

The Spirit's Role in the Feud Between Body and Ego

It ought to be known that "**ruho/spirit, fağro/body, nafšo/soul**" **ܠܐܢܝܐ ܠܚܝܬܐ ܠܥܡܐ**" are among the most widely used terms in Syriac literature. This showcases the degree to which the term/expression "**ruho/fağro/nafšo**", which formulates the constitution of a human being, is prized in Syriac literature.

Wide usage of a word/concept in a particular language indicates its depth of meaning. The profundity of a word/concept is directly proportional to its being used as a key element. How much a word/concept has been used in literary/philosophical speech is indicative of its intellectual depth.

In Syriac, the word "**nafšo ܠܥܡܐ**" is used in two meanings: It means both the soul and the self/ego. The Arabic words "**nefs and nefis**" are derived from this root. In Syriac, "**haṣe nafṣonoye ܠܥܡܐ ܠܥܡܐ**" means carnal passions.

It means soul, living, power and might of the living, quintessence of life. It means the immaterial entity which is believed to grant life to all living beings and at the moment of their death to be separated from their body. It means the essence of life, especially in humans and animals.

The self, on the other hand, is the bad half of the duality of man – the ego. It represents the sin and evil inside people. Because the self-pushes people to do evil, imprisons, subjugates, and defiles them. It drowns them in shame and draws a curtain between humans and God. Therefore, it is critical to restrain one's carnal desires, because the hidden and disordered propensities that pervade the ego disrupt the natural cycle existent in life/people. It upsets the order. All that matter is to recognize these hidden and disordered propensities, vigilantly straighten them out, or even eradicate them entirely, if possible. This is the only way for the true/divine energy which veils life to emerge. Only in this way can it brighten and enfold life.

In Syriac culture, humans are creatures made up of body, soul and spirit. The human spirit is God's breath/reflection. This breath/reflection is a human's core being. It makes a human a human. Society calls this reflection/individuality human dignity. This human dignity is sacred. A conscious, mindful person accepts others as they are and values them because of that reflection/individuality/dignity that they share. Never mind hurting someone -this person endeavors to approach life in a complementary and facilitative manner instead!

Each offence against that reflection/dignity/individuality (hate, jealousy, insult, condescension, oppression, ostracism, haughtiness, scorn, abuse, exploitation, rivalry, intolerance, and all other low frequency negative emotions...) is loss and sin. Because the main reference point for Syriac men of letters who attest that **"to stay true and act morally towards creation is to be human"** is the Word of God, vertical love (love for God), horizontal love (love for creation/humanity), and strong morals. At the same time, this approach forms the very essence of Syriac spirituality.

The fundamental mindset in horizontal love for people is to uphold the greatness of human dignity, which is of the divine essence, with no leeway for exploitation/abuse/oppression of any kind. The words **"Whoever welcomes one of these little children...welcomes me"** are the standard from which it draws its strength. As it is written, **"Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."** (Matthew 25:40). Because when an important individual is welcomed, this is often done out of flattery and for ulterior motives, whereas he who welcomes the little guy does so in good faith and for Christ. This mindset was thus formulated in the words of one of the fourth century church fathers, the "golden-mouthed" John Chrysostom (344-407): **"The smaller the person happens to be, the stronger is Christ's presence."** In this frame of mind, every kindness we bestow on humans, we bestow on Christ.

Since life is created and shaped by our inner states, the inner state is what's important, not outward appearance. Therefore, inner/spiritual beauty is vitally important in one's social life. As it has been said, **"Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit..."** (1 Peter 3:3).

Spiritual energy sustains the body, thereby rendering it living. The spirit animates the body it lives in because the body is an agent of the spirit's own perfection. From the moment it establishes a connection with every medium that will ensure its perfection, it creates states in that medium that correspond to its own energy. The first of these states is vitality, the second - consciousness, and the third - movement.

The spirit is akin to pure gold. It is free of worldly rust, tarnish, and other corrosive substances. It is soft, delicate, and ductile. But just as gold degrades, hardens, embrittles, and becomes susceptible to corrosion when alloyed with other elements, the ego's carnal passions and selfish ambitions degrade a person's life and pollute, indurate, and harden their inner makeup. The effect this pollution, induration, and corruption of the inner world has is commensurate with the measure, great or small, of the ego's passions/actions. So, as the subtleties/facilities/values of the

spirit increase, the farther a person makes it in the material world, the more humble, soft, and flexible they become. But it ought to be clear that the way of the spirit is narrow and uneven. That is the way of balance. It is the way of peace and stability. Its travelers are always scarce. The main purpose of life is to find that way and walk it. Though the beauties of this way are evident to all, the shortcomings/passions/ambitions of the ego make it harder to find it in actual practice.

Marcus Aurelius (121-180), who is regarded as one of the most important philosophers in history, wrote that, **"The soul becomes dyed with the color of its thoughts."** In that case, thoughts are just as important as the spirit. If we don't want our spirit to darken and become dyed with dirty colors, we should keep our minds off depressing, negative thoughts. In the words of Syriac genius Bar Hebraeus (1226-1286), **"Flies do not draw near the food while it is cooking. Likewise, impure thoughts will bypass the human heart, as long as it is burning with the spirit."**

This is because the spirit looks inward, for the truth. The spirit is beauty. And all beauties are manifestations of the spirit. All benevolence is its solace. All virtues are its revival. All purity is its embodiment. All aesthetics are its rejuvenation. All productivity is the spirit in flight. All development/innovation is its overflow.

