

*But there is a spirit in man,
And the breath of the Almighty gives them understanding.
(Job 32:8)*

4

Body, Soul, Spirit and Death

The cells of a growing embryo truly ‘evolved’ in the literal sense, in small steps practically before our very eyes, into the complex interconnected organs of the body, this express ‘evolution’ being guided by the living directive mould of a biofield or a “subtle body,” as we have seen from researches described in the last chapter. The subtle body is the missing link that explains that the processes of growth are not just physical chemistry and physics alone. The subtle body is what enables the physical body to maintain its shape and adapt to the environment up to a tolerable limit, beyond which sickness creeps in and eventually death ensues. The body’s growth follows a unique pattern of intelligent design – that of the subtle body, which in its particular shape and form is built into each species of living things. The subtle body is the builder of complexity in living things. It is the form-building template of an organism.

The subtle body can however be affected by drugs especially at the embryo stage; for example, defective babies born without arms or legs (‘thalidomide babies’), Siamese twins who are ‘joined together’ and share some common organs, persons with an extra 6th finger or toe, even still births. There is an intimate connection that provides an interactive feedback between the subtle body and the cells (their DNAs) and organs of the physical body. The genes may contain all the basic ingredients that allow the subtle body to express them in growth into the various types of cells, organs and tissues. Is it any wonder there are so many failures in cloning and stem cell research because the subtle body is not (adequately) taken into account? It looks like the genes do not decide holistically, but the subtle body does. The genes are not the designer; they but provide (or are) the raw materials, organised in their own basic ways, for the designer subtle body to build into various physical organs and forms. The

whole physical body functions harmoniously on account of regulation by the subtle body or biofield (what some may term as the 'laws impressed upon matter' by the Creator). The subtle body seems to be the answer to the riddle of complexity that is much discussed in recent years in science-theology dialogues. Researches described thus far impute the subtle body as the immediate author of design and complexity.

The subtle body pervades the whole body and provides in some ways the basis of consciousness or the self. The subtle body may be likened to the soul alluded to by thinkers, past and present. Present researches have not discovered what exactly consciousness really is or what the soul is, although increasingly researchers are coming to a holistic view – that consciousness involves the whole body, not just something that arises from the brain, as an epiphenomenon.

Neuroscientist Dr Candace Pert*¹ is known for her pivotal role in the discovery in 1972 of opiate receptors in the body, molecules that unlock cells in the brain so that morphine and other opiates, including the body's natural opiate, endorphins, can enter. In her continuing research into the biochemical substances called neuropeptides (tiny bits of protein that consist of strings of amino acids) present throughout our nervous and immune systems, she believes that these provide the biological underpinnings of our awareness and emotions and is a crucial link between mind and body. Dr Pert believes that her experiments prove that the mind and the body are not two separate entities, but are one interconnected information system – the bodymind – a body-wide system in which every part communicates with every other part. In an interview*² with freelance journalist and author Caren Goldman, Dr Pert has concluded that neuropeptides, after years of studying their form and function, are responsible for our emotions – not only the familiar feelings of anger, fear, sadness, joy, contentment, and courage, but also spiritual inspiration, awe, bliss, and other states of consciousness that scientists have never physiologically explained. "Instead, emotions are the nexus between mind and matter, going back and forth between the two and influencing both," says Dr. Pert. Emotions are the soul of things.

The emotional aspects of our human senses must somehow be intimately linked to the subtle body of an individual and quite distinct from reasoning and making of choices.

Esoteric researches indicate that the subtle body (said to be of at least seven dynamic interpenetrating layers) emanates from seven energy vortices (*chakras*) located along the spine from head to coccyx (both front and back of the body). The existence of these high energy vortices seems to have been verified by the experiments of Dr Hiroshi Motoyama*³ of Japan and Dr Valerie Hunt*⁴, Emeritus Professor at UCLA of U.S.A.

Dr Hunt's research indicates that the human energy field both permeates the entire body and radiates to the outside, inches to feet beyond the body's surface, and it has been validated in laboratories as light emissions, which are electromagnetic radiations. This biofield projects from the body and holds the body in life, which otherwise might be just a biochemical mix. With the help of a special aura-meter, Dr Hunt discovered another form of electromagnetism that is organized into a different pattern, not a moving wave but a standing or stationary energy, which she termed bioscalar wave (taking the name from scalar wave in physics). Dr. Valerie Hunt found that the human energy field vibrations were as much as 1000 times higher frequency than the electrical signals of nerve and muscle. In mapping the bioenergy fields, Dr. Hunt found that each individual has a unique resting pattern. She calls this the Signature Field. Incoherent patterns different from the Signature Field show forth disease or certain human behaviour and experience. According to Dr Hunt, the body can repair and regenerate "beyond our wildest dreams" if the blocks to the emotional organized energy systems are removed.

Do the biomolecules, physical cells, tissues and organs drive the body? It looks more like the subtle body animating and driving the physical body, from the researches we have seen. Since the subtle body and the physical body are closely intermeshed, it follows that consciousness or awareness must be felt by the whole living being. Upon death, consciousness disappears. It is looking at this contrast, the living and the dead, that we observe that the "animating principle" of life is lost to the person on death. Does it continue in some way after death? What is man? Does man have an immortal soul? Is there a volitional spirit in him?

Materialism believes that we are all matter, there is no mind. Dualism believes that there is matter and mind (or spirit). What does Scripture say?

To the above fundamental questions, the Bible must be expected to have some revealed answers. Indeed it has given some satisfactory answers to me. And consciousness studies seem to lend strong support to Scriptural truths.

Living Soul

Going back to the early narrative for some primary definitions, the book of Genesis (2:7) says:

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

This scripture immediately provides a dualistic view of man. Man was made from dust stuff and then enlivened by spiritual stuff, the breath of life from God. No doubt, dust stuff was first made from the God stuff (spirit of God) as we have derived earlier. Dust stuff must also exhibit some inherent God stuff qualities at the root. The raw dust-stuff form of man was imbibed with fresh God stuff breath with a new intent to become a living soul, transformed into an image of God.

