

## Human Spark for Soul Beliefs: Causes and Consequences, Rutgers/Coursera

**Statement of Purpose:** Our goal here is to show that the human spark is a natural outcome of evolution and adaptation for survival, as born out in the archaeological record. We will do so by pointing to archaeological finds which have created a historical record of human evolution.

### Archaeological Evidence

One of the traits that sets human beings apart from other biological life is a spark, which has evidently evolved over time, and which has led to increased likelihood of survival by adaptation over time. The paleoarcheological record suggests that modern human beings appeared roughly 2,000,000 years ago, and have been evolving ever since. In particular during the last 50,000 years there has been particularly rapid evolution and adaptation, leading to human beings becoming a dominant species on planet earth (source: **Wikipedia**). Part of the nature of this rapid evolution has been the growth in the size of the human brain, and the use of speech and music to communicate which has led to group collaboration and organization, unlike other animals.

The ability to walk on two legs or bipedalism evolved over four million years ago. Other important human characteristics -- such as a large and complex brain, the ability to make and use tools occurred over one million years ago. The capacity for language and for singing or music developed more recently, perhaps starting 250,000 years ago. Many advanced traits -- including complex symbolic expression, art, and elaborate cultural diversity -- emerged mainly during the past 50,000 years.

Humans are primates. Physical and genetic similarities show that the modern human species, *Homo sapiens*, has a very close relationship to another group of primate species, the apes. Humans and the great apes (large apes) of Africa -- chimpanzees (including bonobos, or so-called "pygmy chimpanzees") and gorillas -- share a common ancestor that lived between 8 and 6 million years ago. Humans first evolved in Africa, and much of human evolution occurred on that continent. Most scientists currently recognize some 15 to 20 different species of early humans.

Paleoanthropology is the scientific study of human evolution. Paleoanthropology is a subfield of anthropology, the study of human culture, society, and biology. The field involves an understanding of the similarities and differences between humans and other species in their genes, body form, physiology, and behavior. Paleoanthropologists search for the roots of human physical traits and behavior. They seek to discover how evolution has shaped the potentials, tendencies, and limitations of all people. For many people, paleoanthropology is an exciting scientific field because it investigates the origin, over millions of years, of the universal and defining traits of our species.

### Gobekli Tepe

In the mid 1990s, a site in southeastern Anatolia in Turkey (near the border with Syria) was discovered that is a temple that was built roughly 10,000 BCE. During the first phase, circles of massive T-shaped stone pillars were erected. More than 200 pillars in about 20 circles are currently known through geophysical surveys with ground penetrating radar. Each pillar has a height of up to 6 m (20 ft) and a weight of up to 20 tons. They are fitted into sockets that were hewn out of the bedrock. In the second

phase, the erected pillars are smaller and stood in rectangular rooms with floors of polished [lime](#). The site was abandoned in 8,000 BCE. It is felt that the pillars are remnants of a sanctuary or temple; this is the first recorded instance in history of this, and is thousands of years older than the Egyptian pyramids or pyramids in China/India. The sanctuary in Gobekli Tepe appears to be similar to Stonehenge in England or Carnac in Brittany.

### Solutrean Hypothesis

Solutrean culture was based in present day France, Spain and Portugal, from roughly 21,000 to 17,000 years ago, and was replaced by Magdalenian culture. The Solutrean culture developed tools similar to those of Clovis, which appeared in eastern North America roughly 13,500 years ago.

The Solutrean hypothesis claims that Ice Age Europeans crossed the North Atlantic along the edge of ice pack that extended from the Atlantic coast of France to North America, using small boats such as of those of the Inuit, and living along the way from hunting seals and fish for food. The Solutrean culture is claimed to have built thousands of stone circles, in North America, in England (Stonehenge is the most well known), in France (in particular in Brittany). These stone circles were sanctuaries or temples; apparently no other animals in the history of the earth have erected any type of sanctuary, which is felt to be evidence that these people sensed they had a spark that made them different from other creatures, and that these sanctuaries allowed them to realize whatever potential there was in this spark, such as a communion with a higher being.

