

Some Answered Questions, True Felicity

'Abdu'l-Bahá

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True Felicity

The honour and exaltation of every existing thing are contingent upon certain causes and conditions.

The excellence, adornment, and perfection of the earth consist in this, that through the outpourings of the vernal showers it should become green and verdant; that plants should spring forth; that flowers and herbs should grow; that blossom-filled trees should produce an abundant yield and bring forth fresh and succulent fruit; that gardens should be arrayed; that meadows should be adorned; that plains and mountains should don an emerald robe; and that fields and bowers, villages and cities should be decked forth. This is the felicity of the mineral world.

The height of exaltation and perfection of the vegetable world consists in this, that a tree should stand tall beside a stream of fresh water, that a gentle breeze should blow and the sun bestow its warmth upon it, that a gardener should tend it, and that day by day it should grow and yield fruit. But its real felicity consists in progressing into the animal and human worlds and in replacing that which has been consumed in the bodies of animals and men.

The exaltation of the animal world is to possess perfect members, organs, and powers, and to have all its needs supplied. This is the height of its glory, honour, and exaltation. So the supreme felicity of an animal resides in a green and verdant meadow, in a flowing stream of the sweetest water, and in a forest brimming with life. If these things are provided, no greater felicity can be imagined for the animal. For example, were a bird to build its nest in a green and verdant forest, in a pleasant height, upon a mighty tree, and atop a lofty branch, and were it to have at its disposal all the seed and water that it requires, then this would constitute its perfect felicity.



But true felicity for the animal consists in passing from the animal world into the human realm, like the microscopic beings that, through the air and the water, enter into the body of man, are assimilated, and replace that which has been consumed in his body. This is the greatest honour and felicity for the animal world, and no greater honour can be conceived for it.

Therefore, it is clear and evident that such material ease, comfort, and abundance are the height of felicity for minerals, plants, and animals. And indeed no wealth, prosperity, comfort, or ease in our material world can equal the wealth of a bird, for it has all the expanse of the fields and mountains for a dwelling place; all the seed and harvests for wealth and sustenance; and all the lands, villages, meadows, pastures, forests, and wilderness for possessions. Now which is the richer—this bird or the wealthiest of men? For no matter how many seeds that bird may gather up or give away, its wealth does not diminish.

Then it is clear that the honour and exaltation of man cannot reside solely in material delights and earthly benefits. This material felicity is wholly secondary, while the exaltation of man resides primarily in such virtues and attainments as are the adornments of the human reality. These consist in divine blessings, heavenly bounties, heartfelt emotions, the love and knowledge of God, the education of the people, the perceptions of the mind, and the discoveries of science. They consist in justice and equity, truthfulness and benevolence, inner courage and innate humanity, safeguarding the rights of others and preserving the sanctity of covenants and agreements. They consist in rectitude of conduct under all circumstances, love of truth under all conditions, self-abnegation for the good of all people, kindness and compassion for all nations, obedience to the teachings of God, service to the heavenly Kingdom, guidance for all mankind, and education for all races and nations. This is the felicity of the human world! This is the exaltation of man in the contingent realm! This is eternal life and heavenly honour!

These gifts, however, do not manifest themselves in the reality of man save through a celestial and divine power and through the heavenly teachings, for they require a supernatural power. Traces of these perfections may well appear in the world of nature, but they are as fleeting and ephemeral as rays of sunlight upon the wall.

As the compassionate Lord has crowned the head of man with such a refulgent diadem, we must strive that its luminous gems may cast their light upon the whole world.