The word 'soul' [Hebrew: *nephesh*] is also used consistently in the original Hebrew language of the animals and birds and fishes (those that are said to have 'the breath of life', i.e. apart from the plants and trees and other 'inanimate' things, which are not considered from the Bible's point of view as having the breath of life – excluded by definition). See *Gen 1:29-30*.

The phrase 'living soul' is frequently accepted as giving a primary meaning of 'possessing life' and is frequently used also of animals:

Gen 1:20 ... creature [*nephesh*] that hath life

Gen 1:24 ... living creature [*nephesh*]

Gen 1:30 ... every thing [*nephesh*] that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life

Gen 9:12 ... every living creature [*nephesh*] that is with you

Gen 15-16 ... every living creature [*nephesh*]

Ezek 47:9 ... every thing [*nephesh*] that liveth, which moveth

There are passages where *nephesh* designates an individual or person or denote self:

Lev 7:21 ... that soul shall be cut off

Judges 16:16 ... his soul was vexed unto death

Psalms 120:6 ... My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace

Ezek 4:14 ... my soul hath not been polluted

Ezek 18:4 ... all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine:
the soul that sinneth, it shall die

Sometimes *nephesh* is identified with the blood, as something which is essential to physical existence:

Gen 9:4 ... flesh with the life [*nephesh*] thereof, which is the blood thereof

Lev 17:10-14 ... the life [*nephesh*] of the flesh is in the blood

Deut 12:22-24 ... for the blood is the life

And it is “poured out” at death:

Lam 2:12 ... their soul was poured out into their mothers’ bosom

Isa 53:12 ... poured out his soul unto death

To die is to give up one’s soul:

Job 3:11 ... give up the ghost [*nephesh*]

Job 14:10; Jer 15:9 ... given up the ghost [*nephesh*]

And to revive is to have the soul return:

1King 17:21 ... let this child’s soul come into him again

Soul is also extended to refer to a dead body (dead soul):

Num 6:6 ... dead body [*nephesh*]

Hag 2:13 ... dead body [*nephesh*]

It is also associated with consciousness relating to the sense of appetite:

1Sam 23:20 ... all the desire of thy soul
Deut 12:15 ... whatsoever thy soul lusteth after
Deut 12:20 ... thy soul longeth to eat flesh
Deut 14:26 ... whatsoever thy soul desireth
Deut 20-21 ... thy soul longeth to eat flesh, whatsoever thy soul lusteth after
Eccl 2:24 ... his soul enjoy good in his labour
Isa 29:8 ... his soul hath appetite
Job 33:20 ... his life [*nephesh*] abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat
Micah 7:1 ... my soul desired the firstripe fruit
Num 21:5 ... our soul loatheth this light bread
Prov 27:7 ... The full soul loatheth an honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet

Nephesh is also the source of emotion:

1Sam 1:10 ...she was in bitterness of soul
1Sam 30:6 ... the soul of all the people was grieved
Deut 6:5, 13:3 ... love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul,
Eccl 2:24 ... the soul enjoys good
Gen 42:21 ... we saw the anguish of his soul
Isa 55:2 ... our soul delight
Isa 58:3 ... afflicted our soul
Jer 31:25 ... satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul.
Job 14:22 ... and his soul within him shall mourn.
Job 30:25 ... my soul grieved
Judg 16:16 ... his soul was vexed
Num 21:4 ... the soul of the people was much discouraged
Psalms 107:18 ... Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat
Psalms 107:26 ... their soul is melted because of trouble
Psalms 35:9 ... my soul shall be joyful,
Psalms 35:13 ... I humbled my soul with fasting
Psalms 42:1 ... panteth my soul after thee
Psalms 86:4 ... Rejoice the soul, I lift up my soul
Psalms 94:19 ... thy comforts delight my soul
Songs 1:7 ... my soul loveth

It is also associated to some extent with volitional and moral action:

Gen 49:6 ... O my soul, come not thou into their secret
Deut 4:29 ... seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul
Job 7:15 ... my soul chooseth
Psalms 24:4 ... not lifted up his soul unto vanity
Psalms 119:129 ... Thy testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them
Psalms 119:167 ... My soul hath kept thy testimonies

In Scripture, soul is ascribed with knowledge, thought, memory:

Deut 4:9 ... keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget
Deut 11:18 ... lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul,
Esth 4:13 ... Think not with thyself [*nephesh*]
Joshua 23:14 ... ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls
Lam 3:20 ... My soul hath them still in remembrance
Psalms 13:2 ... take counsel in my soul
Psalms 139:14 ... my soul knoweth right well soul
Prov 2:10 ... wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy
Prov 19:2 ... the soul be without knowledge, it is not good
Prov 23:7 ... as he thinketh in his heart [*nephesh*]

But the word *nephesh* (soul) is *never used for the spirit of the dead*.^{*5}

From the above scriptures, the soul is associated to a large extent with the conscious senses, the conscious self, the person, even knowing, and to some extent volitions.

The equivalent Greek *psuche* (soul) has similar meanings in the New Testament scriptures. In scriptural terminology, both the Hebrew *nephesh* and the Greek *psuche*, conveying life, emotions and conscious sensations, seem to include the scientific discovery of the subtle body or biofield.

The “life and soul” of a person or a living moving thing seem to be embodied in or reflected by the intermeshed etheric-material body, and therefore intimately associated with the consciousness of the individual – what the individual wholly is. Scientists talk about *qualia*, perceptive qualities that an individual possesses which enables him to experience and interpret colour, sound, smell, taste and touch in all their varied nuances. We know what it is like to be a human, to have human consciousness. But, what is it like to be a bat? Or a bird?

Or a snake? Or any other living being? Scientists have so far not come to a common understanding of what consciousness really is. But one thing is sure: consciousness is very personal. It brings in the unique sense of the Self. For my hypothesis, I would correlate consciousness to soul, as represented by the Hebrew *nephesh* and the Greek *psuche*.

Spirit in Man

The Bible speaks of man as specifically having a spirit in him, and its presence provides man the cognitive ability to acquire knowledge and understanding.

