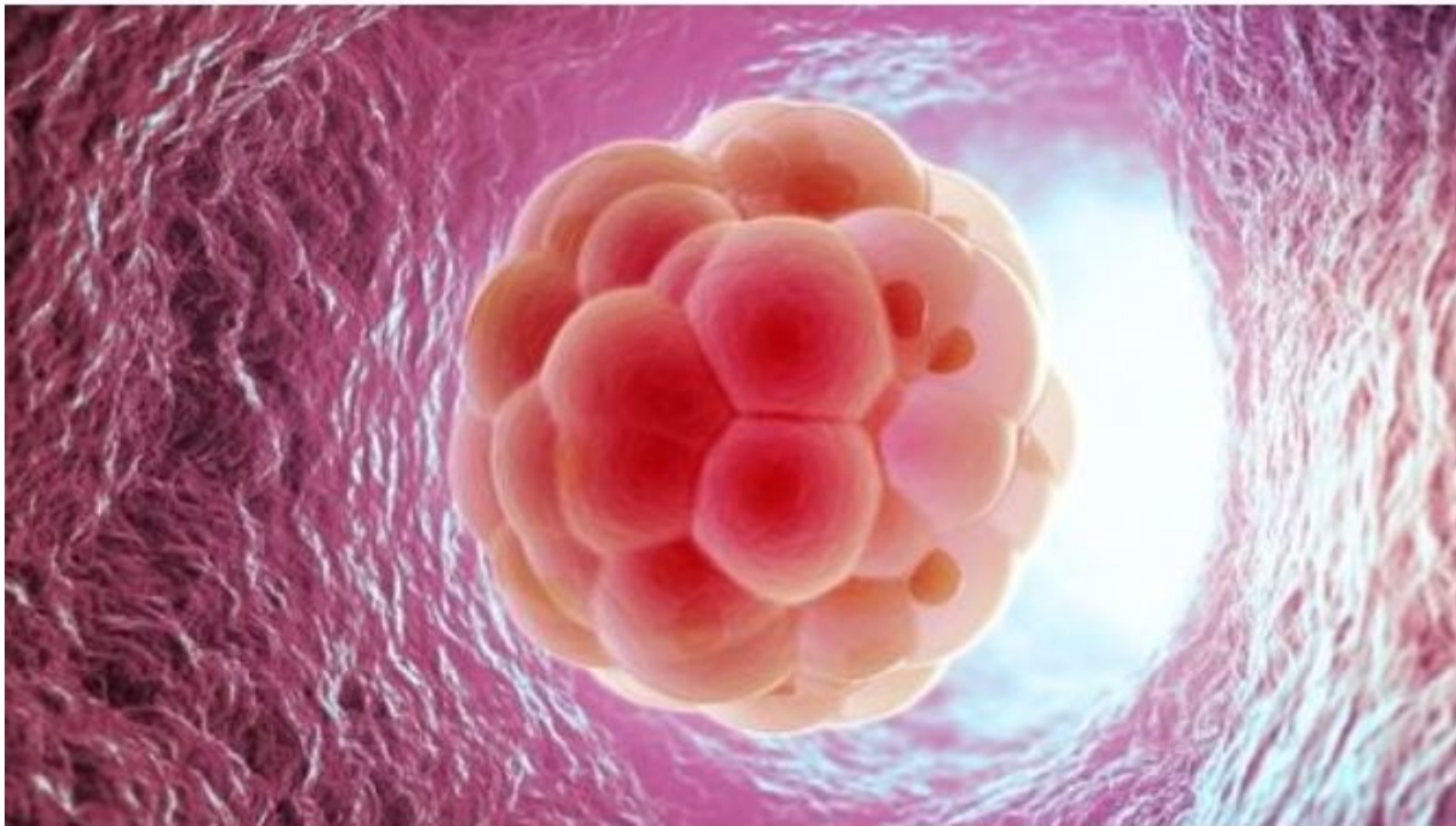


The Human Soul/ The Human Soul

- *Do you ever wonder when and where our spiritual life starts?*
- *What is the difference between our soul and spirit?*
- *What is the purpose of this life ?*
- *Where is the next world?*
- *What do we carry with us on the spiritual journey?*



Edit by Keng-Liang Huang

Reference: Baha'i Writings and The Human Soul by Adib Taherzadeh

Verily I say, the human soul is, in its essence, one of the signs of God, a mystery among His mysteries. It is one of the mighty signs of the Almighty, the harbinger that proclaimeth the reality of all the worlds of God. Within it lieth concealed that which the world is now utterly incapable of apprehending. (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh 82)

The soul is the greatest motivating power within man. And it is the knowledge of the soul which enables us to appreciate our motives and our actions in our life. The soul is our spiritual reality. It is not something we can describe or measure like a physical object. The only way we have to understand the reality and the essence of the soul is to appreciate its characteristics and its powers which are exemplified in the Holy Books of various religions. But up to now, humanity has not reached the stage of being able to appreciate the nature of the soul. And so the Prophets and the Founders of the great religions such as Christ and Muhammad have spoken very little about it. In fact there is only one short sentence in Islam describing the soul: *“The soul is one of the things, of which the knowledge is only with my Lord. And of knowledge, you (mankind) have been given only a little.” (Al-Isra Verse No:85)*. In the Gospel of Matthew 10:28, Jesus said *“And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”* This tells us that the soul lives beyond the death of the body, but that it is vulnerable to evil tendencies that can cause it to turn away from God.

