

Some Answered Questions, The Appearance of the Spirit and the Mind in Man

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Translated. Original Persian



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The Appearance of the Spirit and the Mind in Man

Question: Did the mind and the spirit appear in the human species from the very beginning of its growth and development on earth, or was it a gradual process? And, if the latter, was this achieved over a short span of time or over a long period?

Answer: The beginning of the formation of man on the terrestrial globe is like the formation of the human embryo in the womb of the mother. The embryo gradually grows and develops until it is born, and thereafter it continues to grow and develop until it reaches the stage of maturity. Although in infancy the signs of the mind and the spirit are already present in man, they do not appear in a state of perfection, and remain incomplete. But when man attains maturity, the mind and the spirit manifest themselves in the utmost perfection.

Likewise, at the beginning of his formation in the matrix of the world, man was like an embryo. He then gradually progressed by degrees, and grew and developed until he reached the stage of maturity, when the mind and the spirit manifested themselves in the utmost perfection. From the beginning of his formation, the mind and the spirit existed, but they were hidden and appeared only later. In the world of the womb, too, the mind and the spirit exist in the embryo but are concealed and appear only afterwards. It is even as the seed: The tree exists within it but is hidden and concealed; when the seed grows and develops, the tree appears in its fullness. In like manner, the growth and development of all beings proceeds by gradual degrees. This is the universal and divinely ordained law and the natural order. The seed does not suddenly become the tree; the embryo does not at once become the man; the mineral



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substance does not in a moment become the stone: No, all these grow and develop gradually until they attain the limit of perfection.

All beings, whether universal or particular, were created perfect and complete from the beginning. The most one can say is that their perfections only become apparent gradually. The law of God is one; the evolution of existence is one; the divine order is one. All beings great and small are subject to one law and one order. Every seed has, from the beginning, all the perfections of the plant. For example, all the vegetable perfections existed in this seed at the outset but were invisible and appeared only gradually. So it is the shoot which first appears from the seed, then the branches, leaves, and blossoms, and finally the fruit. But from the beginning of its formation, all of these existed potentially, albeit invisibly, in the seed. Likewise, from the beginning the embryo possesses all perfections, such as the spirit, the mind, sight, smell, and taste—in a word, all the powers—but they are invisible and become apparent only gradually.

Similarly, the terrestrial globe was created, from the beginning, with all its elements, substances, minerals, parts, and components, but these appeared only gradually: first the minerals, then the plants, then the animals, and finally man. But from the beginning, these kinds and species were latent in the earthly realm and appeared gradually thereafter. For the supreme law of God and the universal natural order encompasses all things and subjects them to its rule. When you consider this universal order, you see that not a single thing reaches the limit of perfection immediately upon coming into existence, but grows and develops gradually until it reaches that stage.