But there is a spirit in man, And the breath of the Almighty gives them understanding. (*Job 32:8*)

For who among men knows the things of a man, except the spirit of the man, which is in him? (*1Cor 2:11a*)

The Bible also alludes to the presence of a similar spirit in the animals (*Eccl 3:21*). The spirit in man identifies the self, and it is the knower and decision maker, and the source of creativity and volitions. And it provides the possibility of character training and formation. It is the source of the individual will. We have seen in the last chapter experiments that prove the existence of an individual will or intention which can affect his auric patterns that can be captured on film.

Benjamin Libet's discovery

We have seen some scientific evidence for the existence of a subtle body which is intermeshed with the physical body, both of which in this thesis is equated to the "soul" of man or beast. Is there further scientific evidence for the existence of a "spirit in man"? Indeed there is from a convincing interpretation of the research findings of Professor Benjamin Libet.*⁷

In 1985, Libet reported some tests he did earlier investigating the onset of voluntary action. He had subjects record on a clock the time that they voluntarily decided to flex a finger. His subjects were all the while hooked up to appropriately placed electrode sensors.

What Libet found is that up to one-third to one-half of a second prior to the stated time of decision, the patient's brain-wave pattern had already changed state. He discovered that, in every test subject, there appeared a "readiness potential" in a movement producing area of the brain prior to every conscious intention to act. When is the decision made and who is actually making it? It looks like there is a part of the brain that knows what you are going to do before you do it. The implication seems to be that the non-conscious part of our brains is directing how we act. This is in direct conflict with the commonly held view and experience that we have conscious control over our actions. Libet's experimental results (repeated by others) have generated a lot of lively discussion in view of their controversial nature.

It was found that in all cases not involving pre-planning, our brain activity (unconscious intention) started in the motor area of the brain about 500 milliseconds before the action occurred. Then comes conscious intention to act about 300 milliseconds later, and following that (in 200 milliseconds) we act.

According to Donovan Hulse,^{*6} what this experiment indicates is that our brain knows what we are going to do before we consciously intend to do it. It is the non-conscious readiness potential that causes us to act, not our conscious intention. So something other than our conscious intention is guiding our behaviour. This is why many people consider the experiment revolutionary, he says. For the first time there is evidence that we, our conscious selves, are not in control of our actions. This, as pointed out by Hulse, has many deep implications for theories of responsibility and psychology.

Hulse argues that "we are conscious of our intentions but that intentions are not in consciousness. Being conscious of an intention amounts to the same thing as being conscious of a tree or your foot. It is to have an experience that tells us about something going on in the world. The feeling we have of consciously intending is, like any other perceptual experience, something that tells us how the world is. Our conscious experience of our intentions tells us that we have an intention. But a conscious experience of an intention no more makes for a conscious intention than the conscious experience of a brick makes for a conscious brick. The experience of intending is a separate and distinct mental state from the non-conscious intention. What I am claiming is that it is the intention that has the causal

power to cause us to act, not the experience of the intention. This has great explanatory force in the present context.”

Hulse also pointed out that in many sports we act in the absence of conscious intentions, as we could not possibly be consciously intending every elaborate muscle move that we make. Another example of acting without intending is the case of a hypnotized individual who acts without making any conscious decisions about how to act, the decisions having been made by the hypnotist. Then there is “alien hand syndrome” in which conscious intentions are insufficient to induce action. This can happen in the case of a one-sided-brain-injured patient where he incurs an “alien hand” that starts behaving as if it has a will of its own.

Hulse’s conclusion, convincing to me, seems to support the biblical view that there is a volitional spirit (unconscious “intender”) in man which acts through his physical body, producing consciousness (an experience of the intention), and it takes time to generate action, like a driver driving a robot and wedded to it from the inside. The Self has hitherto been commonly taken as the conscious “I”. According to Libet’s experiments, this “I” must now refer to the unconscious volitional “spirit in man.” In day-to-day practical experience, nonetheless, the “I” or Self rightly refers to the whole person, not just the spirit or the subtle body or the physical body. The whole being includes both conscious and unconscious processes as these are inextricably linked in life. My being is my spirit and my subtle body and my physical body, all combined. Upon death, the whole being disintegrates. “My being” no more exists. Consciousness disappears, the biomolecules decay. The disembodied spirit will have no body to make intentions to, and it returns to God, according to Scripture, and in the divine plan, to await re-embodiment with a spiritual body formed and given at a later time – the resurrection of the dead. More on this point later.

In the spiritual traditions, the soul is frequently spoken of as having some experience in conscious earthly life. Philosophers have been trying to understand what consciousness is in scientific terms. Philosopher of consciousness David Chalmers considers that the subjective aspect of it – an awareness of what it is like to be in an experience of something – as the “hard problem” as this apparently is not reducible to any scientifically explanatory answer. Mental states seem to have *phenomenal properties*, or *qualia*, which

characterize what it is like to be in them. Only a bat would know what it is like to be one (as it has gone through the growing-up stage of being one in its life). One bat would obviously also know what it is like in the life of another bat of its own species. Likewise, all other living beings would know what it is like for their own kind, with its own type of behaviour, feelings, etc. A cat on the other hand would not know what it is like to be a mouse. However, part and parcel of the individual living entity are the sum of its unique kind of instincts, senses of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching or feelings..., plus that volitional spirit factor – which is the apparent answer to the “binding problem” i.e. how perception of unity is possible. An individual living entity unlike raw substances is not a mere collection of atoms or molecules and their electromagnetic forces. That spirit factor, it appears to me, is the “binding answer.” The spirit vanishes away (returns to God) when the entity dies and the evidence of its disappearance is the detectable “death spasm” that accompanies death.

According to Dr Valerie Hunt (who is mentioned earlier), the soul (which is the spirit in our terminology) is the apex of the energy field which holds the memory of everything that has ever occurred to that soul (spirit). The subtle body may therefore be the body structure of the spirit. Upon death, as the spirit leaves it draws its “subtle body” away from the material body.

