

# USE OF THE WORD "SOUL" IN THE N.R.S.V. BIBLE

*The English word "soul" is used to translate two words in the Old and New Testaments:*

- 1) O.T. Hebrew: נֶפֶשׁ "nephesh" = breath, spirit, life, feelings, self
- 2) N.T. Greek: ψυχή "psyche" = life, life-force, feelings, self

*We must be careful in using the word "soul" not to assume that everyone who uses the word means the same thing. The way this word was used in the Bible was very different from the way Greek philosophy used the word, or the way we use it today. Even within the Bible itself, the word "soul" is used in a number of different ways. These varying connotations are listed below, in general order of their frequency in Scripture:*

## **The Word "Soul" = Psychological State (usually in the negative)**

**69 Citations**

Example of an English Expression: "we went to see if we could raise his spirits"

*I loathe my life; I will give free utterance to my complaint; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. (Job 10:1)  
My soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is (Lamentations 3:17) Now my soul is troubled.  
What should I say: 'Father, save me from this hour'? (John 12:27)*

## **The Word "Soul" = The Inner Self (deep and honest, not superficial)**

**30 Citations**

Example of an English Expression: "he devoted his heart and soul to this work"

*From there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find him if you search after him with all your heart and soul. (Deuteronomy 4:29) My soul yearns for you in the night, my spirit within me earnestly seeks you. (Isaiah 26:9)*

## **The Word "Soul" = Myself (a self-reflexive reference)**

**20 Citations**

Example of an English Expression: "so I said to myself ..." / "he was beside himself ..."

*Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? (Psalm 42:5) I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' (Luke 12:19) Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. (Psalm 103:1)*

## **The Word "Soul" = Emotional Feelings/Communal Spirit (love)**

**18 Citations**

Example of an English Expression: "the sad story touched my soul" / "the love of my life, my soul-mate"

*His soul was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob; he loved the girl, and spoke tenderly to her. (Genesis 34:3)  
The soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. (1 Samuel 18:1) Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. (Acts 4:32)*

## **The Word "Soul" = Breath/Respiration/Life-Force (life energy)**

**12 Citations**

Example of an English Expression: "I had the wind knocked out of me" / "there was no life left in me"

*As Rachel's soul was departing, for she died, she named him Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin. (Genesis 35:18) Then let the enemy pursue and overtake me, trample my life to the ground, and lay my soul in the dust. (Psalm 7:5)*

## **The Word "Soul" = One Aspect of the Whole Self (often paired with body)**

**8 Citations**

Example of an English Expression: "we survived intact, in body and soul"

*May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 5:23)*

## **The Word "Soul" = Our Whole Life & Existence (often used as an oath)**

**7 Citations**

Example of an English Expression: "not on your life" / "you bet your life it is ..." / "I sold my soul"

*Abner said, "As your soul lives, O king, I do not know." (1 Samuel 17:55) He has redeemed my soul from going down to the Pit, and my life shall see the light.' (Job 33:28)*