In this new Revelation, Bahá'u'lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá have shed so much light on the subject of the human soul and spirit. Bahá'u'lláh also brought us more knowledge of God. This deeper knowledge about God and the spirit and soul of man is among the greatest contributions to religious knowledge He has brought to us.

Human knowledge is of two kinds. One is the knowledge of things perceptible to the senses, the other kind of human knowledge is intellectual—that is to say, it is a reality of the intellect; it has no outward form and no place and is not perceptible to the senses. For example, the power of intellect is not sensible; none of the inner qualities of man is a sensible thing; on the contrary, they are intellectual realities. So love is a mental reality and not sensible; for this reality the ear does not hear, the eye does not see, the smell does not perceive, the taste does not discern, the touch does not feel. Even ethereal matter, the

forces of which are said in physics to be heat, light, electricity and magnetism, is an intellectual reality, and is not sensible. In the same way, nature, also, in its essence is an intellectual reality and is not sensible; the human spirit is an intellectual, not sensible reality. In explaining these intellectual realities, one is obliged to express them by sensible figures because in exterior existence there is nothing that is not material. Therefore, to explain the reality of the spirit—its condition, its station—one is obliged to give explanations under the forms of sensible things because in the external world all that exists is sensible. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions 16)

When our Soul started

The soul is not a material thing that can enter or leave our body, nor is it attached to the body. It is exalted above exit and entry. It can not move from one body to another body. It is an emanation from the spiritual world of God. We are told that the soul is created at the time of conception and is associated with the body when the first cell is created in the womb of the mother. This is the beginning of the human being.

We have no words to describe the soul directly and can only use analogy. Words become an inadequate tool for expressing the spiritual reality of the soul. But if we have to use words to describe the relationship with our body, we say the soul is “associated with the body”. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has describe this association of the soul and the body as the association of the light and the mirror. If we look at the mirror, we will see the light in it. But the light is not in the mirror such that we can take it and move it out. It is the relationship between the light and the mirror. The light comes from a different source and the mirror is a tangible object. If we break the mirror, nothing happens to the light; if we break our body (die), nothing happens to our soul. This is the meaning of eternal life and this is the way that God has created us. We can not understand what our soul is like unless we turn to the Writings from Bahá'u'lláh and the explanation from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Concerning Body, Soul and spirit

There are in the world of humanity three degrees; those of the body, the soul, and spirit.

The body is the physical or animal degree of man. From the bodily point of view man is a sharer of the animal kingdom. The bodies alike of men and animals are composed of elements held together by the law of attraction.

Like the animal, man possesses the faculties of the senses, is subject to heat, cold, hunger, thirst, etc.; unlike the animal, man has a rational soul, the human intelligence. This intelligence of man is the intermediary between his body and his spirit. When man allows the spirit, through his soul, to enlighten his understanding, then does he contain all Creation; because man, being the culmination of all that went before and thus superior to all previous evolutions, contains all the lower world within himself. Illumined by the spirit through the instrumentality of the soul, man's radiant intelligence makes him the crowning-point of Creation.

But on the other hand, when man does not open his mind and heart to the blessing of the spirit, but turns his soul towards the material side, towards the bodily part of his nature, then is he fallen from his high place and he becomes inferior to the inhabitants of the lower animal kingdom. In this case the man is in a sorry plight! For if the spiritual qualities of the soul, open to the breath of the Divine Spirit, are never used, they become atrophied, enfeebled, and at last incapable; whilst the soul's material qualities alone being exercised, they become terribly powerful—and the unhappy, misguided man, becomes more savage, more unjust, more vile, more cruel, more malevolent than the lower animals themselves. All his aspirations and desires being strengthened by the lower side of the soul's nature, he becomes more and more brutal, until his whole being is in no way superior to that of the beasts that perish. Men such as this, plan to work evil, to hurt and to destroy; they are entirely without the spirit of Divine compassion, for the celestial quality of the soul has been dominated by that of the material. If, on the contrary, the spiritual nature of the soul has been so strengthened that it holds the material side in subjection, then does the man approach the Divine; his humanity becomes so glorified that the virtues of the Celestial Assembly are manifested in him; he radiates the Mercy of God, he stimulates the spiritual progress of mankind, for he becomes a lamp to show light on their path. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks 31)

The Five Aspects of Spirit (‘Abdu’l-Bahá)

Spirit is the part of us which connects with God. Even though our individual bodies are separate from each other, our spirit is connected. The spiritual creation from God is one. Buddha said our Buddha-nature is connected like one big ocean. Because the spirit is one, so we influence and affect each other. Because the spirit is one, so we are connected with God and can feel God’s love. God is Spirit. Spirit has force and power. It is the power of growth in plants. It is the power of growth and senses in animals. It is the power of growth, senses, and consciousness (thinking, imagination, understanding, memory) in mankind. All things receive this power from God to live. It seems to be our own power, but it is actually from God. It is God’s grace.