Near Death Experiences

Raymond Moody, the pioneer of the study of “near death experiences” (NDEs), compiled many such cases in his book “Life After Life” in 1976. Others in the years following him have also done similar studies.

Generally, many persons who had an NDE experienced floating in the air and viewing their bodies from outside of themselves, feeling inexplicable love, joy, and peace. They also frequently see a tunnel of light, or a being of light, interpreted variously by them as an angel, Jesus Christ, God, or some other divine personality acquainted by them in their belief systems. In some cases, there are experiences of encounters with demons and sensations of being in a lake of fire. Those who encountered an NDE felt it as an intensely vivid and real experience, and the effects on their lives were either positively

changed or negatively affected depending upon the nature and their interpretation of their encounters.

A number of medical explanations have been offered by researchers ranging from legitimate possibilities to far-out interpretation such as “memories of birth.” But this phenomenon apparently still remains a mystery, as no single theory or biological process or medical explanation could fully explain it and unanimously accepted. Scientists may be simply trying to discover the mechanism connected with mind-body or spirit-body separation thought by many to occur at death. Because a chemical mechanism is present in the brain, this does not mean the near-death experience is strictly a chemical reaction. Science may only be describing the aspect of dying that deals merely with the physical brain. By and large, the medical and scientific communities deny the claims that near-death experiences indicate that there is life after death. Many are sceptical of the out-of-body experiences and visions that have been associated with NDEs. Nevertheless, they have tried in various ways to make sense of this fascinating phenomenon. It is quite possible, rather more likely in my view, that physical/psychological and spiritual explanations complement each other.

NDEs seem to provide additional evidence for the existence of a spirit in man. The spirit in such cases has not severed from the body, being still attached by what might be called an invisible “silver cord” which is reportedly seen in some NDEs. The silver cord seems to be the interface or link between the spirit and the physical body. The physical body remains conscious while the silver cord is still attached, but once severed there can be no more animation. A physical body without animation from spirit is a dead body, as a machine without electricity becomes non-functional or “dead.” The silver cord is likely the plastic subtle body itself, stretched-out, as the spirit tries to leave and is somehow held back by the physical body.

...the silver cord is severed ...and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. (*Ecc1 12:6-7*)

The silver cord or stretched-out subtle body itself (like an elongated stretchable balloon) may possibly answer to the tunnel frequently imaged in NDEs as the spirit drags itself away from the physical body and depart.

Split brain studies

Brain researchers*⁸ have observed that people with split-brains (a result of surgical resection of the brain, physically severing the two hemispheres, in instances of some severe neurological disorder or accident) do not recognize that they have handicaps even though these are clearly seen by others. After surgery, the visual field of each brain hemisphere is split in two at the middle. However, people with split brains do not report any halving of their vision. They are able to sketch out only half of a picture shown to them, or write out only part (right or left) of some words shown to them. But they insist that their vision is whole. The conscious brain quickly goes to work to mend any discontinuity and always interpret what it sees as the whole, where in fact there is a frightening gap. Split-brain persons could go about living their daily lives quite normally though anomalies show up in laboratory experiments. This gave researchers the conclusion (earlier on) that there must be a kind of “localized centre for consciousness” which did not cease.

Patients with the split-brain syndrome still identify themselves as a sole single person. It is now believed however that consciousness is not restricted to any particular area of the brain. Studies have shown that every conscious task involves activation of large portions of the brain. Rather than a “localized centre” it is more a “unified field” of consciousness, extending even beyond the brain. The identity of the “Self” or “I” remains strong, and this can only lend support to a single volitional “spirit in man.”

It does not look like the brain giving rise to the mind, but the whole mind though handicapped is still there despite a split-brain. The mind or spirit in man can be quite handicapped by the condition of the physical body. The more the physical body is damaged the more handicapped will be the spirit in expressing itself fully, coherently or consistently. This is seen in “dissociative disorders” where a person can go into “alternate personalities” or “multiple personalities.” Although the alternate states or behaviours may be very different depending on the areas and degrees of damage, they are all manifestations coming from a single person.

If the body is damaged to the extent of being unconscious or unfeeling, the spirit obviously will not be able to express itself until or unless

the body regains consciousness. When the body loses consciousness in death, is the spirit itself conscious in some way after death? At present, science could not yet conceivably have an answer to this question as the spirit itself disembodied from its body cannot be seen and measured with scientific instruments, except perhaps at the departure-point (death) where the “departing spirit” can be noticeable in the form of a “death spasm” as measured in Jagadish Bose’s experiments. In my view, any answer could only be opinion, interpretation or else revelation.

I look for further scriptural clues as to the state of the dead and the after life, which are spiritual issues that I believe Sacred Scripture must provide.

Death is a return

The spirit in man is formed by God and it is said to return to God upon death.

.... Yahweh, who stretches out the heavens, and lays the foundation of the earth, and *forms the spirit of man within him...* (*Zech 12:1*)

By the sweat of your face will you eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken. For you are dust, and *to dust you shall return.* (*Gen 3:19*)

Then shall the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. (*Eccl 12:7*)

According to the facts of nature and revelation of Scripture, death is a return of the living being to its original composition, a disintegration of all the complexity of a body back into its constituents. The body decays into the soil and consciousness (all the feelings and sensations that associates with the body) vanishes or dissipates into “the unseen” whilst the spirit component returns to God who gave it in the first place.

Consciousness after death?

Is the spirit conscious after it leaves the body at death? In many spiritual traditions and popular philosophy, there is the concept of

an immortal soul that lives on after death – one that is frequently said to be derived from or reinforced by the thoughts of Greek philosopher Plato who lived some 300 years before the Common Era. I would equate this concept of the “immortal soul” to the “spirit in man” in order to have a common terminology related to that of the biblical usage since this is the component of man that “returns to God” upon death. As indicated earlier, the word *nephesh* (soul) is *never used for the spirit of the dead* in Scripture.

Scripture conveys explicitly that there is no consciousness after death.

