

The Weight Of The Human Soul

By James Donahue

There has been disagreement over the centuries over just what the human soul is, or even if such a thing exists. The soul, which is not the same thing as the spirit, seems to be that spark of something within us that links us to our creator. Some say this is God. We believe it is the Mother Earth, from which we were spawned and to where we will return after our bodies are turned to rot.

That we are creatures with memory, awareness of ourselves and that we exist within our bodies is not debatable. What is in question is just how unique we are in comparison to the other animals sharing this planet with us. So how do we prove that we have a soul?

There was a strange experiment by a doctor in Massachusetts back in 1907 that suggests something, indeed, leaves the body at the moment of death. And that something weighs about 21 grams.

It seems that Dr. Duncan MacDougall of Haverhill conducted his experiment with the help of six dying patients placed in a specially designed bed. The bed was built on a scale so that they could be weighed before, during and immediately after death.

Writing in a journal of American Medicine, Dr. MacDougall told of one patient who was dying of tuberculosis. He wrote: "He lost weight slowly at the rate of one ounce per hour due to evaporation of moisture in respiration and evaporation of sweat. At the end of the three hours and forty minutes, he expired and suddenly coincident with death the beam end (of the scale) dropped with an audible stroke . . . "

He said the loss was about three-fourths of an ounce, or just over 21 grams.

MacDougall conducted similar tests during the deaths of other patients over the years and got similar results. He noted that the entire bed was weighed so that any loss of fluids from urine or the bowels at the moment of death would still be weighed because the material would remain on the bed.

The doctor even considered loss of left-over air in the lungs. To test the possible weight of air in the lungs, he said he and another person each got on the bed and strenuously inhaled and exhaled. Their efforts made no change on the scale.

As a further part of his experiments, Dr. MacDougall wrote that he tried the same experiment with 15 dogs. He said he had to drug the animals to keep them from struggling, which suggests that he also used drugs to kill them. He wrote that there was no change in the weight of the bodies of the dogs at the moment of their death.

The experiments suggest then, that the soul has substance and a measurable mass. It also suggests that humans have something that animals do not, and that it leaves the body at the moment we die.

What continues to remain a mystery is what that something is.