

# The ascension of the soul towards Allah: a critical reading of Ibn Bajah's soul theory

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## **Abstract**

*It is arguable that Ibn Bajah's self-study constitutes a theory which is a scientific hypothesis linking between coordinate introductions and perceptions. Ibn Bajah believes that self makes man one by number despite the variation in his symptoms and his conditions; self is the source of unity and motivation regardless of body changes. The existence of the self, for him, is one of the innate things that do not need evidence to prove. If we try to prove its existence it would have seemed more difficult than we think. As for the question of its fate and immortality, Ibn Bajah showed that the individual self-perishes with the annihilation of the body. The body is perishable, but mind is Immortal. Since the mind is holistic (according to Ibn Baja), then holistic immortality is for the mind. This principle is the cornerstone of his philosophy, which can sustain the movement upward towards The One. The immortality that people aspire to is nothing more than to remain in the memory of the people with the great works and vestiges as stated by Gigamish Epic seven thousand years ago.*

**Keywords,** Soul, Immortality, Perceptions, Intellectual images , Body , Spiritual images.

## **Prolegomena**

Only a few books and letters of Ibn Bajah are available nowadays, which has led to the absence of his ideas. It is hard to study an intellection, (Al-Alawi, 1986) depending on some texts, here or there, in his published letters.

## **The nature of man**

Ibn Bajah believes that the nature of man seems to be a means between the immortal and the mortal incidental; Nature transfers among same or different objects through the means. That is the case with the essences of all existents; between plants and inanimates, there is an existent which can neither be considered a plant nor an inanimate. The matter is the same between plants and animals, between which, there is an existent sharing feature of both. Similarly, man comprises both natures; the immortal and the mortal (Fakhri, 1968). From this text, it can be concluded that Ibn Bajah believes that man consists of two completely different things; One of which is immortal; the soul, and the other is like the mortal objects; the body. Thus, man consists of an immortal soul and a mortal body. Yet, this text does not clearly reveal his view of the reality of human soul, its relationship with body, and its fate after death.

In his letter man brain relationship, he believes that soul makes man one in number despite the variation of images; In the uterus, man is an infant, a baby at birth, a young, an old, an ignorant or a writer. Despite all these variations, man remains one in number (Ibn Bajah, 1960). Whatever body varies, soul unifies and motivates it if it is seen at any case. If it is seen at a different case, it is hard to realize whether it is the first or something else;

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a child, a young, and an old man. This indicates that the first motive is material or essential, (**Ibn Bajah, 1960**). This text indicates that soul is the first motive of man. It is the reason of unity, existence, and immortality. It is invisible, so, it is a non-material object; An object from the world of immortality.

In that letter, Ibn Bajah states that soul is motivated by physical instruments; natural; hand and leg, and artificial, and spiritual instruments. He states that there are three levels of knowledge:

- (a) Raw images perception, through senses,
- (b) Spiritual images perception, through mutual sense and fancy,
- (c) Intellectual images perception, through the brain. A human being may be an animal by power and acts. Man is man by power, being a baby, unless gaining the intellectual power, which makes him man by act. The intellectual power is gained when he gains the reasonable matters, by which, he gains the desire that motivates the brain, by which, man is man, (**Ibn Bajah, 1960**).

Then, Ibn Bajah states that brain is the ever first motive for man. It is by which, Almighty Allah punishes or rewards man. Brain is neither punished nor rewarded because that is for soul. Who obeys Almighty Allah is rewarded and who disobeys is punished. When brain leaves body, it remains a light that praises Almighty Allah with the Prophets, Righteous, and Martyrs. (**Al-Fakhoori, 1966**) This is a brief view that may not be enough to have a full understanding of Ibn Bajah's view about the fate of soul after death. But, the last mentioned text shows clearly that Ibn Bajah adopts the spirituality of soul, specially, his views are close to Al-Farabi's, (**Al-Fakhoori, 1966**).