For the living know that they will die, but *the dead don't know anything*, neither do they have any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.
(*Ecc1 9:5*)

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for *there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in Sheol, where you are going*.
(*Ecc1 9:10*)

His spirit departs, and he returns to the earth. In that very day, *his thoughts perish*.
(*Psalms 146:4*)

The dead don't praise Yah, Neither any *who go down into silence*.
(*Psalms 115:17*)

For Sheol can't praise you, *death can't celebrate you*: Those who go down into the pit can't hope for your truth. The living, *the living, he shall praise you*, as I do this day: The father to the children shall make known your truth. (*Isaiah 38:18-19*)

The death state of a person is frequently equated to the sleep state:

Behold, and answer me, Yahweh, my God. Give light to my eyes, lest *I sleep in death*; (*Psalms 13:3*)

For David, after he had in his own generation served the counsel of God, *fell asleep, and was laid with his fathers, and saw decay*. (*Acts 13:36*)

Stephen the martyr was stoned to death and he is said to “fall asleep” just after asking God to “receive his spirit.” (*Acts 7:59-60*)

Jesus said of the dead Lazarus as having “fallen asleep” (*John 11:11-14*)

From the above scriptures, it can be seen that there is no consciousness to what was once a person who upon disintegration in death is no more that person. The spirit that was once in him may possibly have a kind of innate “consciousness” of its own, but without being embodied, it is as conveyed by Scripture in a latent sleep state to await a future re-embodiment upon resurrection, and only then coming “alive” and “conscious” again. A clue of this hope in the Old Testament is expressed by the Psalmist:

As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: *I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.* (*Psalms 17:15*)

In the Scripture, a clear distinction is made between the physical body, the soul and the spirit in the makeup of man (*1Thess 5:23*). The body and soul are contrasted (compare *Isaiah 51:23* and *Matthew 10:28*). From *Matt 6:25*, we see that clothing is for the physical body and nourishment for the soul. Spirit and soul are also compared and contrasted (e.g. *Heb 4:12*, *1Cor 15:45*).

It looks like the French philosopher Descartes was right in proposing the idea that we are made of dual substances: matter and mind (or spirit) stuff. Maybe he was aware of this idea from the Scripture. This supports the Genesis account.

Recently, some physicists*⁹ working on a newer model of the atomic structure relate their model to the four wheels described by the prophet Ezekiel (*Ezekiel, chapter 1*) in his vision. Ezekiel saw four living winged creatures, with faces of a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle, joined together at their upper wings, and standing like fixed statues as on four corners of a square. They appeared bright as torches, with fire moving around them, and they travel like lightning (extremely fast). Underneath them were four big wheels, with rims full of eyes, and observed by Ezekiel as “wheel within a wheel.” These living creatures travel collectively in a fixed manner as they were carried to travel by the wheels. The decision to move was made by “the spirit,” and “the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels.”

“Wherever the spirit was to go, they [the wheels] went ... When the spirit went, the wheels went, and when the spirit stood, the wheels stood.” (*Ezekiel 1:20, 21*)

If the wheels represent the fundamental structure of matter, then the spirit must refer to electromagnetism in some way and also associated with volitions of living things represented by the creatures in the vision. Many ancient and modern scientists believe that the universe is made of mind stuff, and mind stuff is spirit stuff derived from God. By virtue of *ex-Deo*, the given-away transformed spirit stuff necessarily has individuality and a degree of freewill and volition of its own as imparted, visibly active as embodied in some physical structure.

In summary, a human being is composed of material energised into action by his volitional spirit, which together with the physical body became a living soul (*nephesh* with all its sensations) – a living being. In death, the spirit departs with a spasm, sensations disappear and the body decays. The Bible shows that the spirit returns to God and does not go anywhere else. Exactly where the spirit is kept is not made known to us.

If there is no consciousness, and therefore no life immediately after death, is there one some time later on? Is eternal life promised to the righteous only? What is salvation? What happens to the wicked dead and the righteous dead? If there is no consciousness after death, how could the wicked dead be tormented in a hellfire?

We now turn our attention to resolving some, not all, of these questions in this chapter.

According to Thomas Thayer in “The Origin and History of the Doctrine of Endless Punishment”^{*10}, the doctrine of endless punishment is not of divine origin, but traceable directly to a heathen source. It is thoroughly heathen in origin and character and came to be adopted by the Christian church.

There is no evidence of the doctrine being found in the pages of the Christian Scripture. In the first transgression recorded in the Bible (*Gen 3:1-19*), there was no suggestion that endless punishment awaits the offenders apart from punishment whilst living on earth. In the first murder (of a brother) recorded in the Bible (*Gen 4:1-16*), the

punishment meted to the murderer Cain was: “Now you are cursed because of the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. From now on, when you till the ground, it won’t yield its strength to you. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer in the earth.” And it is evident that Cain did not understand the threats of judgment as implying endless woe after death, for his fears are all confined to his life on the earth – the dread of revenge, of being killed, and the horrors of the life of an outcast and a vagabond.

In the great deluge or destruction of the old world where there was “only evil continually” among the people, Noah “a preacher of righteousness” (*2Peter 2:5, Gen chapters 6 - 8*), did not give any hint of any endless torment that awaits the wicked.

In the notorious destruction of evil Sodom and Gomorrah by fire and brimstone from heaven (*Gen 18, 19*), there was also no indication of endless suffering intimated to the people. This incident is mentioned in *Jude 1:7* as “an example, suffering the punishment of eternal fire.” The word “eternal” from the Greek *aionios* does not mean endless but an indefinite period of time, depending upon its usage in the context. Bible commentator Adam Clarke says that “eternal fire” signifies “an eternally destructive fire; it has no end in the punishment of the wicked Sodomites, etc.; it has no end in the destruction of the cities; they were totally burnt up, and never were and never can be rebuilt.” Noted commentators have shared a similar view. See appendix for a brief treatment of this term.

