



Resurrection as a Metaphor in the Writing of Ibn Sina



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In the same way that Ibn Sina's references to the face of God are metaphorical, our understanding of his references to the resurrection should also be considered metaphorical. The "I" that we use to refer to ourselves does not refer to our bodies, but to the spirit within that animates and which, together with the influence of physical qualities, forms the individual. But since the body is only material and matter is corruptible, how can a soul survive, particularly as an individual?

Ibn Sina's strategy is first to give examples of metaphorical, or non-literal expressions in the Qur'an — such as the mention of God's hand and face. Then he brings out that the Qur'an itself says some verses are clear, others not clear. He mentions that the Hebrew scripture too is filled with allegories. We will consider what the "return to God" (al-ma'ad) means.

As such we will address this in figurative, not literal terms. What then does this mean? That souls return to God. Why then is the return of bodies emphasized? Because it is what common people understand the resurrection to be. The true "I" is the soul, not the body. The soul is an unknown substance, non-material. The soul belongs to the world of ideas where the person is process. The soul becomes individual through a series of connected events arising from its own initiated activities and life.

The main text is al-Adhawiyyah fi al-ma'ad, with additional material from "al-Risalah fi ma'rifat al nafs al-natiqa wa ahwaliha" (published in Les Etats de l'ame par Avicenne).