Ibn Bajah realized the ambiguity of his views and said, "This is proved for another time, but when I read it, I found out that it does not convey what I mean, which can hardly be understood. Besides, the arrangement is not perfect" (**Ibn Bajah, 1960**)

#### **Proving soul existence**

Soul existence is one of the natural matters that do not need a proof because it is obvious and any attempt to prove it complicates the matter more than one may imagine. Soul is an object that refers to itself as Aristotle says, (**Al-Iraqi, 2000**). It is a concept that is apparent by itself like nature. The one who asks for proving it does not know the difference between the known by itself and the known through a means, (**Al-Masoomi, 1960: 36**). However, Ibn Bajah uses the same evidences which Ibn Sina used in order to prove that the essence of soul is different from the essence of body although he does not mention that clearly, but it can be concluded from his philosophical texts, (**Al-Iraqi, 2000**):

Evidence of movement: Some term it "the natural evidence". It indicates that the animal body or human body are not the source of movement, but they receive it from another source; the soul. Movement is not an auto status of the body whereas; it is an auto status of soul. So, soul is independent from body, their essences are variant, and all physical actions are due to soul not the body, (**Huwaiti, 1967**). The first motive in the human body is the soul and its parts whereas; body is that group of instruments, (**Al-Alawi, 1986**).

Ibn Bajah states evidence that natural objects have two types of movement; either towards normal positions, like highness of fire and lowness of stones, or against normal positions, like raising hands or jumping high. Such movements require the intervention of soul, which moves by an instrument; the alive instinctive or alike, (**Al-Masoomi, 1960**) (**Zyada, 1978**).

#### **Evidence of psychological phenomena**

Ibn Bajah states that our first motive consists of fancy and tendency. The tendency is the soul; therefore, one says; I tended, (**Fakhri, 1968**). In another text, Ibn Bajah says " if man analyzes what I mentioned, there will be

no doubt that there are the fancy and talking powers since we find inside us what distinguishes us from all other sensitive and feeding animals. Man finds inside him/herself information including nice, ugly, useful, and harmful which man can recognize and distinguish. Man, also finds matters like; undoubted, doubted, real, or false. All these things are in the human soul, (Al-Alawi, 1986), so, for Ibn Bajah, tendency; whether intellectual or curious, is only governed and produced by soul just like all other acts. (Al-Iraqi, 2000)

#### **Immortality of soul.**

This is a serious problem in Ibn Bajah's intellection, because of which, he was criticized severely. Investigating Ibn Bajah's view of immortality shows the great Farabi's influence, (Al-Fakhoori, 1966) despite its inconsistency. Ibn Bajah states that the individual soul perishes with the body as the soul is an image of the body and the image of natural beings does not remain without the material according to his doctrine of the relationship between the raw material and the image. While qualitative mind is timeless, lasting, and non-variable just like the active mind or the tenth astronomy mind. The human mind is the highest level among the Heavenly creatures. Thus, the active mind can unite with it without any distinction between them. That is the case with thinkers and geniuses who can find out the facts, (Al-Iraqi, 2000) (Abu Reeda, 1938). So, Ibn Bajah believes that physical existences are more appropriate to perish while mental existences are more appropriate to last, (Zyada, 1978), which neither perishes nor gets aged, (Fakhri, 1968).

In another text, Ibn Bajah states that brain is by which, Almighty Allah punishes or rewards man. Brain is neither punished nor rewarded because that is for soul. Who obeys Almighty Allah is rewarded and who disobeys is punished. When brain leaves body, it remains a light that praises Almighty Allah with the Prophets, Righteous, and Martyrs, (Fakhri, 1968) (Al-Fakhoori, 1966).

Ibn Bajah asserts the immortality of mind and mental images on one hand, and the temporary existence of all human features including the raw material and spirituality, on the other hand. This is a corner stone concept in his philosophy, through which the upward movement towards the one lord becomes possible.

Ibn Bajah asserts this concept in many positions in his books and letters, especially, in the letter of communication. He states; "The mind does not have a spiritual image because it realizes itself by itself, it is one, and it does not have any addition, by which, images gather in the raw material" That is the ever-human pleasure, (Fakhri, 1968). So, through oneness of mind, man can achieve immortality as man consists of two parts; Perishable and non-perishable. Hence, immortality is for collective soul and collective mind, (Huwaidi, 1967).

