

# **Soul's Departure And Soul's Independence Of The Body**

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An investigation on soul's departure and soul's independence of the body analyzing several Muslim and non-Muslim scholars' writings on the topic.

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## [The Soul's Independence Of The Body](#)

Although the soul and the body are interrelated from the first step of their generations, their development and the point they reach are not the same. They make a use one from another, but the interaction finally leads to the independence and survival of the soul and corruption of the body. According to Mulla Sadra, although the soul even at its early existence is a substance, it depends on the body like accidents. Since at this level the soul is a pure potentiality, it is, then, even weaker than accidents and has, as such, only potential knowledge even of itself. [1](#)

The soul's independence is due to its substantial motion that keeps the soul moving through a gradual change from one mode to a more perfect level of existence. This change is perfectional and causes the soul to exit from imperfection to the mode of perfection and independence. [2](#) It is interesting to note that in his *al-Asfar* Mulla Sadra firstly approaches the issue of the soul's independence based on the Peripatetic foundations. Then, he adds that this was the way that we approached the issue previously, but nowadays we go through another way. [3](#) One can infer that his new way is based on the principle of substantial motion. He concludes that substantial motion is the key in his famous doctrine "the soul is corporeal in its generation, spiritual in its survival".

The more that the soul becomes actualized and developed in its various dimensions, the more the body

becomes weak.<sup>4</sup> Various forms of decline that we see in the body are accompanied by the opposite developmental attainments in the soul.<sup>5</sup> This is because whenever the soul becomes more developed, its effusion to the body decreases. This process will continue until the soul becomes completely independent and separated from the body. According to this point of view the soul's independence and the corruption of the body is a logical consequence of the soul's substantial change that weakened the interrelationship between the soul and the body.<sup>6</sup>

According to most of the philosophers opposite developmental direction of the soul and the body will lead to two different levels of perfection and survival of the soul. But some philosophers denied survival of the soul. The Peripatetics generally and Ibn Sina particularly argue that since there is not any necessary relationship between the soul and the body such as what exists between a cause and its effect, no one can assert that they are interrelated existentially.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, it would be reasonable to assert that the soul will survive after the corruption of the body.

Someone may argue that while the body is a necessary condition for the soul's generation, it must be also the condition for its survival. So, when the body corrupts, the soul also will be demolished. In response to this objection, Ibn Sina says that the body is only the condition for the generation (*huduth*) of the soul not its existence which is emanated from an unchangeable cause. Therefore, nothingness (*'adam*) of the body cannot be the cause of the soul's nothingness.<sup>8</sup>

Attacking Ibn Sina and his followers, Mulla Sadra points out that this idea contradicts completely with what these people have offered regarding the entity of the soul. If the soul, according to them, is the first entelechy (*kamalun awwal*) of the body,<sup>9</sup> then there must be a kind of causal relationship between the soul and the body. Therefore, they cannot consider the soul-body relationship only as a simple togetherness (*ma'iyah*).<sup>10</sup> Moreover, we cannot distinguish between the condition of generation (*huduth*) and existence (*wujud*). The generation of everything is nothing other than its particular existence. Then, when the condition of generation does not exist, there will be no generated thing. In addition, if Ibn Sina and his followers believe that the soul even at its early existence is an immaterial being, how is it possible for a material thing to bear the potentiality of its existence? Potentiality in material beings always should be a preliminary condition for something that is material.<sup>11</sup>

Mulla Sadra adds that there is a necessary relationship between the soul and the body like the relationship that connects a form to a matter. Both form and matter are in a deep need of each other. The body needs a soul to be actualized (*fi tahaqquqihi*), the soul needs the body not for its intellectual absolute reality (*haqiqah al-muTlaqah al-'aqliyyah*), but for individuation of its soulhood. Accordingly, he believes that the soul has an essential priority to the body and they are, then, related to each other existentially.<sup>12</sup>

The soul as an absolute spiritual nature (*Tabi'ah nafsaniyyah muTlaqah*) that borrows its individuality from a single stable intellect (*wahidin 'aqliyyin thabit*) animates the body (*muqmatun li al-badan*), but as far as its various particularities are concerned it needs the body. In this case the soul in relation to the

body is like a form that needs the matter to be individuated. [13](#)