From the history of the Jews, during their period under the Law of Moses, blessings were bestowed on them for obedience to God’s commandments and curses were exacted as penalties for disobedience, according to the annexure to the Law as given in *Deuteronomy 28*. Thayer in his abovementioned book says: “There runs through their history a system of strict and retributive judgment, whereof the God of Jacob is the administrator. Within the pale of this peculiar dispensation, virtue met its recompense, and vice its punishment, with a regularity that was at once unfailing and notorious. The nation is presented to us under very different attitudes; under judges, under kings, in peace and in war, victorious and vanquished, prosperous and afflicted, at home and abroad, free and in bondage; but whatever the situation or period in which we view their history, we are met at once by the principle in question.”

Thayer further says: "The entire history of the Jewish people as a nation, and as individuals, from generation to generation, shows with what exactness the threatenings of the law were fulfilled in judgments. When they were obedient, the Lord prospered them, and rewarded them with fruitful seasons, with increasing wealth and power, and made them superior to their enemies. But when they were rebellious and wicked, then followed adversity, defeat, captivity, and all the physical calamities threatened in the Law." In none of these "do we find them threatened with the torments of a hell beyond the present life."

Under the Law, "every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward" (*Heb 2:2*). Commenting on this scripture, Thayer says: "This of necessity excludes the idea of a future endless retribution; as well as the important fact, already named, that through all this long and various record of sin and its punishments, no mention is made, nor the least intelligible hint given, of any such thing. We cannot, therefore, suppose it to be true, without a most extraordinary violation, on the part of God, of every principle of honor, justice, and mercy."

On the concept of endless sufferings, Thayer further says: "No trace of it is found in the Old Testament, which is all the written record we have of the divine mind and purpose for the space of four thousand years. The Patriarchs knew nothing of it. Moses, who did know of it, having learned it in Egypt, repudiates it by his silence. The Law contains no vestige of it among all its penalties and threatenings. The Lamentations of Job, the Psalms of David, the Proverbs of Solomon, the Predictions of the Prophets, make no mention of the horrible thing."

According to Thayer, quoting reliable historical sources, the belief in a hell of some sort originated from the ancient pagans. Says Thayer: "Any one at all familiar with the writings of the ancient Greeks or Romans, cannot fail to note how often it is admitted by them that the national religions were the inventions of the legislator and the priest, for the purpose of governing and restraining the common people. Hence, all the early lawgivers claim to have had communications with the gods, who aided them in the preparation of their codes. Zoroaster claimed to have received his laws from a divine source; Lycurgus obtained his from Apollo, Minos of Crete

from Jupiter, Numa of Rome from Egeria, Zaleucus from Minerva, &c. The object of this sacred fraud was to impress the minds of the multitude with religious awe, and command a more ready obedience on their part.”

The Jews, according to Thayer, at a certain time in their history, borrowed the idea of endless punishment from the heathen with whom they interacted socially.

“It is allowed on all hands that the Jews in our Savior’s time believed the doctrine of future endless punishment; that it was a part of the common faith. Of course, as the doctrine is nowhere to be found in their Scriptures, the question arises, where did they find it? At the close of the Old Testament Scriptures they did not believe it; at the beginning of the New they did.”

“Between these two points of time there was an interval of some four hundred years, during which there was no prophet in Israel. Malachi was the last of the Hebrew prophets, and from him to Christ there stretches this waste period of four centuries, when the Jews were without any divine teacher or revelation from heaven. And all this while they were in constant and close intercourse with the heathen, especially the Egyptians, the Greeks and Romans, who held the doctrine in review as part of the national faith. From these, therefore, they must have borrowed it, for it is certain that they could not have obtained it from any inspired source, since none was open to them during this period.”

“Besides, they were, all this time, as one might infer from their previous history, departing further and further from the law, and growing more and more corrupt; till at last they had, as the Savior charges upon them, utterly made void the law of God by their traditions. (*Mark 7:9, 13*).” Two other relevant scriptures are: “In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (*Matt 15:6-9*), and Christ’s warning to His disciples to “beware of the doctrines of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (*Matt 16:12*).

“The truth is,” says Thayer, “that in the four hundred years of their intercourse with the heathen, during which they were without any divine teacher or message, Pagan philosophy and superstition had, so far as regarded the future state, completely pushed aside the Law of Moses and the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and set up in

place of them their own extravagant inventions and fables respecting the invisible world.”

In the New Testament, endless punishment was not taught by Jesus Christ and the apostles. The doctrine came into the church from pagan sources.

Thayer says: “The same statements hold good with regard to the Gentile or heathen converts. They could not in a moment divest themselves of the opinions and traditions in which they had grown up from childhood. And many of them were only half-converted, and but partially understood the doctrines and spirit of the Gospel.”

“Paul had frequent conflicts with Pagan notions both of the vulgar sort, and those that came from Oriental and Greek philosophy. His epistles abundantly show this, sometimes warning against these errors, and sometimes elaborately confuting them. ‘O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science, falsely so called; which some professing have erred concerning the faith’ (*1Tim 6:20, 21*). ‘Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.’ (*Col. 2:8*). See, also, the ‘worshipping of angels,’ *verse 18*; and the ‘endless genealogies’ and ‘fables’ mentioned in (*1Tim 1:4*).”

“Then there were some also in the church of Corinth who even denied the resurrection: ‘How say some among you there is no resurrection of the dead?’ (*1Cor 15:12*). Others there were who denied that Christ came in the flesh, or, in other words, that He had a real human body of flesh and blood; affirming that His body was only an appearance, and not a reality. John speaks of these in strong terms (*1John 4:1-3; 2John 1:7*). And in Revelations there is mention of the Nicolaitanes, a sect who mixed Pagan and Christian things together, and were half idolaters (*Rev 2:6, 15*). Beside these, there were ‘false teachers,’ who set themselves up in the church in direct opposition to the apostles, denying their authority and doctrine (*2Peter 2:1-3*).”

“These facts show how, even while the personal disciples of Jesus were yet alive, errors and false doctrines crept into the church from the Pagan side, as well as from the Jewish. The first converts of course accepted the great historical facts of the Gospel history, but they retained also many of their old opinions, some of which were in

direct opposition to the genius and doctrines of Christianity. The apostles, by their diligent watch and ready refutation, kept these Pagan tendencies measurably in check; but when they had all departed, the corruption became more rapid, and the mixture of Pagan doctrines with those of the Gospel more complete.”

