

Talk at Home of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur J. Parsons

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Original English



123

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Every composition is necessarily subject to destruction or disintegration. For instance, this flower is a composition of various elements; its decomposition is inevitable. When this composed form undergoes decomposition — in other words, when these elements separate and disintegrate — that is what we call the death of the flower. For inasmuch as it is composed of single elements, the grouping of multitudinous cellular atoms, it is subject to disintegration. This is the mortality of the flower. Similarly, the body of man is composed of various elements. This composition of the elements has been given life. When these elements disintegrate, life disappears, and that is death. Existence in the various planes, or kingdoms, implies composition; and nonexistence, or death, is decomposition.

But the inner and essential reality of man is not composed of elements and, therefore, cannot be decomposed. It is not an elemental composition subject to disintegration or death. A true and fundamental scientific principle is that an element itself never dies and cannot be destroyed for the reason that it is single and not composed. Therefore, it is not subject to decomposition.

Another evidence or proof of the indestructibility of the reality of man is that it is not affected by the changes of the physical body. These changing conditions of the bodily composition are definite and continual. At one time it is normal, at another time



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abnormal. Now it is weak, now strong. It suffers injury, a hand may be amputated, a limb broken, an eye destroyed, an ear deafened or some defect appear in a certain organ, but these changes do not affect the human spirit, the soul of man. If the body becomes stout or thin, decrepit or strong, the spirit or soul is unaffected thereby. If a part of the bodily organism be destroyed, even if it be dismembered completely, the soul continues to function, showing that no changes of the body affect its operation. We have seen that death and mortality are synonymous with change and disintegration. As we find the soul unaffected by this change and disintegration of the body, we, therefore, prove it to be immortal; for that which is changeable is accidental, evanescent.

Furthermore, this immortal human soul is endowed with two means of perception: One is effected through instrumentality; the other, independently. For instance, the soul sees through the instrumentality of the eye, hears with the ear, smells through the nostrils and grasps objects with the hands. These are the actions or operations of the soul through instruments. But in the world of dreams the soul sees when the eyes are closed. The man is seemingly dead, lies there as dead; the ears do not hear, yet he hears. The body lies there, but he — that is, the soul — travels, sees, observes. All the instruments of the body are inactive, all the functions seemingly useless. Notwithstanding this, there is an immediate and vivid perception by the soul. Exhilaration is experienced. The soul journeys, perceives, senses. It often happens that a man in a state of wakefulness has not been able to accomplish the solution of a problem, and when he goes to sleep, he will reach that solution in a dream. How often it has happened that he has dreamed, even as the prophets have dreamed, of the future; and events which have thus been foreshadowed have come to pass literally.

Therefore, we learn that the immortality of the soul, or spirit, is not contingent or dependent upon the so-called immortality of the body, because the body in the quiescent state, in the time of sleep, may be as dead, unconscious, senseless; but the soul, or spirit, is possessed of perceptions, sensations, motion and discovery. Even inspiration and revelation are obtained by it. How many were the prophets who have had marvelous visions of the future while in that state! The spirit, or human soul, is the rider; and the body is only the steed. If anything affects the steed, the rider is not affected by it. The spirit may be likened to the light within the lantern. The body is simply the outer lantern. If the lantern should break, the light is ever the same because the light could shine even without the lantern. The spirit can conduct its affairs without the body. In the world of dreams it is precisely as this light without the chimney glass. It can shine without the glass. The human soul by means of this body can perform its operations, and without the body it can, likewise, have its control. Therefore, if the body be subject to [pg 417] disintegration, the spirit is not affected by these changes or transformations.

It is an evident fact that the body does not conduct the process of intellection or thought radiation. It is only the medium of the grossest sensations. This human body is purely animal in type and, like the animal, it is subject only to the grosser sensibilities. It is utterly bereft of ideation or intellection, utterly incapable of the processes of reason. The animal perceives what its eye sees and judges what the ear hears. It perceives according to its animal senses, the scent of the nostril, the taste of the tongue. It comprehends not beyond its sense perceptions. The animal is confined to its feelings and sensibilities, a prisoner of the senses. Beyond these, in the finer higher processes of reasoning, the animal cannot go. For instance, the animal cannot conceive of the earth whereon it stands as a spherical object because the spherical shape of the earth is a matter of conscious reasoning. It is not a matter of sense perception. An animal in Europe could not foresee and plan the discovery of America as Columbus did. It could not take the globe map of the earth and scan the various continents, saying, "This is the eastern hemisphere; there must be another, the western hemisphere." No animal could know these things for the reason that they are referable to intellection. The animal cannot become aware of the fact that the earth is revolving and the sun stationary. Only processes of reasoning can come to this conclusion. The outward eye sees the sun as revolving. It mistakes the stars and the planets as moving about the earth. But reason decides their orbit, knows that the earth is moving and the other worlds fixed, knows that the sun is the solar center and ever occupies the same place, proves that it is the earth which revolves around it. Such conclusions are entirely intellectual, not according to the senses.

Hence, we know that in the human organism there is a center of intellection, a power of intellectual operation which is the discoverer of the realities of things. This power can unravel the mysteries of phenomena. It can comprehend that which is knowable, not alone the sensible. All the inventions are its products. For all of these have been the mysteries of nature. There was a time when the energy of electricity was a mystery of nature, but that collective reality which is manifest in man discovered this mystery of nature, this latent force. Having discovered it, man brought it into the plane of visibility. All the sciences which we now utilize are the products of that wondrous reality. But the animal is deprived of its operations. The arts we now enjoy are the expressions of that marvelous [pg 418] reality. The animal is bereft of them because these conscious realities are peculiar to the human spirit. All the traces are the outcoming of the perfections which comprehend realities. The animal is bereft of these.

Such evidences prove conclusively that man is possessed of two realities, as it were: a reality connected with the senses which is shared in common with the animal, and another reality which is conscious and ideal in character. This latter is the collective reality and the discoverer of mysteries. That which discovers the realities of things undoubtedly is not of the elemental substances. It is distinct from them. For mortality and disintegration are the properties inherent in compositions and are referable to

things which are subject to sense perceptions, but the collective reality in man, not being so subject, is the discoverer of things. Therefore, it is real, eternal and does not have to undergo changes and transformations.

There are many other proofs concerning this vital subject, but I shall conclude with the words of Jesus Christ: "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit" and is acceptable in the Kingdom of God. This means that just as in the first birth the fetus comes forth from the matrix of the mother into the conditions of the human kingdom, even so the spirit of man must be born out of the matrix of naturalism, out of the baser nature, in order that he may comprehend the great things of the Kingdom of God. He must be born out of mother earth to find the everlasting life. And this collective reality, or spirit, of man, being born out of the world of nature, possessing the attributes of God, will continue to live forever in the eternal realm.