Approaching the issue of the soul's independence based on another point of view, Sadra declares that since the soul in relation to the body is a separated substance (*jawharun mubayin*), it depends on the body only in its coming into existence. So, the nothingness of the body does not necessitate the nothingness of the soul. Joined substances or accidents (*al-jawhar wa al-'ara al-muqarin*), on the contrary, depend on their subject (*mahall*), both in existence and nothingness. This is because they do not have any other existence than their related existence. Therefore, when a matter (*madah*) or a receptacle (*mahall*) disintegrates, their related form (*al-surah al-qa'imah*) or related accident will also disintegrate. [14](#)

Sadra then comes to the conclusion that when an existent has a kind of contribution for another being, it does not mean that its non-existence must have a role for its nothingness. [15](#) The case as he mentions is such as when a painter creates a beautiful board utilizing his tools and his thought, but the board will remain even when the painter dies or his tools destroy. [16](#)

Mulla Sadra states that since the soul according to Ibn Sina even at its early existence is an immaterial existent, the body cannot in this view be its cause in any sense. However, he maintains that by distinguishing between two modes of the soul's existence, one can say that whenever the soul is considered as it is related to the body (soulhood of the soul), the body is its material cause. [17](#)

He also maintains that the soulhood of the soul and its relation to the body is an essential aspect of its existence not an accidental thing to its entity. Being the soul is exactly like being the form. As in God, His attributes are not additional to His essence, the soulhood of the soul whenever it is related to the body, is not an additional thing to its existence. [18](#) It is our mind that creates various concepts by evaluating a reality. If the soul is a separated intellect, how can it deal with the body and have a mutual relation with it?

Explaining the real meaning of the soul-body relationship, Mulla Sadra states that the relation between the soul and the body is not a simple form of togetherness like when a piece of stone is attached to man. Since the soul is a perfectional form (*surah kamaliyyah* i.e. entelechy) for the body, it cannot be considered as a separated immaterial being. He adds that being an instrument for the soul, does not mean that the body is like a saw or planer for a carpenter. A carpenter uses his instruments sometimes and leaves them other times and he has his unchangeable essence regardless of his instruments. The soul, on the contrary, is related to the body in a form that uses it continuously and its entity is completely different before and after the relation to the body. [19](#) He probably means that the usage of the body affects the level of the soul's existence.

Sadra also refuses to consider the soul's relation to the body like the relation that exists between a captain and a ship or a house with its owner. The captain and the owner enter and exit the ship or the house without bearing any change, while both the body and the soul will change through their

relationship. Mulla Sadra eventually comes to the conclusion that the evidence which is offered by Ibn Sina and other Peripatetics proves the survival of an immaterial separated intellect (*al-jawhar al-mufariq al-'aqli*) not the soul qua soul.[20](#)

According to Mulla Sadra the problem of the soul's survival has always been a crucial issue for the philosophers. He refers to a letter sent by Nasir al-Din Tusi to one of his contemporaries, where Tusi asked if the soul was generated while a matter had previously carried its potentiality, why this matter cannot bear the potentiality of its corruption? And if it were so, one may ask again how a corporeal being can carry the potentiality of a separated, incorporeal substance?

Mulla Sadra states that when one reviews al-Tusi's writings, he will notice that al-Tusi did not find any conceivable answer for his question. But he adds that he could answer it in two different ways. The more conceivable answer that is based on our new findings, he says, is as follow:

The human soul has various levels and realms. Generation is the characteristic of some levels of its existence. When the soul moves from the realm of creation (*'alam al-khalq*) to the realm of command (*'alam al-amr*), it becomes an immaterial separated intellect, and does not need any body. So, its existence when it is created is completely different from its eventual existence. Because of this significant change, we hypothesized that the soul is corporeal in its generation, spiritual in its survival. The relation of the soul to the body is like the relation of the fetus to the womb. Although fetus needs the womb for its development, it separates it when it is developed.[21](#)

