

What Is Meant by Food for the Soul? How Do We Provide and Use It in Daily Life?

An Examination and Introduction of Practical Solutions for Providing Healthy Food for the Soul

Food for the soul is a phrase that most of us have likely heard at least once. However, it feels unfamiliar or strange due to the differing connotations of the words "food" and "soul," which pertain to two distinct aspects of our existence. When we hear the word "food," the food for our material aspect springs to mind. It is while the soul is our immaterial aspect. Does the soul, our immaterial aspect, even require nourishment? And if so, what is the food for it?

It is obvious that when we talk about food for the soul, we do not refer to meals, drinks, or different types of edibles; rather, we mean immaterial food and inputs that can nourish the soul. Just like food for the body can be beneficial or harmful, so too can food for the soul. Therefore, knowing different types of food for the soul, how to feed the soul, and the impact of each of this food on our spiritual well-being is a crucial matter.

The ultimate criterion for measuring our humanity is the growth and maturity of the true and *fitri* dimension of our existence. This dimension is not of the body or the material world; therefore, its food must be in harmony with its true nature and belong to the diving light. Just as a fetus needs continuous nourishment in his mother's womb to be born healthy into the world, the human soul also requires

nourishment and maturity to be prepared for transition to the *Barzakh* and hereafter.

Many of us make a meal plan for nourishing our bodies, yet we often neglect nourishing our souls. If we only pay attention to our body and give it what it needs, while neglecting our spiritual nourishment, our primary existential dimension will enter the eternal realm while it suffers punishment and is incomplete, weak, and immature at the time of death. It is important to note that the effects of food for the soul do not only manifest itself in the hereafter; they also have impacts on this worldly life. Food compatible with *fitrah*, brings about inner peace, happiness, mental coherence, and frees us from various forms of suffering, anxiety, confusion, and inner turmoil.

What Is the Food for the Soul, and Why Is It Important?

Humans need more than just food, water, and air to survive. In fact, something beyond physical needs, cause us to reach the truth of our existence. The soul is not made of matter or the physical world, so it requires the food that is different from what the body needs. We do not swallow the food of the soul. We cannot also analyze it in the laboratory; however, lack of it affects every aspect of our lives.

If we define a person solely according to their individual and social roles such as being a woman, a man, a parent, an employee, or a manager, then, we have overlooked their truth. The truth of our existence is the Soul Child. It is the *fitri* and divine dimension of our existence that must grow, mature, and be prepared for eternity. Without proper nourishment, it is impossible for it to be prepared for eternity.

Nourishing the soul is as vital as nurturing a fetus or an infant; just as a baby does not grow without milk, the soul also stagnates on the path to perfection without healthy food. This food must align with the human being's *fitrah*, and its healthiness must be endorsed by a divine, reliable, and specialized source. It is because the human being cannot know by themselves what is beneficial for their souls.

Neglecting this aspect may lead a person to appear faithful or successful on the surface while their inward state is suffering from spiritual poverty. If the acts of worship like prayer, fasting, or making a pilgrimage do not have positive effects on the soul, they cannot nourish it. This is not a disadvantage of the religion, but rather it indicates an obliviousness to the quality of the food for *fitrah*.

Food for the soul not only ensures our spiritual well-being in the hereafter, but also saves us from inner turmoil, anxiety, and mental instability in this world. Spiritual nourishment is an investment in achieving true peace and happiness and being born perfect and balanced into the hereafter.

Just as junk food and overeating make the body sick, unhealthy spiritual nourishment and overeating can poison our *fitrah*. The result of this poisoning will be nothing but confusion, inner conflict, or mental breakdown. In such situations, we must ask ourselves whether the food we have provided to our souls has truly been healthy and beneficial. If the answer is no, it is time to seriously consider healthy food for the soul and make a healthy lifestyle eating plan for nurturing our *fitrah*.

What Is the True Food for the Human Soul, and Why Is It Important?

Food for the soul is one of the most fundamental needs of a human being. This food is only effective when it aligns with the human being's inner structure and *fitrah*. Just as we cannot feed a newborn on heavy food, not every religious or spiritual content is necessarily proper food for the human soul. The soul is made of light and is infinite; therefore, its food must also be compatible with light and infinity. Reciting the Quran, reciting *dhikr* with the presence of the heart, acquiring the knowledge that brings a person closer to their true self and the Creator of existence, conscious prayers, crying for the sake of Allah, being interested in studying life story of the Household of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon them) are all examples of food for the soul.

Imam Ali (Peace be upon him) says: "The remembrance of Allah is nourishment for the souls and [being in] the company of the [most] Beloved" [1]. In contrast, acts of worship performed without presence of the heart and without clear intention do not nourish the soul, even if they appear religious. Imam Sadiq (Peace be upon him) warns: "By God, it is possible for a person to live for fifty years and God does not accept even a single prayer and what could be more distressing than this" [2]? This means that if a religious act does not align with the needs of *fitrah*, it is not only ineffective but can also lead to stagnation or spiritual boredom.

