

The Soul

The Life of the Spirit

Issues for Discourse with Youth

Bahá'í Discourse - Soul

Our Spiritual Nature

The question of human nature... prompts us to reexamine, at the deepest levels, who we are and what our purpose is in life. The human experience is essentially spiritual in nature: it is rooted in the inner reality—or what some call the ‘soul’—that we all share in common. The culture of consumerism, however, has tended to reduce human beings to competitive, insatiable consumers of goods and to objects of manipulation by the market.

(Bahá'í International Community, Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism, 2010)

Our Spiritual Nature

...on the one hand, we desire a world of peace and prosperity, while, on the other, much of economic and psychological theory depicts human beings as slaves to self-interest. The faculties needed to construct a more just and sustainable social order—moderation, justice, love, reason, sacrifice and service to the common good... must be harnessed to overcome the traits of ego, greed, apathy and violence....

(Bahá'í International Community, *Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism*, 2010)

Human Reality

The human body is like animals subject to nature's laws. But man is endowed with a second reality, the rational or intellectual reality; and the intellectual reality of man predominates over nature. Yet there is a third reality in man, the spiritual reality.... That celestial reality... delivers man from the material world. Its power causes man to escape from nature's world. Escaping, he will find an illuminating reality, transcending the limited reality of man and causing him to attain to the infinitude of God, abstracting him from the world of superstitions and imaginations, and submerging him in the sea of the rays of the Sun of Reality.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Foundations of World Unity, p. 51)

The Soul

Know that the soul which is common to all men cometh forth following the commingling of things and after their maturation, as thou dost observe in the germ: once it hath developed to its predestined stage, God manifesteth the soul that was latent within it.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Súriy-i-Ra'ís §31, in *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, p. 153. Haifa, Bahá'í World Centre, 2002)

The Soul Directs the Spirit

...the life of man proceedeth from the spirit, and the spirit turneth to wheresoever the soul directeth it. ...the soul is endowed with two wings: should it soar in the atmosphere of love and contentment, then it will be related to the All-Merciful, and should it fly in the atmosphere of self and desire, then it will pertain to the Evil One....

(Bahá'u'lláh, Súriy-i-Ra'ís §33-34, in *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, p. 154. Haifa, Bahá'í World Centre, 2002)

Two Wings



The Soul

...the soul is a sign of God, a heavenly gem whose reality the most learned of men hath failed to grasp, and whose mystery no mind, however acute, can ever hope to unravel. It is the first among all created things to declare the excellence of its Creator, the first to recognize His glory, to cleave to His truth, and to bow down in adoration before Him. If it be faithful to God, it will reflect His light, and will, eventually, return unto Him. If it fail, however, in its allegiance to its Creator, it will become a victim to self and passion, and will, in the end, sink in their depths.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, LXXXII, p. 158-159)

The Reality of Man

[God] chose to confer upon man the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him—a capacity that must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation.... Upon the reality of man... He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self. Alone of all created things man hath been singled out for so great a favor, so enduring a bounty.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, XXVII, p. 65)

The Human Spirit

The human spirit, which distinguishes man from the animal, is the rational soul.... This spirit... encompasses all things and as far as human capacity permits, discovers their realities and becomes aware of the properties and effects, the characteristics and conditions of earthly things. But the human spirit, unless it be assisted by the spirit of faith, cannot become acquainted with the divine mysteries and the heavenly realities. It is like a mirror which, although clear, bright, and polished, is still in need of light. Not until a sunbeam falls upon it can it discover the divine mysteries.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [Some Answered Questions](#), 55, p.241-242)

Attributes of Divinity

The invisible realm of the Divinity is sanctified and exalted above the comprehension of all beings, and all that can be imagined is mere human understanding. The power of human understanding does not encompass the reality of the divine Essence: All that man can hope to achieve is to comprehend the attributes of the Divinity, the light of which is manifest and resplendent in the world and within the souls of men.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 59, p.255)

Attributes of Divinity

When we examine the world and the souls of men, the perspicuous signs of the perfections of the Divinity appear clear and manifest, for the realities of all things attest to the existence of a universal Reality. The reality of the Divinity is even as the sun, which from the heights of its sanctity shines upon every land, and of whose radiance every land and every soul receives a share.

