

A Qualitative Analysis of the Distinction Between Rajah and Tanāsukh from the Perspective of Islamic Philosophers

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ABSTRACT

While the principle of belief in the Return (raj'at) is an essential and unanimously held doctrine among the Imāmiyyah, its specific modality is not a credal necessity. Owing to a perceived similarity between raj'at and transmigration (tanāsukh), some have erroneously equated the two. Among the most significant and challenging discussions in this area is the problem of elucidating the modality of raj'at and distinguishing it from tanāsukh. This study aims, first, to present a tenable modality for the Return that is consistent with rational and scriptural principles, and second, to articulate its distinction from tanāsukh from the perspective of the theosophers (hukamā'). Tanāsukh is beset by rational and scriptural impediments. Mullā Ṣadrā and 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'i did not specify the modality of the Return; they only sought to resolve the rational improbabilities associated with it, arguing that it is not an instance of regression from actuality (fi'l) to potentiality (quwwah), nor is it a retrogressive motion (ḥarakat taḍa'ufi). Fayḍ Kāshānī and Shāhābādī maintained that the Return involves a return to the imaginal body (badan mithālī), thus positing a fundamental difference from tanāsukh. From the viewpoint of Rafī'ī Qazvīnī and Imam Khomeini, the Return occurs with the elemental body (badan 'unṣurī). They argue that an intrinsic relationship exists between the body and the soul (nafs), as the body is a direct positing of the soul. Therefore, raj'at is distinct from tanāsukh, in which the soul becomes attached to a different body.

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Introduction

This research undertakes an in-depth investigation into the essential distinctions between two pivotal concepts, the **Return** (*raj'at*) and **Transmigration** (*tanāsukh*), within the intellectual framework of Islamic theosophers (*hukamā'*). Within the context of Shi'i thought, *raj'at* stands as a unique and foundational doctrine. Unfortunately, owing to certain superficial similarities with the theory of *tanāsukh*, it has persistently been subject to significant misunderstandings. This epistemological error has been propagated not only by opponents of the school of the Ahl al-Bayt but has occasionally been repeated even among some proponents, indicating a critical need for a precise re-examination of these concepts.

Adopting a systematic approach, the present study seeks to restore an authentic understanding of *raj'at* based on rational, scriptural (*naqlī*), and philosophical evidence. To this end, it first presents a comprehensive analysis of the concept of *tanāsukh* and its various classifications. Subsequently, by critically examining the arguments for the invalidation of *tanāsukh*, it establishes the necessary groundwork for a precise elucidation of the true nature of *raj'at*. The significance of this research can be assessed on three levels: **first**, on the theological (*kalāmī*) plane, it clarifies crucial doctrinal boundaries; **second**, on the philosophical level, it delineates the theoretical foundations of both concepts; and **third**, on the historical plane, it responds to polemical questions and doubts raised over many centuries. By referencing the primary works of Islamic theosophers and employing an analytical-critical approach, this paper endeavors to present a lucid and definitive exposition of the subject.

Methodology

This study was designed using a **mixed-methodology** (qualitative-analytical) and an **interdisciplinary approach**, integrating the fields of philosophy, theology (*kalām*), and Hadith studies. Data collection was conducted through a **bibliothecal (library-based) method**, with direct recourse to primary philosophical and theological texts.

In the initial stage, a **qualitative content analysis** was performed on the relevant works of major theosophers such as Mullā Ṣadrā, 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Fayḍ Kāshānī, and others. In the second stage, a **comparative-historical method** was employed to trace the intellectual evolution of these concepts across different periods of Islamic thought. Data analysis was executed using a tripartite technique comprising: **descriptive** (explication of viewpoints), **analytical** (examination of conceptual relationships), and **critical** (assessment and critique of arguments) methods.

For the section on *tanāsukh*, lexical and technical definitions were first extracted from authoritative sources, after which its principal types—*naskh*

(human-to-human), *maskh* (human-to-animal), *faskh* (human-to-plant), and *raskh* (human-to-mineral)—were explained with their precise differentiations. For the section on *rajʿat*, a **documentary analysis** was conducted on all pertinent Qurʾanic verses and reliable narrations, followed by a thorough analysis of their philosophical interpretations. The distinctiveness of this study's methodology lies in its synthesis of scriptural (*naqlī*) and rational (*ʿaqlī*) arguments and its systematic analysis of the relationship between the two concepts.

Findings

The findings of this research, derived from an exhaustive examination of primary texts, can be categorized into several key areas. First, concerning **tanāsukh**, the study demonstrates that the theory is invalidated by five distinct categories of rational arguments:

1. Arguments based on the principle of **Substantial Motion** (*ḥarakat-i jawharī*), which precludes the possibility of regression from a state of actuality (*fiʿliyyat*) to potentiality (*quwwah*).
2. Arguments pertaining to the **intrinsic and essential nature of the soul-body** (*nafs-badan*) relationship.
3. Arguments related to **Divine Wisdom and the Best Possible Order** (*niẓām-i aḥsan*).
4. Arguments based on the philosophical **impossibility of retrogressive motion** (*ḥarakat-i qahqarāʾī*).
5. Arguments concerning the logical **untenability of two souls cohabiting a single body**.

On a scriptural level, numerous Qurʾanic verses, such as Sūrat al-Muʾminūn 23:99-100, and explicit narrations from the Infallible Imams unequivocally negate the doctrine of *tanāsukh*.

Concerning **rajʿat**, the research has yielded the following conclusions:

1. **Ontological Viability:** From an ontological perspective, *rajʿat* is not only compatible with philosophical principles but is entirely justifiable based on the foundations of the **Transcendent Theosophy** (*al-ḥikmat al-mutaʿāliyah*).
2. **The Nature of the Returning Body:** After a comprehensive review of existing viewpoints, this study endorses the theory of the **elemental body** (*badan ʿunṣurī*) based on several compelling reasons, the most significant of which are: (a) its consistency with the prima facie meaning of the narrative sources; (b) its capacity to account for physical events such as wars and retribution as described in the narrations; and (c) its preservation of the principle of the intrinsic soul-body relationship.

3. **Comparative Analysis:** Ten fundamental differences between *raj'at* and *tanāsukh* were identified. The most critical distinctions are: (a) in *raj'at*, the soul returns to its **original, particular body**, whereas *tanāsukh* necessitates attachment to a new body; (b) *raj'at* is an **evolutionary and perfecting motion**, while *tanāsukh* implies a retrogressive one; and (c) personal **identity is preserved** in *raj'at*, whereas *tanāsukh* entails a change of identity.

Conclusion

This study has critically evaluated the different perspectives on the nature of *raj'at*, demonstrating that interpretations positing a return to an **imaginal body** (*badan mithālī*), as proposed by figures like **Fayḍ Kāshānī** and **Shāhābādī**, face significant theoretical challenges. In contrast, the theory of the **elemental body** (*badan 'unṣurī*), advocated by **Rafī'ī Qazvīnī** and **Imam Khomeini**, exhibits greater internal consistency and explanatory power.

In conclusion, by providing a systematic analysis of the relationship between *raj'at* and *tanāsukh* on both philosophical and scriptural grounds, this research takes a substantial step toward clarifying a complex and often misunderstood area of Islamic doctrine. It thereby offers a new and robust paradigm for future scholarly investigations in this field.

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