Know that, speaking generally, there are five divisions of the spirit. First the vegetable spirit: this is a power which results from the combination of elements and the mingling of substances by the decree of the Supreme God, and from the influence, the effect and connection of other existences. When these substances and elements are separated from each other, the power of growth also ceases to exist.

After this is the animal spirit, which also results from the mingling and combination of elements. But this combination is more complete, and through the decree of the Almighty Lord a perfect mingling is obtained, and the animal spirit—in other words, the power of the senses—is produced. It will perceive the reality of things from that which is seen and visible, audible, edible, tangible, and that which can be smelled. After the dissociation and decomposition of the combined elements this spirit also will naturally disappear.

The human spirit may be likened to the bounty of the sun shining on a mirror. The body of man, which is composed from the elements, is combined and mingled in the most perfect form; it is the most solid construction, the noblest combination, the most perfect existence. It grows and develops through the animal spirit. This perfected body can be compared to a mirror, and the human spirit to the sun. Nevertheless, if the mirror breaks, the bounty of the sun continues; and if the mirror is destroyed or ceases to exist, no harm will happen to the bounty of the sun, which is everlasting. This spirit has the power of discovery; it encompasses all things. All these wonderful signs, these scientific discoveries, great

enterprises and important historical events which you know are due to it. From the realm of the invisible and hidden, through spiritual power, it brought them to the plane of the visible. So man is upon the earth, yet he makes discoveries in the heavens. From known realities—that is to say, from the things which are known and visible—he discovers unknown things.

The fourth degree of spirit is the heavenly spirit; it is the spirit of faith and the bounty of God; it comes from the breath of the Holy Spirit, and by the divine power it becomes the cause of eternal life. It is the power which makes the earthly man heavenly, and the imperfect man perfect. It makes the impure to be pure, the silent eloquent; it purifies and sanctifies those made captive by carnal desires; it makes the ignorant wise.

The fifth spirit is the Holy Spirit. This Holy Spirit is the mediator between God and His creatures. It is like a mirror facing the sun. As the pure mirror receives light from the sun and transmits this bounty to others, so the Holy Spirit is the mediator of the Holy Light from the Sun of Reality, which it gives to the sanctified realities. It is adorned with all the divine perfections. Every time it appears, the world is renewed, and a new cycle is founded. The body of the world of humanity puts on a new garment. It can be compared to the spring; whenever it comes, the world passes from one condition to another. Through the advent of the season of spring the black earth and the fields and wildernesses will become verdant and blooming, and all sorts of flowers and sweet-scented herbs will grow; the trees will have new life, and new fruits will appear, and a new cycle is founded. The appearance of the Holy Spirit is like this. Whenever it appears, it renews the world of humanity and gives a new spirit to the human realities: it arrays the world of existence in a praiseworthy garment, dispels the darkness of ignorance, and causes the radiation of the light of perfections. Christ with this power has renewed this cycle; the heavenly spring with the utmost freshness and sweetness spread its tent in the world of humanity, and the life-giving breeze perfumed the nostrils of the enlightened ones.

In the same way, the appearance of Bahá'u'lláh was like a new springtime which appeared with holy breezes, with the hosts of everlasting life, and with heavenly power. It established the Throne of the Divine Kingdom in the center of the world and, by the power

of the Holy Spirit, revived souls and established a new cycle. . (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions 36)

One Entity

Be swift in the path of holiness, and enter the heaven of communion with Me. Cleanse thy heart with the burnish of the spirit, and hasten to the court of the Most High. (Bahá'u'lláh, Hidden Words 8)

God's creation is one entity. There is no difference in this sense between the physical world (*vegetable, animal, human world*) and the spiritual world (*heavenly spirit, Holy Spirit world ~ the world of God*). The spiritual world is never separated from the physical world. The laws we find in nature which apply to the physical world are the same laws and principles which apply to the world of men, religious teaching and the spiritual worlds of God. Therefore, we can appreciate something about the nature of our soul when we are able to find something in the laws of nature to help us understand it. Because the spiritual world and physical world have similar laws, the similarities between physical reality and spiritual reality can be very striking and can help us to understand a little bit more about the soul, and ourselves. However, when the laws of nature are applied to our higher nature, we must add certain characteristics or features to it, which we can not find in the lower kingdom. That is to say, the animal spirit possesses more power than the vegetable spirit, the human more power than the animal spirit.

Another of the laws of nature is that the lower spirit of nature has no capacity to understand the higher spirit of nature. But the higher spirit of nature is capable of understanding the lower spirit of nature. The human spirit has the capacity to understand the animal and vegetable, but the vegetable realm is incapable of understanding the animal realm, just as the animal realm is incapable of understanding the human. This gives us an idea of why the human spirit can not understand the heavenly spirit and Holy Spirit, because we have not been given the capacity to understand them.