Ibn Bajah mentions another way for immortality; Man may do something that makes people remember him. Therefore, he divides deeds into two; Intended and unintended. The unintended deeds are those which man does by chance and Ibn Bajah gives them no value. Whereas, intended deeds are divided by him into three types as follows:

- 1- The first type; Including those deeds by which is the physical pleasure; Delicious food, fashionable clothes, getting drunk, hunting, and playing chess, for which, pleasure is limited to the time of doing them. He believes that such people pretend being rich whereas, they are poor, (Farookh, 1983).
- 2- The second type; Including those deeds which create psychological reactions; Anger, pleasure, sadness, satisfaction, loveliness, hatred, anxiety, or calmness. They are subdivided into: A false type; man may show satisfaction while being unsatisfied. Or, showing bravery when it is not there; Hypocrisy. The real type includes man's real sensation of every act man does, which shows the human tendency for good deeds. Yet, Ibn Bajah does not talk about this topic in his research about pleasure and immortality, (Farookh, 1983). The third type includes deeds of pleasure and immortality, which Ibn Bajah interprets as there are two lives. For every man; the physical life on earth and how long people remember the man's deeds. He proves that by quoting Hatam Al-

Tae's words; O', Mawi, money go and come, and what remains for man is how people remember him/her, Al-Mut anabbi's words; Man's remembrance is his/her life, and Harm bin Sinan's daughter's words to Zuhair's daughter; we gave you the perishable and you gave us the lasting, (Fakhri, 1968).

The deeds of this type are knowledge, wisdom, bravery, and charity, which man is aware of and practices truly. Man feels them inside him/herself and fully realizes the meaning of life and existence. That is pleasure.

Whereas, immortality means that man is aware that people will remember him/her long after death, (Farookh, 1983) and that is human immortality. The duration of the immortality of his/her remembrance is the act of immortality.

Ibn Bajah praises good remembrance. His ideas in this respect are based on the principle that human minds keep remembering great persons, though for a limited period, whereas, scientists are immortalized for hundreds of years, and philosophers for thousands of years. This type of human life through generations is the only type of life after death.

In summary, for Ibn Bajah, immortality concerns mind and talking soul as it is pure from matter thus, it is lasting. Individual soul is not as immortal as the mind since it is the motive power that provides natural organic objects with life, feed, and grow it. Immortality does not concern it. It concerns the mind, (Al-Iraqi, 2000).

It is noticed that Ibn Bajah's view of immortality completely contradicts with the religious views. It is also noticed that he mentions pleasure and immortality so much, but he does not mention the return. That asserts Dr. Omer Farukh's view that immortality for Ibn Bajah is only in this life due to the human acts. Al-Farabi believes that only ignorant souls perish and virtuous souls are immortal. Ibn Bajah believes that all souls perish, therefore, the Sufi philosopher Ibn Sabee'n criticized him and said that Ibn Bajah's view of immortality was false, (Al-Taftazani, 1985). Al-Fatih bin Khaqan used it against Ibn Bajah saying that Ibn Bajah contradicted the Ayah, "Who inspired you the Quran will return you", negated the Ayah, "Today, every soul will be rewarded what it acquired", (Zyada, 1985), and described his views as containing illusions and craziness, (Ghalab, 1948).

#### **The researcher's opinion**

His view concerning the return is ambiguous. He might intend that ambiguity to avoid revealing his inability to solve this problem, (Al-Salahi, 2010).

#### **Conclusions**

1- According to Ibn Bajah the nature of human beings in Ibn Bajah is an intermediary between eternity and corrupt being. Nature does not transform from one genus to another except by or through an intermediary. There is an intermediary between inanimate and plant and there is an intermediary between plants and animals. This can be an indication (though not a clear or strong one) to theory of Evolution but not in Darwinism sense but according to Langer classification.

2 - Self is what makes man one in number despite his different symptoms and conditions; no matter how the body changes, self is the same.

3 - The existence of self is an innate thing that does not need evidence or proof to prove.

4 - An individual self-perishes with the body.

5 - immortality of the mental beings. According to Ibn Bajah mind is holistic; immortality is for the holistic mind in a movement constantly rising towards the one.

6. Individual immortality is to remain in people's memory through great works and vestiges.

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