Thayer quotes Enfield as saying: “Very soon after the rise of Christianity, many persons, who had been educated in the schools of the philosophers, becoming converts to the Christian faith, the doctrines of the Grecian sects, and especially Platonism, were interwoven with the simple truths of pure religion.”

Heaven and Hell

It is popularly believed that good people upon death immediately go to heaven to be with God and His angels, and bad people go to hell, a place of fiery torment, to be with Satan and his demons. My personal study into the Bible yields for me quite a different picture.

As seen from scriptures quoted earlier that the dead remains dead, without consciousness. From the Bible, there is a time of resurrection in the future when the good will be raised from the dead (resurrected) to regain consciousness and then be rewarded with eternal life, whether in heaven or on earth. The wicked will be raised in consciousness to be judged and much later in the plan of God, after judgment, correction and reconciliation, be also given eternal life.

David, a man after God’s own heart, is still not ascended into the heavens (*Acts 2:34*). This was written many years after Christ’s death, resurrection and ascension. David fell asleep and was laid with his fathers, as quoted earlier (*Acts 13:36*).

Contrary to popular belief, and surprising as it may sound, the righteous dead are not now with Christ in heaven.

No one has ascended into heaven, but he who descended out of heaven, the Son of Man, who is in heaven.
(*John 3:13*)

Paul tells us that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (*Rom 3:23*). And (in *Rom 6:23*) “the wages of sin is death” – not eternal life in hell or any place else.

As quoted earlier, there is a non-physical part in man, known as the spirit in man residing in him (*1Cor 2:11*) which is formed by God (*Zech 12:1*) and it returns to God upon death (*Eccl 12:7, Acts 7:59*).

According to the Scripture, Christ's resurrection from the dead is the prime and only event on which depends the fate of all who live and died (*1Cor 15:51-54*). If Christ be not raised ... then they also which are fallen asleep [dead] in Christ are perished" (*verses 17-18*).

The implication of the concept of the "immortality of the soul" has not been generally realized. It does away with the need for Christ's sacrifice. It assumes that man by birth already possesses immortality without the redeeming event of Christ's death and resurrection. Scripture says that only with Christ's victory over death will we through Him attain immortality at His coming and thereafter (*1Cor 15:57, 20-23; 1Thes 4:15-18*). Christ, being the firstborn of the dead (*Col 1:18*) alone has immortality now (*1Tim 6:16*). All the rest of humanity must wait till the appointed times to be resurrected and receive immortality.

From my youth I was taught that the unrepentant wicked will be burned in an everlasting fire in hell when they die and there is no hope for them. I did not wish to fall into that category. So, I tried to be faithful to God and to my church, and being zealous I was also trying to get people to believe in God and "go to church" in order to be saved so that they may go to heaven upon death and therefore avoid eternal suffering in hellfire. Little did I realise that God is more concerned and loving than I am for mankind. In my subsequent exposure to the Bible in a more in-depth way, I was taught that the "unsaved dead" do not suffer in a burning hell but are simply destroyed upon death. Apparently, some scriptures seem to indicate that this is the case, and I felt a sense of relief on learning this. I found even more satisfying answers later on when I discovered that this death state is only an intermediate state. After more detailed study of the Bible, I found that God is even more wonderful! He will, without exception, save everyone eventually – after several epochs of time, in His plan. Following intense Bible study, this new understanding strengthened on my mind. More and more of life's jigsaw puzzles began to fall into place as never before. More on this in another chapter.

The wicked, I discovered after studying the Bible for myself, do not go to a fiery hell to be tormented forever, contrary to popular beliefs.

Several hells

I was surprised to learn that the Bible speaks of *three* hells, but not in the sense that is widely believed. In the original Hebrew and Greek languages in which the Bible was written, four words are translated “hell” in English, especially in the much referred-to Bible, the King James Version. The four words convey three different meanings.

The Hebrew word *sheol*, used 65 times in the Old Testament, has the same meaning as *hades*, one of the Greek words translated “hell” in the New Testament. Both these words refer to the grave. None of the scriptures using either of these words refer to torment after death, except in the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man.

The third word translated hell is *tartarus* (in *2Peter 2:4*) which refers to a place where wicked angels are to be consigned. It does not point to a place where humans go upon death.

The fourth word translated hell is *gehenna*, used 12 times in the New Testament, of which 5 times it is associated with fire. This word refers to the “*valley of Hinnom*”, a valley just outside of Jerusalem. In olden times, refuse including dead bodies of criminals and animals were being thrown into this place. The continual supply of refuse kept the fire burning in this place, hence the fire is said to be “not quenched”. In a place like that, there would always be rotting bodies and worms (maggots from flies, etc) there, and such are described as “worms that die not” (mentioned 3 times) and fire that is “not quenched” (mentioned 5 times).

Many believe that the phrase “the fire is not quenched” is a reference to ever-burning fires that torture the damned. This phrase has been quite notoriously interpreted out of context. The phrase “their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” was quoted by Jesus from the book of Isaiah (*66:24*) from where a proper understanding is derived.

It shall happen, that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me," says Yahweh. "They shall go forth, and look on the dead bodies of the men who have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they will be loathsome to all mankind."

(Isaiah 66:23-24)

The context in Isaiah refers to a time when, God says, "all flesh shall come to worship before Me" (*verse 23*). It is a time when the wicked will be no more. What happened to them? In *verse 24* we read that people shall "go forth, and look on the *dead bodies of the men who have transgressed against me*: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they will be loathsome to all mankind". The wicked are dead at that time spoken of. These are not living people writhing in fire. There is no immortal worm either; the maggots did not die but changed into flies in the insect's life cycle. And truly the fire was not quenched as it burnt itself out. This expression, used several times in Scripture, refers to fire that consumes entirely (*Ezek 20:47*).

Lazarus and the Rich Man

This parable is frequently referred to erroneously as supporting the doctrine of endless punishment. The Rich Man and Lazarus is the end part of a five-part parable told by Christ that begins from *Luke 15:3* and they are: The Good Shepherd, The Lost Coin, The Prodigal Son, The Unjust Steward, and The Rich Man and Lazarus.

