

Some Answered Questions, The Subsistence of the Rational Soul after the Death of the Body

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Translated. Original Persian



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The Subsistence of the Rational Soul after the Death of the Body

Question: After the body has been cast off and the spirit has taken flight, through what will the rational soul subsist? Let us suppose that those souls who are aided by the outpourings of the Holy Spirit attain true existence and everlasting life. But what becomes of those rational souls who are veiled from God?

Answer: Some hold that the body is the substance and that it subsists by itself, and that the spirit is an accident which subsists through the substance of the body. The truth, however, is that the rational soul is the substance through which the body subsists. If the accident—the body—is destroyed, the substance—the spirit—remains.

Secondly, the rational soul, or the human spirit, does not subsist through this body by inherence—that is to say, it does not enter it; for inherence and entrance are characteristics of bodies, and the rational soul is sanctified above this. It never entered this body to begin with, that it should require, upon leaving it, some other abode. No, the connection of the spirit with the body is even as the connection of this lamp with a mirror. If the mirror is polished and perfected, the light of the lamp appears therein, and if the mirror is broken or covered with dust, the light remains concealed.

The rational soul—the human spirit—did not descend into this body or subsist through it to begin with, that it should require some substance to depend upon after the constituent parts of the body have decomposed. On the contrary, the rational soul is the substance upon which the body depends. The rational soul is endowed from the beginning with individuality; it does not acquire it through the intermediary of the body. At most, what can be said is that the individuality and identity of the rational soul may be strengthened in this world, and that the soul may either progress and attain to the degrees of perfection or remain in the lowest abyss of ignorance and be veiled from and deprived of beholding the signs of God.

Question: Through what means can the spirit of man—the rational soul—progress after departing from this mortal world?

Answer: The progress of the human spirit in the divine world, after its connection with the physical body has been severed, is either purely through the grace and bounty of the Lord, or



TRANSLATION

through the intercession and prayers of other human souls, or through the significant contributions and charitable deeds which are offered in its name.