

perfect -- perfectly good, perfectly loving, perfectly kind, and has created this world as a place where we can learn everything we need to know.

What is the Soul?

A soul is that part of a human being which recognises goodness and wants to be better. When you discuss with yourself whether or not to do something which you know is wrong, it is the soul which knows it is wrong and the self which wants to do it anyway.

The soul becomes connected with the body at the beginning of life, when the embryo is first conceived. But the soul is not part of the body. The soul is like a light and the body is like a lamp surrounding that source of light. The light shines through the lamp but is not part of it. When the body dies, the soul separates from the body and continues to live in another dimension which we are not yet able to understand.

The Next World

Just because we can't see the spiritual world, doesn't mean that it isn't there. There are lots of things we can't see, but we can feel their effects. For example, we can't see love, but we can recognise it and it makes us feel happy to be loved.

Imagine a baby in the womb of its mother. It has its own complete world. It has no idea that this is enclosed within another, much bigger world, though it may feel the effects of this outer world. When it is born into this world, it realises how small and confining its old world was. It has much more room to grow and develop in this world. It's the same comparison between this world and the next world. The next world surrounds us in a way we can't even imagine, but when we reach the next world, we will realise the freedom we have from the restrictions of this small world. In the Bahá'í Writings it says:

"To consider that after the death of the body the spirit perishes is like imagining that a bird in a cage will be destroyed if the cage is broken? Our body is like the cage, and the spirit is like the bird? if the cage becomes broken, the bird will continue and exist. Its feelings will be even more powerful, its perceptions greater, and its happiness increase -- for the thankful birds there is no paradise greater than freedom from the cage."

Spiritual Exercises

The baby,
in the womb of its mother, is growing arms and legs which don't seem to be of much use. It can exercise them but it doesn't get anywhere. But, if the baby doesn't develop arms and legs properly, it will be handicapped and find life is more difficult when it is born into this world.

In the same
way, we need to grow spiritual arms and legs while we are in this world, because
we will need these when we get to the next world. These are the spiritual qualities, such as honesty, generosity, truthfulness and kindness. It might seem
at first that these qualities are not very useful to us in this world. If, instead, we lie and cheat, we might gain more money or power, but in reality we will not be happy because we will always want more. If everyone thought only of themselves, then no-one would be happy. The Bahá'í Writings say:

"Man
is, in reality, a spiritual being, and only when he lives in the spirit is he truly happy."

Developing
the Soul

So how
do we develop these spiritual qualities? Every day, we have choices to make, difficulties to overcome, chances to improve ourselves. If someone is unkind to us, either we can be unkind back, or we can rise above it and show there is a better way. If we see someone struggling with something, we can offer to help or
we can ignore it. If we find some money, we can keep it or we can try to find out who lost it. These are the simple things. We also have more difficult problems, like serious illness or losing someone we love. When things go wrong, we can get angry about it, or we can accept it, learn from it and grow stronger:

"Anybody can be happy in the state of comfort, ease, health, success, pleasure and joy; but if one will be happy and contented in the time of trouble, hardship and prevailing disease, it is the proof of nobility."

Life in this world only makes sense if
we see it as a training ground for the next world. Questions like, "Why do innocent people suffer?" are answered. It is only through suffering, and the way
we handle it, that we can develop ourselves to the full. We don't all start off with the same amount of money, good looks or other worldly things, but we do all
start off with the same chance of improving ourselves and this is really what matters. We are all born with different strengths and weaknesses and it is up

to
us how we use our strengths and overcome our weaknesses. Everyone has a soul,
so
every person is of value. We are all in the same situation, so we should accept
one another's faults and concentrate instead on removing our own faults.

How to Be Happy

In the past, God sent us His
Messengers, like Moses, Christ, Krishna, Buddha, Muhammad, and now in this age
He has sent Bahá'u'lláh. These Messengers give us guidance on how to behave,
how
to be happy, how to grow towards goodness and perfection. They explain to us
what really matters in this life. Each One builds on what was said by the One
before. If we follow Their guidance, we can be happy in this world, whatever
happens to us. We will also be happy in the next world. This is why we are
here:
to learn and grow as much as we can while we have the chance.

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