...the full splendour of the perfections, bounties, and attributes of the Divinity shines forth from the reality of the Perfect Man, that is, that unique Individual Who is the universal Manifestation of God.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 59, p.255)



The mirror in need of light

Beginning of Perfection

Man is in the ultimate degree of materiality and the beginning of spirituality; that is, he is at the end of imperfection and the beginning of perfection.... He has both an animal side and an angelic side, and the role of the educator is to so train human souls that the angelic side may overcome the animal. Thus, should the divine powers, which are identical with perfection, overcome in man the satanic powers, which are absolute imperfection, he becomes the noblest of all creatures, but should the converse take place, he becomes the vilest of all beings. That is why he is the end of imperfection and the beginning of perfection.

Human Attributes

...knowledge is a human attribute but so is ignorance; truthfulness is a human attribute but so is falsehood; and the same holds true of trustworthiness and treachery, justice and tyranny, and so forth. In brief, every perfection and virtue, as well as every vice, is an attribute of man.... Should he come under the shadow of the true Educator and be rightly trained, he becomes... the wellspring of spiritual attributes, the dawning-place of heavenly lights, and the recipient of divine inspirations. Should he, however, be deprived of this education, he becomes the embodiment of satanic attributes, the epitome of animal vices, and the source of all that is oppressive and dark.

Reality of Humanity

The reality of man is his thought, not his material body. The thought force and the animal force are partners. Although man is part of the animal creation, he possesses a power of thought superior to all other created beings.

If a man's thought is constantly aspiring towards heavenly subjects then does he become saintly; if on the other hand his thought does not soar, but is directed downwards to center itself upon the things of this world, he grows more and more material until he arrives at a state little better than that of a mere animal.

Need for the Holy Spirit

...the world of mankind is in need of the breaths of the Holy Spirit. Without the spirit the world of mankind is lifeless, and without this light the world of mankind is in utter darkness. For the world of nature is an animal world. Until man is born again from the world of nature, that is to say, becomes detached from the world of nature, he is essentially an animal, and it is the teachings of God which convert this animal into a human soul.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 227, pp. 303-304)

The power of the Spirit

Man—the true man—is soul, not body; though physically man belongs to the animal kingdom, yet his soul lifts him above the rest of creation. Behold how the light of the sun illuminates the world of matter: even so doth the Divine Light shed its rays in the kingdom of the soul. The soul it is which makes the human creature a celestial entity!

*By the power of the Holy Spirit, working through his soul, man is able to perceive the Divine reality of things. All great works of art and science are witnesses to this power of the Spirit.
The same Spirit gives Eternal Life.*

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Paris Talks, 28, p. 85)

The soul is ever active

The soul, whether it be in sleep or waking, is in motion and ever active. Possibly it may, whilst in a dream, unravel an intricate problem, incapable of solution in the waking state.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Revelation*, p. 221)

The Soul is Limitless

...with the human soul, there is no decline. Its only movement is towards perfection; growth and progress alone constitute the motion of the soul. Divine perfection is infinite, therefore the progress of the soul is also infinite. From the very birth of a human being the soul progresses, the intellect grows and knowledge increases. When the body dies the soul lives on. All the differing degrees of created physical beings are limited, but the soul is limitless!

The Soul evolves spiritually

As to the soul of man after death, it remains in the degree of purity to which it has evolved during the life of the physical body, and after it is freed from the body it remains plunged in the ocean of God's Mercy.

From the moment the soul leaves the body and arrives in the Heavenly World, its evolution is spiritual, and that evolution is: The approaching unto God.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Paris Talks, 20, p. 66)

The soul is invisible

Spirit cannot be perceived by the material senses of the physical body, excepting as it is expressed in outward signs and works. The human body is visible, the soul is invisible. It is the soul nevertheless that directs a man's faculties, that governs his humanity.

The spirit does not need a body, but the body needs spirit, or it cannot live. The soul can live without a body, but the body without a soul dies.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, 28, p. 86-87)

Detachment from this World

Our greatest efforts must be directed towards detachment from the things of the world; we must strive to become more spiritual, more luminous, to follow the counsel of the Divine Teaching, to serve the cause of unity and true equality, to be merciful, to reflect the love of the Highest on all men, so that the light of the Spirit shall be apparent in all our deeds, to the end that all humanity shall be united, the stormy sea thereof calmed, and all rough waves disappear from off the surface of life's ocean henceforth unruffled and peaceful.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, 28, p. 87)