If we want that the food for the soul be impactful, it must possess five essential characteristics:

1. Being Compatible with *Fitrah*

Anything that brings us closer to our true self is the food for the soul; however, not everything that appears religious or sacred is necessarily nourishing. Saying *dhikr*

or performing acts of worship, without prior preparation or having capacity, do not resonate with the heart, much like seemingly healthy food that the body rejects.

2. Being in Harmony and Balanced

Just as overeating can make the body sick, excessive spiritual nourishment can make the soul tired and disheartened. Sometimes, a simple and timely advice from a wise and religious person can have more impact than a long-term study. It is because a timely advice aligns with the needs of our inward state.

3. It Must Be Used Gradually

Our *fitrah* grows gradually and through life. Emotional outbursts or temporary actions are usually not lasting. A person who thirsts for spirituality should not put too much pressure on themselves at once. The food for the soul should be used through life, and we must have a regular schedule for using it.

4. It Must Be Used Continuously and Consistently

If the soul gets nourishment occasionally while being left hungry for days, he is akin to a newborn that is full one day and hungry for three. The soul must be nourished regularly, not only in some seasons, rituals, or occasions. This continuity is not out of obligation but arises from the soul's natural need for a constant connection with the source of light, which is God.

5. It Must Be Received from a Reliable Source

Just as we entrust our physical health to specialists, the nourishment of the soul should also be determined by divine sources, the mentors and experts familiar with our *fitrah*. Using inappropriate or imitative content can poison the food for *fitrah*.

The human being's soul cannot be nurtured through guesswork and personal taste; it requires precise and tested divine prescriptions.

If these five principles are not observed, the soul will be born with birth defects into the eternal world, just like a blind baby; as a result, he cannot enjoy the blessings of the hereafter. However, if the food for the soul is received thoughtfully from a healthy source, we will achieve inner peace, happiness, growth, and spiritual capacity. We will also be prepared to be born healthy and balanced into eternity.

How Can We Provide Food for the Soul?

Recognizing the needs of the soul is the beginning of the path to spiritual growth. The next step is to intelligently and consistently meet these needs. Just as the body needs food to survive and be healthy, *fitrah* also requires continuous, balanced, and purposeful nourishment. For many people, the term "food for the soul" may seem vague or abstract; however, divine teachings have made it obvious how we can nourish the soul and access the food for it. In the following, we will refer to the most important sources of the food for *fitrah*:

1. Studying Religious Texts Purposefully to Gain *Ma'rifa*

The main sources of the food for the soul are educational and spiritual texts—content designed to address the needs of the human being's soul, not merely to fill the mind or increase knowledge! Books that bring the human being closer to themselves, God, and the purpose of life, play a significant role in this spiritual journey. This study should be continuous and take place in a calm environment.

Then we must reflect on what we have learned so that we can accept it, and its meaning penetrates deeply into our soul.

2. Conscious Worship and Supplication

Prayer, *dhikr*, and supplication (*dua*) are the best food for the soul, if performed with presence of the heart, passionately, and out of genuine need. However, if they are performed out of obligation, and we just repeat them without paying attention to their meaning, they may not only be helpful but could also lead to boredom. Sometimes, a person may have performed their prayers for years without fail, yet still feel empty inside because the food offered to their soul has either not been absorbed or was not suitable at all.

3. Solitude and Mindful Silence

At times, staying silent for a moment, contemplating our inward state, or an honest self- talking can serve as the richest spiritual meal. In such solitude, one can hear the voice of their Soul Child—the very voice that gets lost amid the chaos of modern life.

4. Companionship with Devout Persons

Connecting with individuals who have nurtured their own souls is one of the most effective ways to nourish our soul. Sometimes, a glance, a brief silence, or a simple phrase from a devout person can have a greater impact on the soul than studying dozens of books or attending many lectures. However, on this journey, we must be cautious not to be deceived by appearances and the large number of people who attend these gatherings; we should prioritize the quality of spiritual connections.

5. Continuous Self- Scrutiny and Weighing Our Deeds

Continuous self-scrutiny serves as a key tool in regulating the food for *fitrah*. Just as we examine what to eat to keep our body healthy, we must also pay attention to the profound effects of what we read, see, listen, and do because they are considered the nourishment for the soul.

We sometimes need to change the sources of nourishment and reduce or increase the quantity of the content we receive. Our soul may not always have the capacity or readiness to absorb these influences. In other words, it refuses food. Therefore, understanding our inner states is also part of intelligent eating.