As our knowledge of things, even of created and limited things, is knowledge of their qualities and not of their essence, how is it possible to comprehend in its essence the

Divine Reality, which is unlimited? For the inner essence of anything is not comprehended, but only its qualities. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions 59)

To every discerning and illuminated heart it is evident that God, the unknowable essence, the Divine Being, is immensely exalted beyond every human attribute... (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh 19)

God’s creation is one entity. Seen in another way, one creation has five aspects of spirit levels. It means the vegetable kingdom can not understand the animal kingdom even though they are existing in the same world of creation; as well as the animal with the human. This tell us even the human kingdom can’t understand the higher lever of the spiritual kingdom even though we exist in the same world of creation. Only one world of creation, we truly exist in one entity but in different spiritual levels. That is why we are so close to God, “closer than our life-vein”.

My holy, My divinely ordained Revelation may be likened to an ocean in whose depths are concealed innumerable pearls of great price....It is the duty of every seeker to bestir himself and strive to attain the shores of this ocean...This most great, this fathomless and surging Ocean is near, astonishingly near, unto you. Behold it is closer to you than your life-vein! (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh 153)

The answer to the first question: the souls of the children of the Kingdom, after their separation from the body, ascend unto the realm of everlasting life. But if ye ask as to the place, know ye that the world of existence is a single world, although its stations are various and distinct. For example, the mineral life occupieth its own plane, but a mineral entity is without any awareness at all of the vegetable kingdom, and indeed, with its inner tongue denieth that there is any such kingdom. In the same way, a vegetable entity knoweth nothing of the animal world, remaining completely heedless and ignorant thereof, for the stage of the animal is higher than that of the vegetable, and the vegetable is veiled from the animal world and inwardly denieth the existence of that world—all this while animal, vegetable and mineral dwell together in the one world. In the same way the animal remaineth totally unaware of that power of the human mind which graspeth universal ideas and layeth bare the secrets of creation. ...Of this power of discovery which belongeth

to the human mind, this power which can grasp abstract and universal ideas, the animal remaineth totally ignorant, and indeed denieth its existence.

In the same way, the denizens of this earth are completely unaware of the world of the Kingdom and deny the existence thereof. They ask, for example: 'Where is the Kingdom? Where is the Lord of the Kingdom?' These people are even as the mineral and the vegetable, who know nothing whatever of the animal and the human realm; they see it not; they find it not. Yet the mineral and vegetable, the animal and man, are all living here together in this world of existence. Those souls who are pure and unsullied, upon the dissolution of their elemental frames, hasten away to the world of God, and that world is within this world. The people of this world, however, are unaware of that world, and are even as the mineral and the vegetable that know nothing of the world of the animal and the world of man.

In the other world the human reality doth not assume a physical form, rather doth it take on a heavenly form, made up of elements of that heavenly realm. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 163)

How we can understand our soul

It is impossible for us to understand the soul, but when we have some ideas or a little bit of understanding it will help us to appreciate God's creation. We can learn some spiritual laws by looking at nature, but looking at nature alone is not sufficient. We also can look at the Holy Writings. Studying the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá will enable us to understand something about the soul and ourselves. We can only understand their characteristics but not their essence.

Consider again the sun when it is completely hidden behind the clouds. Though the earth is still illumined with its light, yet the measure of light which it receiveth is considerably reduced. Not until the clouds have dispersed, can the sun shine again in the plenitude of its glory. Neither the presence of the cloud nor its absence can, in any way, affect the inherent splendor of the sun. The soul of man is the sun by which his body is illumined,

and from which it draweth its sustenance, and should be so regarded. (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh 80)

Bahá'u'lláh teaches that if we want to know God, we should know ourselves first. Everything we do is motivated by our soul. Our mind, our heart and our senses are manifestations of the soul. But when we put mind, heart and senses all together they do not make our soul. Then what is the human soul? We can never know the essence, the true reality, of our soul. It is exalted. When a man reaches the stage of understanding that he can't comprehend it all, this is a mark of the culmination of man's development.

Wert thou to ponder in thine heart, from now until the end that hath no end, and with all the concentrated intelligence and understanding which the greatest minds have attained in the past or will attain in the future, this divinely ordained and subtle Reality, this sign of the revelation of the All-Abiding, All-Glorious God, thou wilt fail to comprehend its mystery or to appraise its virtue. Having recognized thy powerlessness to attain to an adequate understanding of that Reality which abideth within thee, thou wilt readily admit the futility of such efforts as may be attempted by thee, or by any of the created things, to fathom the mystery of the Living God, the Day Star of unfading glory, the Ancient of everlasting days. This confession of helplessness which mature contemplation must eventually impel every mind to make is in itself the acme of human understanding, and marketh the culmination of man's development. (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh 83)

The laws of nature can help us to understand the soul. Everything which we come across in our life is a counterpart to something spiritual. Everything in our life, this physical world which is created by God, is a counterpart to something in the spiritual world. For instance, a tree in this physical world has a counterpart meaning in the spiritual world. It is a metaphor for the life of spirit of men, a metaphor for the oneness of humanity, all part of a single "family tree", and of the Religion of God. Everything we see in this life has a spiritual counterpart. The counterpart of the sun is the Prophet or Manifestation of God. If we want to understand the soul or spiritual reality, we can find a counterpart in this life that is similar to it and has the same characteristics, and then study that counterpart. This physical counterpart will help us get some idea or

knowledge of the soul. We can't go along our spiritual journey on our own, we have to constantly seek and be supported by an understanding of the Word of God.