The setting of the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus is not some sudden and disconnected literal revelation concerning the state of the dead, and it is certainly not one which is contradictory to the law and the prophets. An abundance of scriptures (some of which are enumerated earlier) indicate clearly that the dead are without consciousness; they remain dead until a future resurrection.

This parable is given in *Luke 16:19-31*. A rich man lived in luxury. A beggar named Lazarus, hungry and full of sores in his body, was laid at the rich man's gate desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. The story continues:

It happened that the beggar died, and that he was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died, and was buried. (23) In Hades, he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far off, and Lazarus at his bosom. (24) He cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue! For I am in anguish in this flame.' (25) "But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that you, in your lifetime, received your good things, and Lazarus, in like manner, bad things. But now here he is comforted and you are in anguish. (26) Besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, that those who want to pass from here to you are not able, and that none may cross over from there to us.' (27) "He said, 'I ask you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house; (28) for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, so they won't also come into this place of torment.' (29) "But Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.'

(Luke 16:22-29)

In this parable, both the rich man and Lazarus are dead, and they are conveyed as talking to each other across a great gulf. This can be understood in harmony with the other scriptures only if this parable, like other parables, is seen in a figurative sense. If this parable is read in the light of its context and the rest of scriptures, it may be perceived that the traditions of the Pharisees, who justified themselves before men, were "an abomination in the sight of God" (*verse 15*).

Paradise, carrying away by angels, Abraham's bosom are popular expressions found in the teachings in the Jewish Talmud. Christ avails Himself of those teachings, and adapts them for His own purpose, judging the Pharisees out of their own mouths (*Luke 19:22*).

The book of Hebrews tells us that Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Samson, David, Samuel and other righteous saints of Israel all died in faith, *not having received the promises (Heb 11:13)* at the time Hebrews was written.

The promises made to these righteous patriarchs will be fulfilled in a time yet future, according to the Scripture.

Social and moral consequences

It is believed by many that the doctrine of eternal hellfire is a great regulator of social and individual morality. It is supposed to put a restraint on immoral excesses, transgressions and the like. Is this supposition supported by history?

Thomas Thayer has this to say: "It matters not by what name a man is called, whether Pagan, Jew, or Christian; nor matters it at all where the lot of life has fallen to him, whether in a land over which broods the night of heathenism, or on which rests the radiant light of the Gospel. He is still a man, though a Christian; he is born, lives, and dies; he thinks and feels, hopes and fears, rejoices and sorrows, after the manner of all other men. Hence, if the Christian believe in a cruel religion, believe in it with all his heart, it will make him cruel; it will certainly harden his heart. If he believe in and worship a God of a merciless and ferocious character, this will eventually be, visibly or invisibly, his own character. If he believes the God of the Bible hates any portion of mankind, or regards them with any dislike or displeasure, he also will come to hate them, and to entertain towards them the same feelings which he supposes reside in the bosom of God. If he believes that God will, in expression of those feelings, or for any reason, devote them to flame and torture hereafter, it is natural and necessary that he should infer it would be, for the same reason, acceptable to God that he should devote them to flame and torture here. And if the degree of civilization and the condition of society shall permit; or, in other words, if no power from without prevent, he will assuredly do this, as a most acceptable offering to Heaven; and to the utmost of his power will conform to what he believes to be the disposition and wishes of God in this respect. And this is not said without ample means for proving the correctness of the statement..."

In chapter seven of his book, Thayer says that the doctrine creates a cruel and revengeful spirit and he illustrated his claim from an analysis of history.

In conclusion he says: "The belief of endless punishment does not tighten the bonds of morality, nor lead to a life of virtue; while, on the other hand, the disbelief of it does not loosen the bonds of morality, nor lead to a life of wickedness."

It is stimulating at this point to hear what Thomas Allin ^{*11} of yonder years has to say about the inhumane doctrine of hell and some of the human reasoning strained to support it.

“Such reasoning is to suppose that the saints in heaven are without any memory of the past. Even Dives, in the flames of Hades, remembers with pity his brethren. But unless you make the impossible supposition, that the blessed lose all memory in heaven, then they must either suffer keenly at the thoughts of the torments of their dear ones lost in hell, and tormented fore ever and ever; or they must be on a lower level, morally and spiritually, than was even DIVES – choose which alternative you please. To this dilemma no answer has ever been given, for no answer is possible. If Hades kindles the sympathy of the lost, shall heaven kill the sympathy of the blessed? If the blessed sympathize with the torments of the lost, can they enjoy even a momentary happiness? If they fail to sympathize, are they not sunk in selfishness and debased? Or shall we say that God actually maims His redeemed, depriving them of knowledge and memory, lest they should miss their loved ones? On this view God’s ways are so awful that if known they would wither up the very joys of heaven, and so He shuts out pity, and wraps the blessed in a mantle of selfish ignorance. I know nothing more degrading, or revolting in the traditional creed than the baseness of its heavenly state. Fancy a mother thrilled through with bliss while (near, or far off, it matters not) her child is in the grip of devils; a wife joining in the angelic harmonies, while her husband for ever blasphemes! Such is the heaven of the ordinary creed; if it be not something worse still, an exulting over the torments of the lost.”

Footnotes:

- *1. *“Molecules of Emotion” by Candace Pert*
- *2. *www.ikosmos.com*
- *3. *www.cihs.org*
- *4. *www.bioenergyfields.org*

- *5. *See New Bible Dictionary (IVF Publication) on 'Soul'*
- *6. *Paper titled "Intentions, Actions and Consciousness" from www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/philosophy/DonovanPAPER.pdf*
- *7. *The User Illusion, by Tor Norretranders*
- *8. *"Consciousness – how matter becomes imagination"- Gerald Edelman & Giulio Tononi*
- *9. *"Creation verses Evolution – How God Interacts with His Universe" by Dave Bergman. www.commonssensescience.org*
- *10. *This book, published in 1855, is available at www.tentmaker.org*