6. Referring to Reliable Divine Sources and Prescriptions

We cannot nourish the soul based on guesswork. Just as we entrust our physical health to a physician, we need a guide and a precise divine prescription for nurturing our soul. The lessons from revelation, characters of Prophet Muhammad's Household (Peace be upon them), as well as the experiences of God's friends and those who make the spiritual journey, are the best sources for regulating the food for our *fitrah*.

If spiritual nourishment is purposeful, gradual, continuous, and aligned with the inherent capacity of *fitrah*, and if it is received from a reliable source, the human being's soul will flourish and be prepared to enter eternal life.

The Effects of Nourishing *Fitrah* in Human Life

One important question is: What changes will occur in our lives if we nourish our soul? To put it another way, is this nourishment only beneficial for our life in the

hereafter, or does it also impact our daily lives? The answer to this question is clear: Receiving the food for *fitrah* is not only useful for eternity but also transforms our worldly life. In the following we will review the most important effects of nourishing the soul in our daily lives:

1. Lasting Inner Peace

Among the most significant effects of nourishing the soul in daily life is achieving a deep inner peace that does not disappear with changing circumstances, others' judgments, or life's pressures. This inner stability arises from a connection to the Absolute Source of truth and does not come from external factors. The Holy Quran states in this regard: "Surely in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find comfort" [3].

2. Having Insight and Clarity in Decision-Making

A person who constantly receives spiritual nourishment finds inner light. Their decision-making is based on insight, rather than superficial analyses or imitations! Nurturing *fitrah* leads to the maturation of the Soul Child. This maturation frees one from indecision, emotional uncertainty, and exhaustion in relationships.

3. Freedom from Unhealthy Attachments

A nourished soul is calm; although it lives in the world, it is not attached to it. It is neither shattered in the face of failures nor becomes arrogant when it becomes successful. Its sense of security does not come from the approval of others or material possessions; rather, it is rooted in a connection to an eternal and unchanging source.

4. Enduring Sufferings and Overcoming Difficulties

An individual who knows the needs of their inner self and addresses them are stronger from within. They remain resilient, resistant, and hopeful in the face of failure, illness, and worldly difficulties because their roots lie in something beyond this world.

5. Being kind, Forgiving, and Selfless

Food which nourishes *fitrah* fosters love, empathy, and forgiveness among people and makes them serve others. A person rich in spirit does not need to belittle others to prove themselves. They are happy for the growth and success of others and have empathy with them. The person whose soul is nourished is not prone to anger, jealousy, or revenge; instead, they love others, make sacrifices for them, and are peaceful.

6. Readiness for Death and Transition into Eternal Life

At the moment of death, the soul is born into the hereafter; if it is not prepared for birth, it will go through a painful experience. A person who has been oblivious to their soul during their lifetime will have a weak and powerless soul upon entering the *Barzakh*; in contrast, someone who has nourished their soul throughout their life will enter the eternal realm in peace and strength.

The food for the soul is not merely a spiritual need; it is a vital necessity for a balanced and purposeful human life. When this food is healthy and is provided consistently, a person feels freedom from within and is secure and tranquil—something that no external success can replace.

In this lesson, we examined the topic of nurturing the supra-rational dimension of the human being from a human and *fitri* perspective. We first explored the difference between the material nature and *fitrah*, demonstrating that the true growth of the human being cannot be achieved solely through physical nourishment, education, or external successes.

The main dimension of our existence, the "Soul Child," requires the food that is compatible with it; if this dimension is left unfed, the human soul becomes sluggish and stagnant, as a result it will have birth defects at the moment of death, when it enters the eternal world.

We then understood that the food for the soul must be in harmony with *fitrah*. It must be used gradually and continuously and received from reliable and divine sources. We also explored practical ways to provide this food, ranging from studying religious knowledge and performing acts of worship consciously to solitude, connection with devout persons, and self-scrutiny.

In the final section, we reviewed the tangible effects of this journey that is the journey of *fitrah*, including achieving inner peace, mental clarity, freedom from attachment, the strength to overcome suffering, as well as love, making sacrifices for others, and being prepared for death and entering into eternal life. All of this shows that nourishing the soul is not merely a theoretical or spiritual matter; it is directly intertwined with the quality of our daily lives.

If you feel empty and restless; if you are spiritually hungry; and if you find that despite performing acts of worship or achieving external successes, your life is still meaningless, perhaps it is time to reflect on nurturing your *fitrah* and feeding your

soul. Have you ever considered the needs of the divine dimension of your existence? Please share your experiences or perspectives with us.

References

- [1]. Abu al-Fath al-'Amidi, *Ghurar Al-Hikam Wa Durar Al-Kalim*. Qom: Ansariyan Publications, 2012, p. 598.
- [2]. Shaykh al-Hurr al-Amili, *Wasa'il al-Shia*. vol. 3, p. 15.
- [3]. Quran, 13:28