Spiritual Reality Understood Through the Counterpart of the Embryo

1. One cell becomes one being

The Writings tell us that the physical counterpart of the soul in this life is the embryo which grows in the womb of the mother. That is to say, each stage of growth of the embryo in the womb of the mother, is analogous to a stage of the development of the soul. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has given us several examples of an embryo being similar to the soul. When we examine the characteristics of the growth of the embryo we find very interesting parallels as we try to understand our spiritual life. The physical body of man is created at the time of conception and one cell becomes one being. That cell has nothing in it that resembles a human. We can not see the limbs or organs of a person. But that cell has the capacity to multiply and eventually become a perfect human being. As it develops, it gradually acquires limbs and organs. It is the same thing with the soul. The soul has no virtues, no qualities and no perfections when the soul comes to us at the time of conception. But we can acquire the virtues, qualities and perfections in our life, and they develop gradually. It has no knowledge, but that can be acquired too. While the growth of the body only continues up to adulthood, the development of the soul continues throughout our life if we strive to acquire spiritual virtues, qualities and perfections.

Let us return to our subject that man, in the beginning of his existence and in the womb of the earth, like the embryo in the womb of the mother, gradually grew and developed, and passed from one form to another, from one shape to another, until he appeared with this beauty and perfection, this force and this power. It is certain that in the beginning he had not this loveliness and grace and elegance, and that he only by degrees attained this shape, this form, this beauty and this grace. There is no doubt that the human embryo did not at once appear in this form; neither did it then become the manifestation of the words "Blessed, therefore, be God, the most excellent of Makers." Gradually it passed through various conditions and different shapes, until it attained this form and beauty, this perfection, grace and loveliness. Thus it is evident and confirmed that the development and

growth of man on this earth, until he reached his present perfection, resembled the growth and development of the embryo in the womb of the mother: by degrees it passed from condition to condition, from form to form, from one shape to another, for this is according to the requirement of the universal system and Divine Law.

That is to say, the embryo passes through different states and traverses numerous degrees, until it reaches the form in which it manifests the words “Praise be to God, the best of Creators,” and until the signs of reason and maturity appear. And in the same way, man’s existence on this earth, from the beginning until it reaches this state, form and condition, necessarily lasts a long time, and goes through many degrees until it reaches this condition. But from the beginning of man’s existence he is a distinct species. In the same way, the embryo of man in the womb of the mother was at first in a strange form; then this body passes from shape to shape, from state to state, from form to form, until it appears in utmost beauty and perfection. But even when in the womb of the mother and in this strange form, entirely different from his present form and figure, he is the embryo of the superior species, and not of the animal; his species and essence undergo no change. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions 47)

[2. Attachment](#)

As we see, the embryo must grow in the womb of the mother. That is its place. It is attached to the womb of the mother. It is its home. In the same way, after we are born, our human bodies, our physical side, are attached to the physical world. We think this world we are living in is our home, and we never leave it as long as we live. Just as the embryo growing in the womb of the mother does not leave the womb world until it is ready to be born, the soul remains associated with the body and our mind and consciousness, which are functions of the soul which remain tied to the material world until physical death.

Another similarity is that the womb of the mother is not a place where the embryo can live forever. It is only a temporary place and a transition period for it to stay. Similarly, the world we live in is only a temporary and transitional place for our soul. The world is not the permanent home for our soul. For each one of us no matter how long we live in this world, the soul is

associated with the body only for that period. If only mankind can realize this, that the world we live in is not the place, not the permanent home for our soul, then we will know that this world is not the place we need to focus on and we can direct our attention to something more important in our life.

3. Purpose of this life ~ Preparation

Another similarity is that the purpose of the embryo's growth in the womb of the mother is to acquire limbs and organs. Limbs and organs grow so we can have a perfect human body, but they are not used while we are in the womb. The same thing applies to our soul in this life. The purpose of the growth and development of the soul in this world is to acquire spiritual qualities. These qualities, perfections and virtues have to be acquired in this life. This is the purpose of this life.

When we look at what Creation is like, we can see what God really has done. He has brought two opposite things together. He creates things in pairs, in counterparts. We see this in ourselves where a spiritual entity, a soul, is associated with the material body, and these two together form the human being. This human being has two sides, a physical and a spiritual side. The purpose of this is so the soul of man may grow and become strong, and acquire the qualities and perfections of the spirit.

