

Some Answered Questions, The Outward and the Inward Powers of Man

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Translated. Original Persian



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The Outward and the Inward Powers of Man

There are five outward material powers in man which are the means of perception—that is, five powers whereby man perceives material things. They are sight, which perceives sensible forms; hearing, which perceives audible sounds; smell, which perceives odours; taste, which perceives edible things; and touch, which is distributed throughout the body and which perceives tactile realities. These five powers perceive external objects.

Man has likewise a number of spiritual powers: the power of imagination, which forms a mental image of things; thought, which reflects upon the realities of things; comprehension, which understands these realities; and memory, which retains whatever man has imagined, thought, and understood. The intermediary between these five outward powers and the inward powers is a common faculty, a sense which mediates between them and which conveys to the inward powers whatever the outward powers have perceived. It is termed the common faculty as it is shared in common between the outward and inward powers.

For instance, sight, which is one of the outward powers, sees and perceives this flower and conveys this perception to the inward power of the common faculty; the common faculty transmits it to the power of imagination, which in turn conceives and forms this image and transmits it to the power of thought; the power of thought reflects upon it and, having apprehended its reality, conveys it to the power of comprehension; the comprehension, once it has understood it, delivers the image of the sensible object to the memory, and the memory preserves it in its repository.

The outward powers are five: the power of sight, of hearing, of taste, of smell, and of touch. The inward powers are also five: the common faculty and the powers of imagination, thought, comprehension, and memory.



TRANSLATION