

Some Answered Questions, Material and Spiritual Cycles

'Abdu'l-Bahá

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Material and Spiritual Cycles

In this material world, time has changing cycles and place is subject to varying conditions. Seasons follow one another and individuals progress, regress, and develop. At one point it is springtime and at another the autumn season; at one point it is summer and at another it is winter.

The vernal season has rain-laden clouds and musk-scented breezes, life-giving zephyrs, and perfectly mild weather. The rain falls; the sun shines; the reviving winds blow; the world is renewed; and the breath of life reveals itself in plant, animal, and man alike. Earthly beings pass from one condition to another. All things are clothed with a new vesture: The black earth is swathed in abundant grass, mountains and plains don an emerald-green robe, trees bear leaves and blossoms, gardens bring forth flowers and sweet herbs, the world becomes another world, and all creation is imbued with a new life. The earth, which was as a soulless body, finds a new spirit and displays the utmost beauty, grace, and charm. Thus the springtide produces a new life and infuses a new spirit.

Then comes summertime, when the heat intensifies and growth and development manifest the fullness of their power. The life force reaches its plenitude in the vegetable kingdom: Fruits and crops appear, the harvest time arrives, the seed becomes the sheaf, and provision is made for the winter months.

Then comes unrelenting autumn, when unwholesome gales blow, barren winds waft, and the season of dearth and want arrives. All things wither; the pleasant air becomes hard and chill; the breezes of spring turn into the blasts of fall; trees, once green and verdant, become wasted and bare; flowers and herbs fade away in sorrow; and delicate gardens become darksome heaps of dust.

There follows the winter season, when cold winds blow and tempests arise. It snows and storms, it hails and rains, it thunders and lightens, and lethargy and torpor take hold. Plants become as dead, and animals languish and waste away.

When this stage is reached, the life-giving springtide returns once again and a new cycle is inaugurated. Springtime, with its hosts of vitality and grace, and in the plenitude of its greatness and majesty, pitches its tent upon the mountains and plains. Once more the temples of created things are revived and the creation of contingent beings is renewed. Living bodies grow and



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develop, fields and plains become green and verdant, trees put forth blossoms, and last year's spring returns once again in the height of its majesty and glory. The very existence of things must ever depend upon, and be perpetuated through, these cycles and successions. Such are the cycles and revolutions of the material world.

The spiritual cycles associated with the Prophets of God proceed in like manner. That is, the day of the advent of the Holy Manifestations is the spiritual springtime. It is divine splendour and heavenly grace; it is the wafting of the breeze of life and the dawning of the Sun of Truth. Spirits are revived, hearts are refreshed, souls are refined, all existence is stirred into motion, and human realities are rejoiced and grow in attainments and perfections. Universal progress is achieved, the souls are gathered up, and the dead are quickened to life—for it is the day of resurrection, the season of commotion and ferment, the hour of joy and gladness, and the time of rapture and abandon.

That soul-stirring springtime then gives rise to the fruitful summer. The Word of God is proclaimed, His Law is promulgated, and all things reach a state of perfection. The heavenly table is spread, the breezes of holiness perfume the East and the West, the teachings of God conquer the whole earth, souls are educated, laudable results are produced, universal progress is made in the human realm, the divine bounties encompass all things, and the Sun of Truth shines above the horizon of the heavenly Kingdom in the height of its power and intensity.

When that Sun reaches its zenith it begins to decline, and that summer season of the spirit is followed by autumn. Growth and development are arrested; soft breezes turn into blighting winds; and the season of dearth and want dissipates the vitality and beauty of the gardens, the fields, and the bowers. That is, spiritual attractions vanish, divine qualities decay, the radiance of the hearts is dimmed, the spirituality of the souls is dulled, virtues become vices, and sanctity and purity are no more. Of the law of God naught remains but a name, and of the divine teachings naught but an outward form. The foundations of the religion of God are destroyed and annihilated, mere customs and traditions take their place, divisions appear, and steadfastness is changed into perplexity. Spirits die away, hearts wither, and souls languish.

Winter arrives—that is, the chill of ignorance and unawareness envelops the world, and the darkness of wayward and selfish desires prevails. Apathy and defiance ensue, with indolence and folly, baseness and animal qualities, coldness and stone-like torpor, even as in the wintertime when the terrestrial globe is deprived of the influence of the rays of the sun and becomes waste and desolate. Once the realm of minds and thoughts reaches this stage, there remains naught but perpetual death and unending non-existence.

When, however, the winter season has run its course, the spiritual springtime returns again and a new cycle reveals its splendour. The breezes of the spirit blow, the radiant morn breaks, the clouds of the Merciful rain down, the rays of the Sun of Truth shine forth, and the world of being is invested with a new life and arrayed in a wondrous robe. All the signs and bestowals of the former springtime, and perhaps even greater ones, reappear in this new season.

The spiritual cycles of the Sun of Truth, like the cycles of the physical sun, are in a state of perpetual motion and renewal. The Sun of Truth can be likened to the material sun, which rises from many different points. One day it rises from the sign of Cancer and another from the sign

of Libra; one day it casts its rays from the sign of Aquarius and another from that of Aries. Yet the sun is but one sun and one single reality. The possessors of true knowledge are lovers of the sun and are not attached to its dawning points. Those who are endued with insight are seekers of the truth itself, not of its exponents and manifestations. Thus they bow in adoration before the sun, from whatever sign and above whatever horizon it may appear, and seek the truth from any sanctified soul who might reveal it. Such people inevitably discover the truth and are not veiled from the light of the Sun of the divine firmament. Thus the lover of the rays and the seeker of the light will always turn towards the sun, whether it be shining from the sign of Aries, or bestowing its grace from the sign of Cancer, or casting its rays from the sign of Gemini.

But the foolish and the ignorant are enamoured with the zodiacal signs and enraptured with the dawning points, not with the sun itself. When it was in Cancer they turned towards it, but when it passed into Libra they continued, attached as they were to the former sign, to fix their gaze upon and hold fast unto that sign, and thus they deprived themselves of the rays of the sun when once it had moved. Thus the Sun of Truth at one time shed its rays from the sign of Abraham; later it dawned above the sign of Moses and illumined the horizon; and later still it shone forth with the utmost power, heat, and radiance from the sign of Christ. Those who were searching after truth worshipped it wherever they saw it, but those who were attached to Abraham, when once that Sun cast its rays upon Sinai and illumined the reality of Moses, were deprived thereof. And those who clung to Moses, when once the Sun of Truth shed its heavenly splendour in the fullness of its radiance from the point of Christ, were likewise veiled, and so forth.

Therefore one must search after truth, become enraptured and enthralled with any sanctified soul in whom one finds it, and become wholly attracted to the outpouring grace of God. Like a moth, one must be a lover of the light, in whatever lamp it may shine; and like a nightingale, one must be enamoured of the rose, in whatever bower it may bloom.

Were the sun to rise from the west, it would still be the sun. Indeed, from whatever point the sun may rise, it is still the sun. One must not take its appearance to be confined to a single point and regard the other points as deprived. One must not be veiled by its rising in the east and consider the west as the place of its setting and decline. One must seek after the manifold grace of God, search out the divine effulgences, and become enraptured and enthralled with any reality in which they are clearly and plainly found. Consider that, if the Jews had not clung to the horizon of Moses but had fixed their gaze upon the Sun of Truth, they would have undoubtedly beheld that Sun shining in the fullness of its divine splendour in that true dawning point that was Christ. But a thousand times alas! They clung to the name of Moses and deprived themselves of that supernal grace and heavenly splendour.