This pairing of things is even shown forth in the Qur'án: "Glory be to Him Who has created all the pairs: of such things as the earth produceth, and of themselves; and of things which they know not" —that is to say, men, animals and plants are all in pairs— "and of everything have We created two kinds"—that is to say, We have created all the beings through pairing. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions 17)

We can see something else. The limbs and organs which a child grows in the womb of the mother are not required there. He has eyes and ears but he does not use them in the womb. But they are needed in the life he is heading towards which is after his birth. Similarly, the virtues, perfections and qualities we are supposed to acquire in this life are really needed for our next life which is our second birth. Indeed, if you think carefully, whether or not we use the spiritual qualities in this world, we still can live physically, although we must use these qualities in this

life, otherwise they will never grow. For example, we must love. If we don't show love to others, we will never strengthen the capacity to love in our soul. There are millions of people who live without it and yet they carry on their life. When our soul acquires the quality of love, when our soul acquires the quality of unity, when our soul acquires knowledge, when our soul acquires all the virtues that are in the teachings of God, then in the next life, these qualities and perfections become part of our being. A child in the mother's womb has two perfect eyes by the end of pregnancy, but they can not see because there is no light. Those eyes are useless inside the womb of the mother. But when they are born, their eyes become useful because there is light. The same thing with the qualities and perfections of our soul is in this life. Some of the qualities seem useless in this life, not necessary to make us successful in this world, but they are necessary for the next life. So we have to use them and get better and better at it so we can have spiritual vision, like we acquired eyes in the womb of the mother. We don't know how these qualities or wisdom function in our life as a spiritual being in the next world.

If a child did not acquired perfect limbs or organs in the womb, he can't acquire limbs and organs after birth. He becomes handicapped. This is similar to the development of our soul. The well-being of our spiritual life relies on the qualities and perfections of the soul just as our well-being in this life relies on perfect limbs and organs. That is why we have to acquire all the perfections, qualities and virtues in this life. So we can take them with us to the next world. At the time of conception, the cell has nothing at all. When the soul is created, it has no qualities and perfections at all. But after years of following spiritual teachings, a soul can become full of qualities and virtues and grow to become a spiritual being.

Another analogy is that of a little bird that has been placed in a cage. The purpose of a bird being placed in the cage is to protect and to feed it so it can become strong. When the bird grows strong enough the cage is opened. The bird is ready to fly in the realm of God. The home of the bird is not really in the cage. The bird has been created to soar in high places. The bird living in the cage is similar to man living in this world. A lot of people do not think about whether we have a soul or not so they don't feed the soul with spiritual food, which is the Word of God. Without spiritual food the soul becomes small and never grows. Another thing we do is tie our soul up with so many strings, here and there. So many attachments we have, we tie the wings of

the bird with strings in this material world, so even when the cage is opened the bird can't fly. We are still attached to the things of this world.

When man does not open his mind and heart to the blessing of the spirit, but turns his soul towards the material side, towards the bodily part of his nature, then is he fallen from his high place and he becomes inferior to the inhabitants of the lower animal kingdom. In this case the man is in a sorry plight! ... on the contrary, the spiritual nature of the soul has been so strengthened that it holds the material side in subjection, then does the man approach the Divine; his humanity becomes so glorified that the virtues of the Celestial Assembly are manifested in him; he radiates the Mercy of God, he stimulates the spiritual progress of mankind, for he becomes a lamp to show light on their path. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks 31)

Everything returns to its origin.

The body of man is composed of atoms. Therefore when the body dies it decomposes and returns to its origin which is dust. The soul also returns to its origin. Where does it come from? We are told in the Writings very clearly, that the soul has come from the spiritual world of God. So where does it return to? What causes it to return to the spiritual world of God? But see what is different, when it first came it had no virtues, no qualities, and no perfections, and now it has an identity and personality. Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá tell us that we must develop our identity and we will retain the identity in the spiritual world of God. He said we will associate with one another. Holy souls will associate with Prophets, Founders of the great religions and the Manifestations of God in the next life. It is not like we lose consciousness and don't remember who we are.

Know, verily, that the soul is a sign of God, a heavenly gem whose reality the most learned of men hath failed to grasp, and whose mystery no mind, however acute, can ever hope to unravel. It is the first among all created things to declare the excellence of its Creator, the first to recognize His glory, to cleave to His truth, and to bow down in adoration before Him. If it be faithful to God, it will reflect His light, and will, eventually, return unto Him. If it fail, however, in its allegiance to its Creator, it will become a victim to self and passion,

and will, in the end, sink in their depths. (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh 82)

Where is the next world?

Bahá'u'lláh tells us the spiritual world of God is infinite in range. In fact, anything associated with God is infinite. Even the physical universe is infinite. It is the same with the spiritual world of God. But where is it? In order to be able to understand this and be able to appreciate it we need to turn to the Writings again, which is what Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá have told us. Also we can look at nature and find a counterpart or analogy.

Let's look at nature first. When we see a child growing in the womb of the mother we ask "where is he"? If he is in the womb of the mother, it means he is here in this world, isn't he? He is in this world with his mother. The womb prevents him from recognizing the great world he is living in. It is like a chicken before it is hatched, and it is already in the world. But the shell prevents the chicken from seeing it and recognizing it. So, in the Writings we are told the next world is here. It is closer to us than we think.