Mulla Sadra also mentions that the body is only the material cause of the soul, and then its corruption does not necessarily lead to the corruption of the soul. Moreover, in the process of perfectional evolution (*al-harakah al-istikmaliyyah*), when the body lost the potentiality of having a soul, the soulhood of the soul will be demolished and a more perfect being will appear.[22](#)

The problem, however, appears in a new form. One may ask, then, what is the matter that carries the potentiality of the soul when it changes to an immaterial intellect? When the soul becomes an intellect, a new immaterial being is generated. All generated things undoubtedly need a matter whereas the immaterial beings do not have any matter. Mulla Sadra answers that in this case the soul only connects with the immaterial intellect or better to say changes to it. So, it becomes a related existent to an immaterial separated being. The carrier (*hamil*) of the potentiality of this connection is the soul itself while it was related to the body.[23](#)

Commenting on this idea, Tabataba'i says that it is better to say when the soul is related to the body and is a dependent existent; its carrier is the body. When the soul moved through substantial motion and became immaterial, it would be an independent existent that needs no matter and is beyond the time. Tabataba'i adds that since the soul is a material being while it is related to the body, there is an unsolved problem to consider the related soul as matter for the immaterial soul.[24](#)

As well as his analytical approach, Mulla Sadra sometimes tries to use examples that indicate the soul's

independence of the body. He mentions that despite their close relationship, the soul and the body have their particular manners. When we sleep our body weakens but the soul will remain active. True dreams and being aware of hidden truths are signs of the soul's activity when we are asleep.[25](#)

Immense thoughts also affect our brain's cell and may destroy them, but they improve the soul and make it more perfect. So what is the cause of imperfection of the body is the cause of soul's perfection. We enjoy physiologically when we eat or drink, but the soul gets happy by divine knowledge. When we are going to meet our beloved or meet a highly respectable person, we completely forget that we were hungry or thirsty. This manner mostly happens for people who know God in a way that their knowledge overwhelms their whole existence. These examples show that the weakness of the body may be accompanied with the strength of the soul or vice versa. So, it will be reasonable for the soul to survive when the body is destroyed.[26](#)

## **Union Of The Soul And The Active Intellect**

The final part of our discussion about the soul's development concerns understanding the entity of its relation to the realm of intellects after it separates from the body. How a material being becomes an immaterial existent? If the soul governs the body and also develops itself through using it, how does it become an unrelated and independent being? Since this issue needs an independent study, we have not dealt with it in detail. Briefly we can say that, according to Mulla Sadra, all natures have an innate motion toward their essential goals.

He also emphasizes that all imperfect beings distinctly are intent to acquire perfection. When an imperfect being reaches to the point of perfection, it unites with it. It means that it becomes another being. Human beings are also moving toward a purified goal. When the soul passed different levels of perfection and reached to the position of the intellect, it becomes a pure intellect. At this level, it unites with the active intellect and becomes an active intellect.[27](#)

As Sadra maintains, there is not any generation or change or appearance of a new manner in the world of pure immateriality. Therefore, neither the emanation nor the union of the soul creates any change in that realm.[28](#)

Illustrating Mulla Sadra's doctrine concerning the nature of the union of the human soul with the active intellect, Fazlur Rahman says that we have to keep two points in our mind. The first point is about understanding the exact meaning of the identity of the intellect and the intelligible. Secondly we need to comprehend the unitary character of the active intellect. Simplicity at the level of active intellect, he says, is the character of existence not essence. In the process of progressive beings, "an ever-increasing number of essences are "taken in" and absorbed by a progressively higher scale of being and as existence becomes more and more strong and explicit, essences tend to become more and more implicit and recoil upon existence, losing their own being, as it were, until, when we reach pure intellects or God, all essences are lost and become "interiorized" in themselves, and Pure Existence takes over."[29](#)

According to this passage, the union of the soul and the intellect is like the union of the intellect and intelligible. The issue will be more understandable if we notice that at the highest level of progressive existence, there is no essence or, better to say, there is no plurality of existents. This is because essences that are the borders of existence (*hadd al-wujud*) and create individuality have been previously lost or recoiled upon existence.

