

Some Answered Questions, The Infinite Perfections of Existence and the Progress of the Soul in the Next World

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Translated. Original Persian



Some Answered Questions, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Fifth Edition, page 265

The Infinite Perfections of Existence and the Progress of the Soul in the Next World

Know that the degrees of existence are finite—the degrees of servitude, of prophethood, and of Divinity—but that the perfections of God and of creation are infinite. If you examine the matter with care, you will see that even in their most outward sense the perfections of existence are infinite; for it is impossible to find any created thing such that nothing superior to it can be imagined. For example, one cannot find in the mineral kingdom a ruby, or in the vegetable kingdom a rose, or in the animal kingdom a nightingale, such that an even better specimen cannot be imagined.

As the grace of God is limitless, so too are the perfections of man. If it were possible for the reality of anything to reach the very summit of perfection, then it would become independent of God and the contingent reality would attain to the station of the necessary reality. But every created thing has been assigned a degree which it can in no wise overpass. So he who occupies the degree of servitude, no matter how far he may progress and acquire endless perfections, can never reach the degree of divine Lordship. The same holds true of all other created things. No matter how far a mineral may progress, it can never acquire the power of growth in the mineral kingdom. No matter how far this flower may progress, it can never manifest the power of sensation while it is in the vegetable kingdom. So this silver mineral can never gain sight or hearing; at most it can progress in its own degree and become a perfect mineral, but it cannot acquire the power of growth or sensation and can never become living: It can only progress in its own degree.

For example, Peter cannot become Christ. At most, he can attain infinite perfections in the degrees of servitude, for every existing reality is capable of progress. As the spirit of man lives forever after casting off this elemental frame, it is, like all existing things, undoubtedly capable of progress, and thus one may pray for a departed soul to advance, to be forgiven, or to be made the recipient of divine favours, bounties, and grace. That is why, in the prayers of Bahá'u'lláh, the forgiveness and pardon of God are implored for those who have ascended to the next world. Moreover, just as people are in need of God in this world, so too are they in need of Him in the next. The creatures are ever in need, and God is ever completely independent of them, whether in this world or in the world to come.



TRANSLATION

The wealth of the next world consists in nearness to God. It is certain therefore that those who enjoy near access to the divine threshold are permitted to intercede, and that this intercession is approved in the sight of God. But intercession in the next world bears no resemblance to intercession in this world. It is an altogether different condition and reality, which cannot be expressed in words.

Should a wealthy man choose to bequeath, upon his death, a portion of his wealth to the poor and needy, perchance this action will bring about divine pardon and forgiveness and result in his progress in the Kingdom of the All-Merciful.

Likewise, parents endure the greatest toil and trouble for their children, and often, by the time the latter have reached the age of maturity, the former have hastened to the world beyond. Rarely do the mother and father enjoy in this world the rewards of all the pain and trouble they have endured for their children. The children must therefore, in return for this pain and trouble, make charitable contributions and perform good works in their name, and implore pardon and forgiveness for their souls. You should therefore, in return for the love and kindness of your father, give to the poor in his name and, with the utmost lowliness and fervour, pray for God's pardon and forgiveness and seek His infinite mercy.

It is even possible for those who have died in sin and unbelief to be transformed, that is, to become the object of divine forgiveness. This is through the grace of God and not through His justice, for grace is to bestow without desert, and justice is to give that which is deserved. As we have the power to pray for those souls here, so too will we have the same power in the next world, the world of the Kingdom. Are not all the creatures in that world the creation of God? They must therefore be able to progress in that world as well. And just as they can seek illumination here through supplication, so too can they plead there for forgiveness and seek illumination through prayer and supplication. Thus, as souls can progress in this world through their entreaties and supplications, or through the prayers of holy souls, so too after death can they progress through their own prayers and supplications, particularly if they become the object of the intercession of the holy Manifestations.