A child as long as he lives in the womb, is not given the capacity to understand the world he is going to be born into. What a small world he is living in compared with the world he will be born into. Because a child does not understand and is not given the capacity to understand, he is content. If he ever knew or had the slightest capacity to know what a great world he is going to live in, then he would want to come out of the womb immediately. In the Writings it is mentioned that if the glory of next life is disclosed to the eyes of men then all of humanity will wish to go immediately. God has not given the capacity to an unborn child to understand the smallness of the place he is living in and what a great world is waiting for him. The same God has not given us the capacity to understand what the soul is and what a great spiritual world is waiting for us after our separation from the body. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has clearly told us that the place where we are living now is as small as where a child lives in his mother's womb, when compared with the spiritual world we are going to. This gives us an idea of the wisdom of God in not disclosing to us what it will really be like living in the next life. We don't think about it and we can not understand the spiritual world until we are born there and live in it. But of course, we are

in the spiritual world already; even if we have no capacity to understand it, just like a child has no capacity to understand that he is already in this world even when he is inside his mother.

What do we carry with us on the spiritual journey?

When a child is born, he brings everything with him which he has. He does not leave anything behind. It is the same with our birth into the spiritual world. When we leave this world, the body remains on the earth and the soul departs. We carry anything which is good with us, because bad has no existence in itself. In this world it looks like there are plenty of bad things. But in God's creation, bad is the non-existence of good. So doing bad things means a person has a lack of doing good things. Just like darkness has no existence itself. Darkness means lack of light. The darkness disappears when the light shines in the dark. Bad things disappear when a person learns to do good things. We can say one person brings light from one room to another room, but we can not say a person brings dark with him. It is the same thing with poverty. We can not say I am a poor man and I am going to bring poverty with me. Poverty means he has very little money and that is only what is meant. So whatever we have that is good, we take to the next world. And from there we start our spiritual life. It is like the capital we have. When we have all the good qualities, we have good capital and it means we move ourselves away from poverty. Our capital is our virtues, good qualities and perfections. We start our next spiritual journey depending on what we have acquired in this life. The qualities and perfections of what we have will decide which level of spiritual reality we will live in.

Quality levels

Bahá'u'lláh tells us that in the next life men will be graded into levels. The levels in the next life will be similar to the levels of existence in this life. This life has a mineral kingdom, vegetable kingdom and animal kingdom. Within the animal kingdom there are animals of lower intelligence and higher intelligence. Bahá'u'lláh also tells us that in the spiritual world those who are at higher levels will encompass the lower levels. The lower levels will never understand the higher levels, but those at higher levels can interact with the lower levels and pray for their progress. This is the meaning of heaven and hell. The more perfections we have, the nearer we are to God, and it may be said we are in heaven. When we lack qualities of the soul, it is like we

don't have perfect limbs and organs, we survive due to the mercy of others and from God to be able to live. It means we are in the lower level of the spiritual world. It is all relative. Heaven and hell are relative terms and our existence in the next life depends on what spiritual qualities we have acquired in this life.

Free Will

Another thing to point out is that the embryo and all other physical beings have no control over what they do. The embryo grows because the law of nature makes it so. It grows without any will. The soul also grows in this life as it acquires qualities and perfections, but there is one thing added to it. It has choice. It can make the choice of either developing its spiritual qualities or not. The embryo does not have the choice to grow or not. The seed will grow by the natural laws without choice once we plant it. Our soul has something extra added to it, the power of free will. This is a great difference. When we apply a law from a lower level to a higher level in nature, we find that something is added to it.

You can find the same principles in many other religions. The main teachings of the faiths all have the same origin. You can trace the origin in nature. You can see that nature is the reflection of the Teachings of God. In many Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh you can see the similarity in nature. While we study nature, along with the Writings, then we come to have more understanding of what life is and what creation is.

O Son of Spirit! My first counsel is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting. (Bahá'u'lláh, Hidden Words 1)

So we know we acquire qualities in this life and carry them with us to start our spiritual existence in the next life. The journey will never end according to Bahá'u'lláh. He said a man has a beginning and has no end. And it will continue as long as God exists. Can you imagine that the great glory, the life of the spirit, has been born and is living and never ends on this journey? It always will be closer and closer to God, but he never reaches Him in the spiritual world of God. Endless, limitless, infinite, immortal is the soul.

Fulfillment

You perceive how the soul is the intermediary between the body and the spirit. In like manner is this tree the intermediary between the seed and the fruit. When the fruit of the tree appears and becomes ripe, then we know that the tree is perfect; if the tree bore no fruit it would be merely a useless growth, serving no purpose! When a soul has in it the life of the spirit, then does it bring forth good fruit and become a Divine tree. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks 31)

In nature we will find anything has organic growth. It begins with the seed. We plant a seed in the ground. The seed grows to become a tree. A tree grows and eventually will become a mature tree, and the same thing as our soul. Our soul has organic growth as well. It begins with the seed you can say, a spiritual seed. A tree comes to a point in its life when it must give fruit. And when it gives fruit, we say it has fulfilled itself. Because it was created to produce fruits and its own seeds, the stage of maturity to giving birth. In life, a tree can not produce a tree by itself, it has to be pollinated from different sources. A mother can not give birth to a child by herself. A female must have a relationship with male so the female can conceive a child. When she conceives a child, she can give birth to a child. Our soul is the same. The Holy Books tell us our soul is represented as a female. If it is going to fulfill itself, the soul must produce a child. It must give birth to a child. Where does the soul turn to be fertilized for this to take place? The Writings tell us, *our soul, acting as a female, should turn to the influence from the Manifestation of God.*