Mulla Sadra adds that in spite of the unity of the soul with the intellect, one must notice that this does not mean that the active intellect will either become multiple and divisible or what one knows is identical with the knowledge of others. Facilitating this understanding, Mulla Sadra gives an example. "The idea of "animal" is a unity in itself, while at the same time containing several ideas under it, e.g., man, horse, bull, lion, etc. When we say "horse," we designate an animal, but we do not mean that the "horse," has been partialized or made divisible: "animal" is not partitioned into these various species of animals. Nor would it be true to say that by being an animal, horse and bull become identical in content, for a horse is a horse and a bull is a bull. The unity of a concept like "animal" is, therefore, a different kind of unity from a numerical or a physical one."[30](#)

Utilizing the above-mentioned example, Mulla Sadra states that human souls similarly can all unite with the active intellect without partitioning it and without having the same type of knowledge. Distinguishing between two aspects of the existence of active intellect, Sadra gives more explanation. He points out that from the two aspects that are known as being-in-itself and being-for-the-other, active intellect contacts with the human mind with its latter existence.[31](#)

One can ask here: if the soul in its final level is nothing other than its immaterial cause (active intellect), then what has happened to the souls? If the soul at this level is a new intellect like its cause, then it will be a kind of increase in that realm. If it is nothing other than its cause, one can ask whether it is possible for an effect to be its cause at its final perfection? Moreover, if the soul unites with its immaterial cause without having any independent and separated existence, then we have unconsciously denied eschatology. If the soul unites with its immaterial cause and the body also has previously been corrupted, what will be rewarded or punished after death?

Mulla Sadra's theory about the union of the soul with an immaterial intellect also implies disregarding the soul's existence. According to him active intellect both before the generation of the soul and after its union with the soul is the same without any increase or decrease. Conclusively, since the soul's existence and its developmental motion do not create any change in the realm of intellects, the creation of the soul will be meaningless! Therefore, we still need a more comprehensive interpretation for the soul's union and annihilation.

[1.](#) Mulla Sadra, *al-Mabda' wa al-Ma'ad*, op. cit., p. 262.

[2.](#) Mulla Sadra, *al-Asfar (al-hikmah al-Muta'aliyah Fi al-Asfar al-Aqliyyah al-Arba'ah)*, (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1981), vol. 9, *al-juz'-thani min al-safar la-rabi'*, *al-safar al-rabi'*, pp. 51-52.

[3.](#) Mulla Sadra, *al-Asfar*, vol. 8, op. cit., *al-safar al-rabi'*, *al-bab al-sabi'*, chapter 6, pp. 392-93.

[4.](#) Mulla Sadra, *al-Mabda' wa al-Ma'ad*, p. 321. & *al-Shawahid*, p. 216.

