

Nufs

Nufs, Arabic, is the same as Nefesh in Hebrew and has been translated as spirit, animal soul, lower self. It corresponds exactly to what might be called "Ego." Nufs is the desire to express oneself at the cost of some other self. It is strange to notice that its, root "nuf" is symmetrically opposed to "fan" the root of Fana, which means to express oneself by merging in with the source of selves. In other words Nufs tends to contract to a point, while its opposite, Fana, is the tendency to expand to a limitless circle or sphere.

Nufs corresponds to Nachash in Hebrew, which has been erroneously translated "serpent" in the story of the temptation of Eve. But Nufs is a tempter. Nufs beguiles the self with joys and endeavors to make one think that joys bring contentment. So the self goes on the wheel of fate and remains there until Nufs is extirpated. One reason why Nufs is like a serpent is that it acts like a coiled spring, like a snake trying to grasp something and bring it to its bosom. The stars resemble a group of Nufs, each showing their puny light, ignorant of the fact that even those little lights get what glory they have from the sun.

Nufs begins to appear in the human body at the age of seven, although it is there at birth. First it comes as selfishness, than as temper, envy, and later in life as cowardice, viciousness, lust, etc. So it is very necessary to begin training a child at birth, or even before birth. Otherwise, instead of the child's soul growing with the body, it gradually goes out until the sunset of life which is at 7 years. Then darkness begins and remains. The growth of the human soul is then like night. At 14 the mind begins to develop and we have moonrise. But as the moon has its phases, so the human mind had, resembling all the quarters and the waxing and waning.

Nufs first gets hold of the body and in little children generally begins with the stomach, especially in boys. Therefore to guard against Nufs, a child's food should be carefully watched. Children crave sweets and therefore should be given plenty of fruit and honey and some jam and jelly, but not much cake or candy. Dates are sweeter than most candy, honey is sweeter than sugar, and bread and syrup sweeter than cake. The Nufs grasps the play instinct, so this should be very carefully watched. A child should be trained to enjoy a few certain toys and be satisfied, to have plenty of healthy exercise, but to be disciplined as to time. How many children are obedient until they begin to play baseball; when their mother calls them and they answer, "Just one more inning." "Wait until I get my licks." But if the parent takes the child in hand, neither restricting him too much nor allowing him to go too free, Nufs will be checked. In fact the golden mean is the only way in all cases. If parents only observed this rule! How much less of vice and crime and suffering!

If Nufs is not properly restricted before puberty, how much worse afterwards. When the mind comes, Nufs seizes that. Then reason is used as a weapon, even for low and vicious acts and this goes on and on, causing indeed every evil in this world today or indeed any other day. And if it is hard to check Nufs during childhood, how much harder when a person is older, when the mind is set.

The battle against Nufs is seen in all the legends: Perseus and the Medusa, Apollo and Python, Horus and Typhon, Buddha and Mara, the Kundavas and the Pauravis. Hawthorne has a story about the Indians seeing a snake in one, and that is Nufs (or Nachash). But the best story is seen in the struggle between Hercules and the old man of the sea (Proteus). When Hercules grabbed him, he changed his form again and again, but in the end was conquered.

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And this can readily be seen in life. The result of Nufs in eunuchs is that they are cruel, gluttonous and vain. Women and men in later years, when they can no longer indulge, often become bitter or miserly. And even if Nufs is driven from the body, he can take refuge in the emotions and in the mind. All these struggles are illustrated by the battles in the Mahabharata and in the book of Joshua. But the great battle in the Mahabharata took place at Kurushetra, the battlefield of the heart.

And now comes the question of how to overcome Nufs. One can see it is easy to drive it from the body (gluttony, lust), harder to drive it from the emotions (cruelty, vanity) and hardest from the mind (pride, conceit). In fact many of our great citizens and scholars have done the first, but few have entirely driven Nufs from the mind. It is interesting to notice that the very latest school of philosophers in England realize that philosophers in the past have not found the truth because they looked at everything from a personal point of view. They call this the "egocentric predicament," but it is the control of mind by Nufs which is true in most cases.

The method to use to overcome Nufs has been prescribed time and again. The only trouble is that instead of following the physicians' advice, people argue as to who is the best physician. The medicine for Nufs is its opposite, FANA. Instead of contraction, expansion; instead of cold, heat; instead of centripetal motion, centrifugal motion; instead of selfishness, love; instead of getting, giving. Every great religious teacher and many great philosophers have laid down the rules, the prescription and how to take it, and if instead of arguing over the doctors, we would only follow one of them, we should be cured.

The Greek word for Nufs is Psyche. Unfortunately when this word occurs in the New Testament, it is sometimes translated one way, some times another. But it means exactly the same as Nufs and Nefesh. Christ said: "He that would have his soul (psyche) will lose it, and he that will lose his soul (psyche) for my sake will have it." This means that if Nufs is overcome, it is not destroyed, but its power used for good. For example, we can see the wonderful result of this use of the creative faculty in the lives of Darwin and Wallace, in Carlyle and Edward Carpenter, the last of whom realized this truth.

Again it says, "Greater love hath no man than this, that he giveth up his life (psyche) for his friend." here the same word "psyche" is used. What is meant that greater love hath no man than he who gives up his psyche-Nufs-ego, and forgets himself for his friend, he becomes one with his friend. And greater Love hath no man than when he makes God his Friend and gives up all for Him. Then his Nufs becomes Fana and he is bathed in the sea of Love forever.

Note 1. One hour without hesitation at 4:30 stop. An hour not only of inspiration, but almost of illumination.

Note 2. This idea can be worked up both by illustrations from life and from scriptural sources. There are many things Pryse has not realized, it seems. He knows nothing of Nachash or Nufs and therefore cannot understand Psyche. On returning to San Francisco, I will get a Greek Concordance on the N.T. (and O.T. if possible) and work this out fully. I think it can be printed in **Sufism**.