### Ayurvedic Tradition

With this as a prolog, the main trait that will be discussed is that of a higher level of consciousness that other life forms evidently do not possess on earth, that of a **spirit** or **soul**. In the **Yoga Sutras of Patanjali** (new edition, translation, and commentary by Edwin F Bryant, North Point Press, 2009) which were written down roughly 2000 years ago but were part of an **Ayurvedic** oral tradition long before that, there are 196 sutras each of roughly 50 Sanskrit words. Ninety per cent of the yoga sutras deal with the notion that there is an essence everywhere, which we might call God or universal spirit, and this essence shines everywhere; in particular, it shines on special entities called spirits or souls, and the shadow of the illumination from this essence cast by a soul illuminates a human brain to create the human mind. The rapid evolution and adaptation of human beings over the past 50,000 years has been in response to being able to receive shadows from the spirit or soul with more and more accuracy and understanding, and this in turn has lifted and accelerated the adaptation of human beings. Note that the human body can be born, grows, matures, and then dies, while the spirit or soul is immortal, and can be reincarnated at a later point in time. Many practitioners of yoga have concentrated on the small fraction of yoga that deals with calming oneself or becoming centered or being able to resonate with the higher spirit and not be continually caught up in the day to day travails of modern life; this can be achieved by moving through a variety of postures or stretching activities, and some people assume this is all that there is to a yoga, a set of physical postures and stretching and breathing activities, all of which facilitate becoming more centered and grounded. Nothing could be further from the reality of the text of the yoga sutras. As an aside, it appears that a number of individuals had been in India and brought the postures and breathing exercises to Southern California in the 1920s where it caught on in Hollywood, but they did not bring the bulk of the yoga sutras teachings and lesson, and that has continued in the US through today.

## Plato's Phaedra

It is interesting that we find a parallel to this in Plato's writings: **The soul is a divine creation.** Plato may have received this concept from interactions with Egyptians, who in turn interacted with Indians. He wrote in Phaedra:

- **The soul is immortal.**
- **The body and the soul are separate entities.**
- **All souls pre-existed in other bodies.**
- **The soul is perfect but that perfection is contaminated by having to be encased in the body.**

Plato independent of other Greeks pointed to mind/body **dualism**. Two entities: the body and the soul. Bodies come and go. They are born and then they die. But souls are immortal. Souls fall into bodies at birth and move into other bodies when the body encasement dies. According to some of Plato's musings (e.g. *Phaedo*), the **relationship between a soul and the body it occupies is frequently strained**. In general, souls do not like being in bodies, in part because they are contaminated by them, and in part because they would much rather be free.

Plato modified this one-against-one struggle twenty years later in *The Republic* when he divided the soul into two elements: a **rational element** (governed by higher **reason**) and an **irrational element** (governed by our lower **animalistic appetites**). He also proposed a third element: the **spirit** or **will**. The spirit gives the person a choice by either siding with reason or with irrational appetites. The only way a soul can end the cycle of reincarnations is to operate in the rational sphere of **Pure Reason** because **Truth and Beauty** can only be obtained through pure reason. But alas, pure reason is a difficult condition to maintain because it is constantly under the threat of being dragged down by animalistic passions of the body (e.g., lust, envy, pleasure, pain, fear, hope, etc). According to Plato, souls most likely to enter into and remain in the sphere of truth and beauty are the souls of philosophers. Souls that rise to that level have reached perfection and are not recycled. So, if you want be the container of such a soul, consider majoring in philosophy.

Plato emphasized the struggle between the material body and the ethereal soul. The body could not operate without soul and it was nearly impossible for the soul not to be contaminated by the body. As we will see, the tension between bodily desires and maintaining the purity of the soul subsequently became a central feature of Christian and Islamic religions.

## Conclusion

We have pointed to three distinct areas, first the archaeologic record of mankind, second the Solutrean hypothesis of sanctuaries (Gobekli Tepe in Turkey, Stonehenge in England, Carnac in France and thousands more in North America, Spain and Portugal), third the Vedic oral beliefs which were written down as Yoga Sutras roughly two thousand years ago but are far older, and last the Phaedra of Plato. All of these suggest a long held belief in a spark, a soul or spirit, that is immortal, and that can provide the spark for human beings that other animals apparently lack.