5. Mulla Sadra, al-Mabda' wa al-Ma'ad, p. 354.
6. Mulla Sadra, al-Asfar, vol. 9, op. cit., al-juz' al-thani min al-safar al-rabi', al-bab al-thamin, chapter 4, p. 52.
7. Ibn Sina, Risalah Fi Ahwal al-Nafs, edited by Ahmad Fu'ad al-Ahwani, (Cairo: Dar Ihya' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 1952), pp. 99–102. See also al-Najat, vol. 2, op. cit., p. 35–37.
8. Ibn Sina, al-Najat, vol. 2, op. cit., p. 36. See also Mulla Sadra, al-Asfar, vol. 8, op. cit., al-safar al-rabi', al-bab al-sabi, chapter 4, pp. 380–81.
9. It is worth mentioning that Ibn Sina in his Risalah Fi Ahwal al-Nafs maintains that the rational soul (al-nafs al-natiqah) is not the form of the body because it is not imprinted in it. Then when we refer to the soul as the form of the body, it is a common noun for all aspects of the soul (ishtirak al-ismi). Risalah, op. cit., p. 55.
10. Mulla Sadra, al-Asfar, vol. 8, op. cit., al-safar al-rabi', al-bab al-sabi', chapter 4, p. 382.
11. Ibid., pp. 384–85.
12. As it has been already mentioned, in his al-Mabda' wa al-Ma'ad, Mulla Sadra like Ibn Sina firstly distinguishes between the soulhood of the soul and its real essence then he refutes the necessary relationship between the soul and the body. He only accepts that the body is the real material cause of the soul in so far as it is related to the body. But the body is an accidental material cause regarding its essence. al-Mabda' wa al-Ma'ad, op. cit., pp. 313–15.
13. Mulla Sadra, al-Asfar, vol. 8, op. cit., al-safar al-rabi', al-bab al-sabi', chapter 4, pp. 382–83.
14. Mulla Sadra, al-Mabda' wa al-Ma'ad, op. cit., p. 317.
15. A similar form of this argument is offered by Ibn Sina in his Risalah Fi Ahwal al-Nafs. See Risalah edited by al-Ahwani, p. 101.
16. Mulla Sadra, al-Mabda' wa al-Ma'ad, op. cit., pp. 317–18. This version about the soul seems to contradict what Mulla Sadra offers in his al-Asfar, vol. 8, al-safar al-rabi', al-bab al-sabi', chapter 1, p. 326: «إِنَّ النَّفْسَ بِحَسَبِ أَوَائِلِ تَكْوِينِهَا وَحُدُوثِهَا حَكْمًا حَكْمًا حَكْمَ الطَّبَائِعِ الْمَادِّيَةِ الَّتِي تَفْتَقِرُ إِلَى مَادَّةٍ مَبْهَمَةِ الْوُجُودِ»  
In another page he adds:  
«إِنَّ النَّفْسَ فِي أَوَّلِ حُدُوثِهَا صُورَهُ مَادِّيَهُ ثُمَّ تَصِيرُ مَجْرَدَهُ»  
al-Asfar, vol. 8, al-safar al-rabi', al-bab al-sabi', chapter 3, p. 377.  
According to these two statements the soul at its early existence is merely an inhering form.
17. Mulla Sadra, al-Asfar, vol. 8, op. cit., al-safar al-rabi', al-bab al-sabi', chapter 4, p. 383. He maintains: «إِنَّ الْبَدْنَ عَلَهُ مَادِّيَهُ لِلنَّفْسِ بِمَا هِيَ لَهَا وَوُجُودِ نَفْسَانِيٍّ»  
It is interesting to mention that in spite of the above-mentioned idea the body according to Mulla Sadra himself is the material cause ('illah maddiyah) for man (the whole being which comes out of the connection of form and matter) and a matter (mddah) for the soul.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., pp. 383–84.
20. Ibid., pp. 383–84.
21. Ibid., al-safar al-rabi', al-bab al-sabi', chapter 6, pp. 390–93.
22. Ibid., pp. 393–94.
23. Ibid., p. 395. In his al-Asfar he says:  
«ننقل الكلام إلى حدوث ذلك الوجود المفارقي للنفس كيف حدث لها و كلاً حادث يفتقر إلى مادة و المجرد لا مادة له؛ قلت: الحادث ههنا ليس في الحقيقة إلا اتصال النفس بذلك المفارق و إنقلابها إليه لا نفس وجود ذلك المفارق و ذلك الإتصال أو الوجود الربطي أو ما شئت فسمه، حدوثه مسبق بالإنشغال بالإستعداد و حامل هذا الإستعداد هو النفس ما دامت متعلقة بالبدن»
24. Ibid., Tabataba'i's commentaries , No. 1.
25. This example is used by Ibn Sina in one of his treatises as an evidence for the duality of the soul and the body. Ibn Sina, Risalah Fi Ma'rifah al-Nafs al-Natiqah, compiled by al-Ahwani, op. cit., p. 186.
26. Mulla Sadra, al-Mabda' wa al-Ma'ad, op. cit., pp. 319–20.
27. Ibid., p. 395.
28. Ibid., p. 396.
29. Fazlur Rahman, The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra, (Sadr al-Din Shirazi), (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), p. 240.

[30.](#) Mulla Sadra, al-Asfar, vol. 3, op. cit., al-juz' al-thalith min al-safar al-awwal, al-marhalah al-'ashirah, chapter 9, pp. 339-40. See also Ibid., p. 240-41.

[31.](#) Mulla Sadra, al-Asfar, , vol. 9, op. cit., al-juz' al-thani min al-safar al-rabi', al-bab al-'ashir, chapter 5, p. 140.

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