The ego looks outward, at the display. When the spirit is muddled by the egoism of the ego, it loses all of its beauty. So long as this egoism that muddies the spirit is not cleared away, true life cannot come to pass. Love, which is high life energy, cannot grow. This is why the meanings of the spirit are the final and biggest assurance given to humanity. These meanings are the yeast. The yeast must raise the dough. It has to permeate the self. It needs to transform and build up. It must discipline its passions and ambitions. It has to find a workspace within people for spiritual thoughts and meanings. Similar to how the wolf you feed wins, all forms of duality and dichotomy, everything great or small must be overcome, and the spirit must be cleansed of the muds of egoism in order for it to impact a person's life and bear fruit.

A Lebanese author Mikhail Naimy (1889-1988) hits the nail on the head when he urges, **"It is much better to be mute than to ensnare and wound with one's words. And until the tongue is purified by the Holy Mindset, words will always inflict harm and spill blood. I invite you to scrutinize your own hearts, gentlemen. I exhort you to remove all the barriers therein. And I tell you to undo all the swaddling clothes which shroud your Self, so you can see that it is one with the word of God, the creator of worlds who forever offers peace..."**

On the other hand, the ego/self is like a gatekeeper on guard duty at the spirit's castle, who keeps bolting the gates. The price for entry is bribery and lip service. For the ego/self tends the gate of the spirit, girded with the garments of the fabric woven from Şu'loyno's threads/meanings; namely fixed opinions, haughtiness, conceit, undercurrent negative emotions, exploitation, abuse, oppression, association fallacy, stereotypes, vanity, etc.

Unfortunately, the said GATEKEEPER drives away those who bring or evoke the meanings of Şumloyno (the complementary logic) and does not allow fresh air/new thoughts into the castle. He wishes to breathe the air/meaning that is to his own liking. Put differently, he demands a bribe from life-changing, encouraging meanings/values in exchange for access to the spirit's meaningful world.

Since we generally like carnal desires, egoistic attitudes/passions better, we are quick to please the girded gatekeeper with the bribery he enjoys so much. **Maybe this is why we scuffle and struggle with our hardening hearts.**

This is what Mor Eliyo of Anbar (10th century), a skillful writer of Syriac literature, means when he says with a sense of the self and life in mind, **"If you wish to ascend, you must get started, with dexterity and courage. You should be ready to chop off and destroy the roots of lethargy and disorderly undercurrents that have seeped into your spirit."** Because the essence (yeast) of spiritual meanings is true love. This love subsumes virtues such as self-control, active altruism, compassionate awareness, affection, conscience, loyalty, helping and protecting one another, inclusivity, appreciation, and sharing. Sadly, the spirit cannot grow and develop unless its encouraging and life-changing meanings are fathomed. Until the spirit grows, the disorderly undercurrents that swarm it remain standing.

Thus, a person's decency and civility increases proportionally with the spirit's growth. The same goes for their morals, which become more delicate, courteous, and graceful. With a self-controlled lifestyle and a strong character forged by self-confidence, people who have found the inner peace of being oneself through spiritual meaning and values overcome all conceit and haughtiness, and begin to serve. They see others as their equals. They strive for a healthy and safe society. They are a unique addition to life, and rightfully so. For this reason it has been said that, **"Only with respect and courtesy did anyone ever achieve anything, while those who spurned respect and courtesy were deprived as a result."**

Remember that, **"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who**

belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other." (Galatians 5:22-26).

Because, **"Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."** (Galatians 6:8).

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1 On one of my occasional journeys into the horizons of Syriac authors' thought and will, the poem "**Human Passions as Explained by the Body and Ego**" by Abdisho bar Berika of Nusaybin caught my eye. The poem draws attention to humanity's inner conflicts, duality, and paradoxes. This poem is located in "**Fardayso d'Eden/Paradise of Eden**", a work set apart by its literary devices.

The poem's Turkish translation is available here: <https://www.karyohliso.com/articles/article/2549>

The Syriac version is available here: <https://www.karyohliso.com/articles/article/2514>

When I translated the poem into Turkish for its thematic contents, I found that Abdisho bar Berika, who wrote of the conflict between the body and ego, made no mention of anything related to the spirit, on account of speculated, one of a kind truths. He had a different reason for composing the work in question.

Syriac literature is replete with references to the spirit. If humans are creatures made up of body, soul, and spirit; then the conflict between body and soul (ego) can only take a turn for the better with the spirit's intercession and actuation. In no other way can this unremitting feud reach a peaceful resolution. This text, which supplements the spiritual aspect that I felt lacking in the poem, was included in its translation as a footnote. Then, I thought it best to make it into a separate article. Which is why I'm publishing it here? I hope it proves useful.

Abdisho bar Berika, who lived in the 13th century, was a metropolitan of the Assyrian Church of the East (known today as the Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East). He is a celebrated genius and brilliant luminary of Syriac literature. In his days, Arab writers demeaned the Syriac language with labels like **"weak, inadequate, meager, insular, and ill-equipped"**. Abdisho of Nusaybin (1318) makes it abundantly clear that he composed his **"Paradise of Eden"** in protest against that derogatory and insulting rhetoric. He employs wordplay in his writing to emphasize and display the wealth of concepts in the Syriac language. With the book's rhetoric, staggering acrostics, and rhyming/poetic expressions, he substantiates the width and depth of Syriac.

In the preface to the book in question, which some researchers/writers dub "**The Miracle of Syriac Language**", there are ideas that hold significance both for the period when they were written and for this present age. For clarity of the subject, I think it will be helpful to relay this hard-hitting sentence found in the book's preface: "**It falls to me to bring down their overbearing stupidity and the height of their censure; to bring victory to our ancient language; and to embrace the weak among Suryoye/Suryave and Christians.**"

«... حرم، هؤلأد د اّجدا، ههؤؤا ؤمبدا، ومبشا خصل مّ كذا مهكسه
هخصلاؤ وهما، وحكسه، هؤءال حكم مبعنا اّذا كملى نه، صعهف، جاله اّها.»