Adam signifies the heavenly spirit of Adam, and Eve His human soul. For in some passages in the Holy Books where women are mentioned, they represent the soul of man. The tree of good and evil signifies the human world; for the spiritual and divine world is purely good and absolutely luminous, but in the human world light and darkness, good and evil, exist as opposite conditions. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions 30)

When our body grows to maturity, we search for a companion, and then have a relationship with the companion, and then maybe have a child. Similarly, when our soul gets to a certain stage we are seeking light, which is the light from God, the spiritual companion. We start to

build the relationship with God. How does our soul give fruit? Like the embryo is the seed and the beginning of our physical life, the life of the spirit we carry in our soul is the seed of our spiritual life. ***When a soul has in it the life of the spirit, then does it bring forth good fruit and become a Divine tree.*** The embryo relies on the food from the mother, the food source from the cord which connects them. Our life of the spirit also needs food to be able to grow. The food source is from God, the spiritual power and Word of God. The cord for the food is through the Manifestations of God. They deliver the food to us. They are the connection between our soul and God. A pregnant mother would be very careful about the food she eats and the condition of her body. When our soul carries the life of the spirit we should be very careful what we feed to our soul and our soul's condition. We pray to God and read Holy Books everyday for the spiritual food. Let our mind consume God's words instead of earthly words and purify our soul to keep our soul in good condition for the new life to grow. Like we do our best to hope for a healthy child, we watch out for our soul so that the life of the spirit can grow and be born into the next world.

He will come to your aid with invisible hosts, and support you with armies of inspiration from the Concourse above; He will send unto you sweet perfumes from the highest Paradise, and waft over you the pure breathings that blow from the rose gardens of the Company on high. He will breathe into your hearts the life of spirit, cause you to enter the Ark of salvation, and reveal unto you His clear tokens and signs. Verily is this abounding grace. Verily is this the victory that none can deny. . (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 157)

Imagine that when a mother does not pay attention to what she can do to protect the new life, a miscarriage could happen or physical problems occur. When we have faith in God, if we fail to maintain the relationship with God or do not take our spiritual food daily, the same thing can happen to our soul, a miscarriage and lack of qualities and virtues. Maintaining our soul's condition, purification, and having appropriate food is critical to our spiritual development. A mother needs to be very careful during pregnancy, and so does our soul when we carry the life of the spirit which is firm in faith and in the Covenant of God. When we fall outside of the path, it is like a miscarriage, everything has to start over again.

Another condition is where a woman might have trouble getting pregnant and having a baby. It may be because of the condition of the body. When our soul is not ready, the faith is not strong enough, the life of spirit won't happen, the seed won't produce. The female in this kind of situation needs to bring her body back to health and prepare it to become pregnant. We need to prepare the condition for our soul to be able to have the life of the spirit. In this situation we need to turn our soul to the influence from the Manifestation of God. In each age there has been a Manifestation of God. In this age it is Bahá'u'lláh. We turn to Bahá'u'lláh to establish the mysterious spiritual intercourse with these forces. These forces will be released into the soul and the soul becomes pregnant with the life of the spirit.

What is the spiritual fruit when it is produced? It is our life of the spirit (fruit) born in the next world. This is the meaning of ***“the soul is the intermediary between the body and the spirit”***. Bahá'u'lláh told us that this is the purpose for which God created men. Not only has the soul coming here to have good quality and perfection, but to give birth to the life of the spirit in the next world. The life of the spirit comes to us not by its own efforts. It is impossible to become a Christian, Muslim or Bahá'í by ourselves. The only way we can have faith is that this mysterious relationship must be established. The forces of the Manifestation will penetrate into the heart of a person, into a soul. And come to the point of "I believe". And when the soul says "I believe" that embryo has started. In every age in which a Manifestation appears the same thing happens. When Peter recognized Christ he opened his soul to the influence of Christ and then he acquired the life of the spirit. That spirit of life originates from two sources. One is from Bahá'u'lláh in this age, and also the human soul.

This is our human soul, how and what we have been created for. I hope by now, we all know the purpose of our life and why we need to turn towards our creator and to know Him, and to worship Him. This might be only a glimmering of our spiritual reality, but enough for us to know who we are and be able to appreciate our value. We are all on the same journey, truly, one creation and one humanity.

Life is a load which must be carried on while we are on earth, but the cares of the lower things of life should not be allowed to monopolize all the thoughts and aspirations of a human being. The heart's ambitions should ascend to a more glorious goal, mental activity

should rise to higher levels! Men should hold in their souls the vision of celestial perfection, and there prepare a dwelling-place for the inexhaustible bounty of the Divine Spirit. I ask for you the supreme blessing, that you may be so filled with the vitality of the Heavenly Spirit that you may be the cause of life to the world. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks 31)

(References: Bahá'í Writings and The Human Soul by Adib Taherzadeh)