

# Some Answered Questions, The Connection between God and His Manifestations

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Translated. Original Persian



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## The Connection between God and His Manifestations

Question: What is the reality of the Divinity and its connection to the Daysprings of Lordly splendour and the Dawning-Places of the light of the All-Merciful?

Answer: Know that the reality of the Divinity and the nature of the divine Essence is ineffable sanctity and absolute holiness; that is, it is exalted above and sanctified beyond every praise. All the attributes ascribed to the highest degrees of existence are, with regard to this station, mere imagination. The Invisible and Inaccessible can never be known; the absolute Essence can never be described. For the divine Essence is an all-encompassing reality, and all created things are encompassed. The all-encompassing must assuredly be greater than that which is encompassed, and thus the latter can in no wise discover the former or comprehend its reality. No matter how far human minds may advance, even attaining the highest degree of human comprehension, the uttermost limit of this comprehension is to behold the signs and attributes of God in the world of creation and not in the realm of Divinity. For the essence and the attributes of the all-glorious Lord are enshrined in the inaccessible heights of sanctity, and human minds and understandings will never find a path to that station. "The way is barred, and all seeking rejected."

It is evident that whatsoever man understands is a consequence of his existence, and that man is a sign of the All-Merciful: How then can the consequence of the sign encompass the Creator of the sign? That is, how can human understanding, which is a consequence of man's existence, comprehend God? Thus the reality of the Divinity lies hidden from all understanding and is concealed from the minds of all men, and to ascend to that station is in no wise possible.



TRANSLATION

We observe that every lower thing is incapable of comprehending the reality of that which is higher. Thus, no matter how far they may evolve, the stone, the earth, and the tree can never comprehend the reality of man or imagine the powers of sight, hearing, or the other senses, even though the former and the latter alike are created things. How then can man, a mere creature, comprehend the reality of the sanctified Essence of the Creator? No human understanding can approach this station, no utterance can unfold its truth, and no allusion can intimate its mystery. What has the speck of dust to do with the world of sanctity, and what relationship can ever hold between the limited mind and the expanse of the limitless realm? Minds are powerless to comprehend Him, and souls are bewildered as they attempt to describe His reality. "No vision taketh in Him, but He taketh in all vision, and He is the Subtile, the All-Informed!"

Thus, in this connection, every statement and explanation is deficient, every description and characterization is unworthy, every conception is unfounded, and every attempt to contemplate its depths is futile. Yet for that Essence of essences, that Truth of truths, that Mystery of mysteries, there are splendours, effulgences, manifestations, and appearances in the world of existence. The Daysprings of those effulgences, the Dawning-places of those revelations, and the Sources of those manifestations are those Exponents of holiness, those universal Realities and divine Beings Who are the true mirrors of the sanctified Essence of the Divinity. All the perfections, bounties, and splendours of the one true God are plainly visible in the realities of His Holy Manifestations, even as the light of the sun is fully reflected with all its perfections and bounties in a clear and spotless mirror. And if it be said that the mirrors are the manifestations of the sun and the dawning-places of the daystar of the world, this is not meant to imply that the sun has descended from the heights of its sanctity or has become embodied in the mirror, or that that limitless Reality has been confined to this visible plane. God forbid! This is the belief of the anthropomorphists. No, all these descriptions, all these expressions of praise and glory, refer to these holy Manifestations; that is, every description, praise, name, or attribute of God that we mention applies to Them. But no soul has ever fathomed the reality of the Essence of the Divinity so as to be able to intimate, describe, praise, or glorify it. Thus all that the human reality knows, discovers, and understands of the names, attributes, and perfections of God refers to these holy Manifestations and leads nowhere else: "The way is cut off, and all seeking rejected."

Yet we ascribe certain names and attributes to the reality of the Divinity and praise Him for His sight, His hearing, His power, His life and knowledge. We affirm these names and attributes not to affirm the perfections of God, but to deny that He has any imperfections.

When we observe the contingent world, we see that ignorance is imperfection and knowledge is perfection, and thus we say that the sanctified Essence of the Divinity is all-knowing. Weakness is imperfection and power is perfection, and thus we say that

that sanctified and divine Essence is all-powerful. It is not that we can understand His knowledge, His sight, His hearing, His power, or His life as they are in themselves: This is assuredly beyond our comprehension, for the essential names and attributes of God are identical with His Essence, and His Essence is sanctified above all understanding. If the essential attributes were not identical with the Essence, then there would be a multiplicity of pre-existences and the distinction between the Essence and the attributes would therefore also be firmly established and pre-existent. But this would imply an infinite chain of pre-existences, which is an evident error.

It follows that all these names, attributes, laudations, and praises apply to the Manifestations of God Themselves, and that all that we may construe or conceive besides them is sheer delusion, for we can never find a path to the Invisible and Inaccessible. Thus it is said: "All that ye vainly believe to have discerned and expressed in your subtlest terms is but a creature like unto you and returneth unto your own selves." [113]

It is evident that if we attempt to conceive the reality of the Divinity, that conception would be encompassed and our mind would be that which encompasses it—and assuredly that which encompasses is greater than that which is encompassed! Thus it follows that any reality that we might conceive for the Divinity besides that of the holy Manifestations would be mere delusion, as there is no means of approach to that divine Reality which is entirely beyond the reach of the mind. And all that we might conceive is pure imagination.

Consider then how the peoples of the world are circling round their own vain imaginings and worshipping the idols of their own thoughts and fancies, without the least awareness of doing so. They regard these vain imaginings as that Reality which is sanctified above all understanding and exalted beyond every allusion. They consider themselves to be the proponents of the Divine Unity and all others as worshippers of idols, even though idols at least enjoy a mineral existence, whereas the idols of human thoughts and imaginations are sheer illusion and have not even the existence of stones. "Take ye good heed, O people of insight!"

Know that the attributes of perfection, the outpourings of divine grace, and the effulgences of divine revelation shine resplendent in all the Manifestations of God, but that the all-encompassing Word of God—Christ—and His Most Great Name—Bahá'u'lláh—have appeared with a revelation beyond all conception. For not only do They possess all the perfections of the former Manifestations, but They also evince beyond those such perfections as to make all others even as Their followers. Thus the Prophets of Israel were all recipients of divine revelation, and so too was Christ, but what a difference between the revelation of Him Who was the Word of God and the inspiration of an Isaiah, a Jeremiah, or an Elijah!

Consider that light consists in the vibrations of the ether, whereby the nerves of the eye are stimulated and vision is produced. Now, though the vibrations of the ether exist both in the lamp and in the sun, yet what a difference there is between the light of the sun and that of the stars or of the lamp!

The human spirit has certain signs and manifestations in the stage of the embryo, and yet other splendours and expressions in the stages of childhood, adolescence, and maturity. The spirit is one, and yet in the embryonic stage it lacks the powers of sight and hearing, whereas in the stages of adolescence and maturity it appears with the utmost splendour and radiance. In the same way, the seed at the beginning of its growth appears only as a leaf, which is the place of appearance of the vegetable spirit; and in the stage of fruition that same spirit, that is, the power of growth, becomes manifest in the plenitude of its perfection—yet how far is the station of the leaf from that of the fruit! For from the fruit a hundred thousand leaves will in time appear, even though they all grow and develop through the same vegetable spirit. Pause then to reflect upon the difference between the virtues and perfections of Christ and the splendours and effulgences of Bahá'u'lláh, on the one hand, and the virtues of the Prophets of the House of Israel, such as Ezekiel or Samuel, on the other. All were the recipients of divine revelation, but between them there is an immeasurable distance.