

## LIFE AFTER DEATH

### *Quotes to answer questions raised by participants in studying Reflections on the Life of the Spirit, Ruhi Book 1, Unit 3*

#### 1. What is the beginning of the soul? Did it exist before conception? What/When is its connection with the body?

Know that, although the human soul has existed on the earth for prolonged times and ages, yet it is phenomenal. As it is a divine sign, when once it has come into existence, it is eternal. The spirit of man has a beginning, but it has no end; it continues eternally. In the same way the species existing on this earth are phenomenal, for it is established that there was a time when these species did not exist on the surface of the earth. Moreover, the earth has not always existed, but the world of existence has always been, for the universe is not limited to this terrestrial globe. The meaning of this is that, although human souls are phenomenal, they are nevertheless immortal, everlasting and perpetual; for the world of things is the world of imperfection in comparison with that of man, and the world of man is the world of perfection in comparison with that of things. When imperfections reach the station of perfection, they become eternal.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 151-2)

...the Teachings state that the soul appears at conception....

(On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 344)

...the soul is present from conception...

(On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 195)

...the soul of man comes into being at conception...

(Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 346)

The soul or spirit of the individual comes into being with the conception of his physical body.

The Prophets, unlike us, are pre-existent. The Soul of Christ existed in the spiritual world before His birth in this world. We cannot imagine what that world is like, so words are inadequate to picture His state of being.

(On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 504)

**Note:** Part of this passage is Scripture, part of it is Adib Taherzadeh’s: Nevertheless, a study of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings is enlightening. We learn from the Writings that the soul, being an emanation from the spiritual worlds of God, comes into existence at the time of conception, when it becomes associated with the body. The belief that the soul exists before conception is therefore contrary to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Faith, states, 'the soul or spirit of the individual comes into being with the conception of his physical body'. [P-6] The soul, being exalted above entry or exit, ascent or descent, cannot be physically placed inside a body or have any connection with material things.

Bahá'u'lláh declares in the same Tablet to Abdu'r-Razaq:

"Verily I say, the human soul is exalted above all egress and regress. It is still, and yet it soareth; it moveth, and yet it is still. It is, in itself, a testimony that beareth witness to the existence of a world that is contingent, as well as to the reality of a world that hath neither beginning nor end."  
[P-7]

The association of the soul and the body is similar to the association of light and the mirror. The light is not inside the mirror, but reflected on it from a different source. When the mirror breaks, the light remains unaffected.

When the soul becomes associated with the body, a human being with a unique identity is created. This creation has a beginning at the time of conception, but has no end. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states: 'The spirit of man has a beginning, but it has no end; it continues eternally.' [P-8] The soul is thus immortal and will progress in the spiritual worlds of God for all eternity. Such a concept of everlasting life is truly a most uplifting vision for the human race. This thought of immortality can evoke in the heart of every believer the feelings of utmost joy and gratitude for having been endowed with eternal life by Almighty God. Another feature of this bounty is that God has bestowed an everlasting privilege upon the parents who become aware of, and rejoice in, being instrumental in bringing into this world children whose souls are destined to progress in the worlds of God throughout eternity.

(Adib Taherzadeh, *The Covenant of Baha'u'llah*, p. 7-8)

**Note:** This is Adib Taherzadeh's, not Scripture:

As long as a human being lives in this world, the soul and the body are associated with each other. When death takes place, this association comes to an end; the body will return to its origin, which is the earth. The soul also returns to its origin which is the spiritual worlds of God. The embryo begins its life as one cell, but ends up as a perfect human body by the time of its birth. The soul is the same. When it first emanates from the spiritual worlds of God, it has no powers. But if it has grown properly, lived a good life on this earth, and acquired spiritual qualities, then it returns in a state of might and glory to its own original habitation. Manifesting the signs of God and possessing divine attributes, it retains its own individuality and identity, and as Bahá'u'lláh promises, it will associate with God's Messengers and Chosen Ones in the realms above.

(Adib Taherzadeh, *The Covenant of Baha'u'llah*, p. 10-11)

## 2. What develops the soul?

The mind and spirit of man advance when he is tried by suffering. The more the ground is ploughed the better the seed will grow, the better the harvest will be. Just as the plough furrows the earth deeply, purifying it of weeds and thistles, so suffering and tribulation free man from the petty affairs of this worldly life until he arrives at a state of complete detachment. His attitude in this world will be that of divine happiness. Man is, so to speak, unripe: the heat of the fire of suffering will mature him. Look back to the times past and you will find that the greatest men have suffered most.

'He who through suffering has attained development, should he fear happiness?'

'Abdu'l-Bahá. -- 'Through suffering he will attain to an eternal happiness which nothing can take from him. The apostles of Christ suffered: they attained eternal happiness.

'Then it is impossible to attain happiness without suffering?'

