

Some Answered Questions, Eternal Life and Entrance into the Kingdom of God

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Translated. Original Persian



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Eternal Life and Entrance into the Kingdom of God

You have asked concerning eternal life and entrance into the Kingdom. The Kingdom is outwardly referred to as “heaven”, but this is an expression and likeness and not a factual statement or reality. For the Kingdom is not a material location but is sanctified above time and place. It is a spiritual realm, a divine world, and it is the seat of the sovereignty of the almighty Lord. It is exalted above bodies and all that is corporeal, and it is freed and sanctified from the idle conjectures of men. For to be confined to place is a characteristic of bodies and not of spirits: Time and place encompass the body, not the mind and the soul.

Observe that the body of man abides in a limited space and occupies no more than two spans of earth. But the spirit and mind of man traverses all countries and regions and even the limitless expanse of the heavens; it encompasses all existence and makes discoveries in the spheres above and in the infinite reaches of the universe. This is because the spirit has no place: It is a placeless reality, and for the spirit earth and heaven are the same, since it makes discoveries in both. But the body is confined in space and is unaware of that which lies beyond.

Now, life is of two kinds: that of the body and that of the spirit. The life of the body consists in material life, but the life of the spirit is a heavenly existence which consists in receiving the grace of the Divine Spirit and being quickened through the breath of the Holy Spirit. Although material life has existence, yet in the eyes of holy and spiritually minded souls it is utter non-existence and death. Thus man exists and so does this stone, but what a difference between the existence of man and that of the stone! Although the stone exists, in relation to the existence of man it is non-existent.



TRANSLATION

What is meant by “eternal life” is receiving the grace of the Holy Spirit, even as a flower partakes of the gifts and breezes of spring. Observe that in the beginning this flower had a purely mineral life, yet through the advent of springtime, the outpouring of its vernal showers, and the heat of its shining sun, it found another life and appeared with the utmost vitality, delicacy, and fragrance. Compared to its latter life, the former life of the flower was even as death.

Our meaning is that the life of the Kingdom is the life of the spirit, and that it is eternal and sanctified above time and place, even as the human spirit, which is placeless. For were you to search throughout the human body, you would be unable to find a specific place or location for the spirit. The spirit is absolutely placeless and immaterial, but it has a connection with the body, even as the sun has a connection with this mirror: The sun occupies no place within the mirror, but it has a connection with it. In the same way, the world of the Kingdom is sanctified above all that can be seen by the eye or perceived by the other senses, such as hearing, smell, taste, or touch.

Where then can one find in man this mind that resides in him and whose existence is beyond doubt? Were you to examine the human body with the eye, the ear, or the other senses, you would fail to find it, even though it clearly exists. The mind, therefore, has no place, although it is connected with the brain. So it is with the Kingdom. Likewise, love has no place, but it is connected with the heart. And in the same way, the Kingdom has no place, but it is connected with the human reality.

Entrance into the Kingdom is through the love of God, through detachment, through sanctity and holiness, through truthfulness and purity, through steadfastness and faithfulness, and through self-sacrifice.

It follows clearly from these explanations that man is immortal and everlasting. Those who believe in God, who cherish His love, and who have attained certitude, enjoy that blessed life which we call life eternal; but those who are veiled from God, though they be endowed with life, yet they live in darkness and their life, in comparison with that of the believers, is non-existence.

Thus, the eye is alive and so too is the fingernail, but the life of the fingernail in relation to that of the eye is non-existence. The stone and the man both exist, but in relation to man the stone has no existence or being. For when man dies and his body is disintegrated and destroyed, it becomes like the stone, the earth, and the mineral. It is therefore clear that even though the mineral exists, it is non-existent in relation to man.

Likewise, those souls who are veiled from God, although they exist both in this world and in the world to come, are non-existent and forgotten in relation to the sanctified existence of the children of the divine Kingdom.