'Abdu'l-Bahá. -- To attain eternal happiness one must suffer. He who has reached the state of self-sacrifice has true joy. Temporal joy will vanish.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 178-9)

### **3. What happens after death? How many worlds of God are there?**

Concerning the future life what Bahá'u'lláh says is that the soul will continue to ascend through many worlds. What those worlds are and what their nature is we cannot know. The same way the child in the matrix cannot know this world so we cannot know what the other world is going to be.

(On behalf of the Guardian, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 204)

You ask an explanation of what happens to us after we leave this world: This is a question which none of the Prophets have ever answered in detail, for the very simple reason that you cannot convert to a person's mind something entirely different from everything they have ever experienced. 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave the wonderful example of the relation of this life to the next life being like the child in the womb; it develops eyes, ears, hands, feet, a tongue, and yet it has nothing to see or hear, it cannot walk or grasp things or speak; all these faculties it is developing for this world. If you tried to explain to an embryo what this world is like could never understand- but it understands when it is born, and its faculties can be used. So we cannot picture our state in the next world. All we know is that our consciousness, our personality, endures in some new state, and that that world is as much better than this one as this one is better than the dark womb of our mother was...

(On behalf of the Guardian, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 208-209)

### **4. Can we pray to others in the next world to intercede on our behalf? Can we pray for them?**

The wealth of the other world is nearness to God. Consequently, it is certain that those who are near the Divine Court are allowed to intercede, and this intercession is approved by God. But intercession in the other world is not like intercession in this world. It is another thing, another reality, which cannot be expressed in words.

'Can a departed soul converse with someone still on earth?'

'Abdu'l-Bahá. -- A conversation can be held, but not as our conversation. There is no doubt that the forces of the higher worlds interplay with the forces of this plane. The heart of man is open to inspiration; this is spiritual communication. As in a dream one talks with a friend while the mouth is silent, so is it in the conversation of the spirit. A man may converse with the ego within him saying: "May I do this? Would it be advisable for me to do this work?" Such as this is conversation with the higher self.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 179)

It is even possible that the condition of those who have died in sin and unbelief may become changed; that is to say, they may become the object of pardon through the bounty of God, not through His justice; for bounty is giving without desert, and justice is giving what is deserved.

As we have power to pray for these souls here, so likewise we shall possess the same power in the other world, which is the Kingdom of God. Are not all the people in that world the creatures of God? Therefore in that world also they can make progress. As here they can receive light by their supplication, there also they can plead for forgiveness, and receive light through entreaties and supplications. Thus as souls in this world, through the help of the supplications, the entreaties, and the prayers of the holy ones, can acquire development, so is it the same after death. Through their own prayers and supplications they can also progress; more especially when they are the object of the intercession of the Holy Manifestations.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 1984 ed., p. 231)

## 5. What are the responsibilities and purposes of the souls who have passed on?

And now concerning thy question regarding the soul of man and its survival after death. Know thou of a truth that the soul, after its separation from the body, will continue to progress until it attaineth the presence of God, in a state and condition which neither the revolution of ages and centuries, nor the changes and chances of this world, can alter. It will endure as long as the Kingdom of God, His sovereignty, His dominion and power will endure. It will manifest the signs of God and His attributes, and will reveal His loving kindness and bounty. The movement of My Pen is stilled when it attempteth to befittingly describe the loftiness and glory of so exalted a station. The honor with which the Hand of Mercy will invest the soul is such as no tongue can adequately reveal, nor any other earthly agency describe. Blessed is the soul which, at the hour of its separation from the body, is sanctified from the vain imaginings of the peoples of the world. Such a soul liveth and moveth in accordance with the Will of its Creator, and entereth the all-highest Paradise. The Maids of Heaven, inmates of the loftiest mansions, will circle around it, and the Prophets of God and His chosen ones will seek its companionship. With them that soul will freely converse, and will recount unto them that which it hath been made to endure in the path of God, the Lord of all worlds. If any man be told that which hath been ordained for such a soul in the worlds of God, the Lord of the throne on high and of earth below, his whole being will instantly blaze out in his great longing to attain that most exalted, that sanctified and resplendent station.... The nature of the soul after death can never be described, nor is it meet and permissible to reveal its whole character to the eyes of men. The Prophets and Messengers of God have been sent down for the sole purpose of guiding mankind to the straight Path of Truth. The purpose underlying Their revelation hath been to educate all men, that they may, at the hour of death, ascend, in the utmost purity and sanctity and with absolute detachment, to the throne of the Most High. The light which these souls radiate is responsible for the progress of the world and the advancement of its peoples. They are like unto leaven which leaveneth the world of being, and constitute the animating force through which the arts and wonders of the world are made manifest. Through them the clouds rain their bounty upon men, and the earth bringeth forth its fruits. All things must needs have a cause, a motive power, an animating principle. These souls and symbols of detachment have provided, and will continue to provide, the supreme moving impulse in the world of being. The world beyond is as different from this world as this world is different from that of the child while still in the womb of its mother. When the soul attaineth the Presence of God, it will assume the form that best befiteth its immortality and is worthy of its celestial habitation.

(Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 155-157)

How does one look forward to the goal of any journey? With hope and with expectation. It is even so with the end of this earthly journey. In the next world, man will find himself freed from many of the disabilities under which he now suffers. Those who have passed on through death,

have a sphere of their own. It is not removed from ours; their work, the work of the Kingdom, is ours; but it is sanctified from what we call 'time and place.' Time with us is measured by the sun. When there is no more sunrise, and no more sunset, that kind of time does not exist for man. Those who have ascended have different attributes from those who are still on earth, yet there is no real separation.

In prayer there is a mingling of station, a mingling of condition. Pray for them as they pray for you! When you do not know it, and are in a receptive attitude, they are able to make suggestions to you, if you are in difficulty. This sometimes happens in sleep. but there is no phenomenal intercourse! That which seems like phenomenal intercourse has another explanation." The questioner exclaimed; "But I have heard a voice!" 'Abdu'l-Bahá said: "Yes, that is possible; we hear voices clearly in dreams. It is not with the physical ear that you heard; the spirit of those that have passed on are freed from sense-life, and do not use physical means. It is not possible to put these great matters into human words; the language of man is the language of children, and man's explanation often leads astray.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London*, p. 95-96)

## **6. What will be the relationship of the believers in the next world?**

And now concerning thy question whether human souls continue to be conscious one of another after their separation from the body. Know thou that the souls of the people of Bahá, who have entered and been established within the Crimson Ark, shall associate and commune intimately one with another, and shall be so closely associated in their lives, their aspirations, their aims and strivings as to be even as one soul.

(Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 169-170)

## **7. What about our using psychic forces here on earth?**

To tamper with psychic forces while in this world interferes with the condition of the soul in the world to come. These forces are real, but are not to be active on this plane.

The child in the womb has its eyes, ears, hands and feet, but these powers are not in activity. The whole purpose of the womb-life is the coming forth into this world. So, the whole purpose of this matrix-world life is the coming forth into the world of Reality, where all these (psychic) forces will be active. They belong to that world.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Baha’i Scriptures*, p. 442)

## **8. What do we need to do to prepare for the next world?**

In the beginning of his human life man was embryonic in the world of the matrix. There he received capacity and endowment for the reality of human existence. The forces and powers necessary for this world were bestowed upon him in that limited condition. In this world he needed eyes; he received them potentially in the other. He needed ears; he obtained them there in readiness and preparation for his new existence. The powers requisite in this world were conferred upon him in the world of the matrix, so that when he entered this realm of real existence he not only possessed all necessary functions and powers but found provision for his material sustenance awaiting him.

Therefore in this world he must prepare himself for the life beyond. That which he needs in the world of the Kingdom must be obtained here. Just as he prepared himself in the world of the matrix by acquiring forces necessary in this sphere of existence, so likewise the indispensable forces of the divine existence must be potentially attained in this world.

What is he in need of in the Kingdom which transcends the life and limitation of this mortal sphere? That world beyond is a world of sanctity and radiance; therefore it is necessary that in this world he should acquire these divine attributes. In that world there is need of spirituality, faith, assurance, the knowledge and love of God. These he must attain in this world so that after his ascension from the earthly to the heavenly Kingdom he shall find all that is needful in that life eternal ready for him.

That divine world is manifestly a world of lights; therefore man has need of illumination here. That is a world of love; the love of God is essential. It is a world of perfections; virtues or perfections must be acquired. That world is vivified by the breaths of the Holy Spirit; in this world we must seek them. That is the Kingdom of life everlasting; it must be attained during this vanishing existence.

By what means can man acquire these things? How shall he obtain these merciful gifts and powers? First, through the knowledge of God. Second, through the love of God. Third, through faith. Fourth, through philanthropic deeds. Fifth, through self-sacrifice. Sixth, through severance from this world. Seventh, through sanctity and holiness. Unless he acquires these forces and attains to these requirements he will surely be deprived of the life that is eternal. But if he possesses the knowledge of God, becomes ignited through the fire of the love of God, witnesses the great and mighty signs of the Kingdom, becomes the cause of love among mankind, and lives in the utmost state of sanctity and holiness, he shall surely attain to second birth, be baptized by the Holy Spirit and enjoy everlasting existence.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*, p. 63-64)

## ACTIVITY

Using the quote in #8 above, complete the following:

1. List what divine attributes we need to acquire in this world for the next world.

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2. List the ways to acquire these divine attributes in this world.

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3. Reflect and then note below the specific actions you will take in your life to acquire these attributes.

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4. Using various art supplies, create something that will support and remind you to be engaged in acquiring these attributes.