

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

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Original English



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What is the reality of Divinity, or what do we understand by God?

When we consider the world of existence, we find that the essential reality underlying any given phenomenon is unknown. Phenomenal, or created, things are known to us only by their attributes. Man discerns only manifestations, or attributes, of objects, while the identity, or reality, of them remains hidden. For example, we call this object a flower. What do we understand by this name and title? We understand that the qualities appertaining to this organism are perceptible to us, but the intrinsic elemental reality, or identity, of it remains unknown. Its external appearance and manifest attributes are knowable; but the inner being, the underlying reality or intrinsic identity, is still beyond the ken and perception of our human powers. Inasmuch as the realities of material phenomena are impenetrable and unknowable and are only apprehended through their properties or qualities, how much more [pg 422] this is true concerning the reality of Divinity, that holy essential reality which transcends the plane and grasp of mind and man? That which comes within human grasp is finite, and in relation to it we are infinite because we can grasp it. Assuredly, the finite is lesser than the infinite; the infinite is ever greater. If the reality of Divinity could be contained within the grasp of human mind, it would after all be possessed of an intellectual existence only — a mere intellectual concept without extraneous existence, an image or likeness which had come within the comprehension of finite intellect. The mind of man would be



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transcendental thereto. How could it be possible that an image which has only intellectual existence is the reality of Divinity, which is infinite? Therefore, the reality of Divinity in its identity is beyond the range of human intellection because the human mind, the human intellect, the human thought are limited, whereas the reality of Divinity is unlimited. How can the limited grasp the unlimited and transcend it? Impossible. The unlimited always comprehends the limited. The limited can never comprehend, surround nor take in the unlimited. Therefore, every concept of Divinity which has come within the intellection of a human being is finite, or limited, and is a pure product of imagination, whereas the reality of Divinity is holy and sacred above and beyond all such concepts.

But the question may be asked: How shall we know God? We know Him by His attributes. We know Him by His signs. We know Him by His names. We know not what the reality of the sun is, but we know the sun by the ray, by the heat, by its efficacy and penetration. We recognize the sun by its bounty and effulgence, but as to what constitutes the reality of the solar energy, that is unknowable to us. The attributes characterizing the sun, however, are knowable. If we wish to come in touch with the reality of Divinity, we do so by recognizing its phenomena, its attributes and traces, which are widespread in the universe. All things in the world of phenomena are expressive of that one reality. Its lights are shining, its heat is manifest, its power is expressive, and its education, or training, resplendent everywhere. What proof could there be greater than that of its functioning or its attributes which are manifest? This plant or this flower — we ask: Does it exist or not? Can this plant — this flower — comprehend the reality of man? Can it put itself in touch with the human existence or reality? Evidently not. It is entirely out of tune with the human kingdom; it is not possessed of the capacity, although both man and the flower have been created. But the difference in the degrees between the vegetable and the human is ever a hindrance, an obstacle. Inasmuch as the [pg 423] degree of capacity appertaining to this plant is inferior to our human kingdom, it is entirely impossible for the plant, which is inferior, to comprehend man, who is superior, although both are accidental, or created. We are created; likewise, this plant is existent, this mineral exists, this wood exists. But can this flooring here comprehend those who are standing upon it? It cannot, because sight and hearing are properties or faculties belonging to a higher kingdom than the mineral. The difference between these two kingdoms, the vast difference between the mineral kingdom and the human kingdom, is a hindrance to comprehension.

How, then, can the reality of man, which is accidental, ever comprehend the Reality of God, which is eternal? It is self-evidently an impossibility. Hence we can observe the traces and attributes of God, which are resplendent in all phenomena and shining as the sun at midday, and know surely that these emanate from an infinite source. We know that they come from a source which is infinite indeed.

Furthermore, it is a philosophical principle that the existence of phenomena implies composition and that mortality, or nonexistence, is equivalent to decomposition. For example, certain elements have come together, and as a result of that composition man is here. Certain elements have entered into the structure of this flower. Certain organic or cellular elements have been utilized in the composition of every animal organism. Therefore, we can state that existence necessitates composition, and death is another expression for decomposition. When there is disintegration amongst these composing elements, that is death; that is mortality. The elements which have gone into the body of this flower and which have given existence to this form and shape will finally disintegrate; this beautiful organism will decompose; and this we call mortality, death. Consequently, the conclusion is that life means composition, and death is equivalent to decomposition. On this account the materialists are of the opinion that life is the mere conjoining of elemental substances into myriad forms and shapes. The materialist comes to the conclusion that life, in other words, means composition; that wherever we find single elements combined in aggregate form, there we behold the phenomena of organic life; that every organic composition is organic life. Now if life means composition of elements, then the materialist may come to the conclusion of the nonnecessity of a composer, the nonnecessity of a creator; for composition is all there is to it, and that is accomplished by adhesion or cohesion. In response to this we say that composition must needs be of three kinds: One form of composition [pg 424] is termed philosophically the accidental, another the involuntary, and a third the voluntary. As to the first, or accidental, composition: This would signify that certain elements through inherent qualities and powers of attraction or affinity have been gathered together, have blended, and so composed a certain form, being or organism. This can be proven to be false; for composition is an effect, and philosophically no effect is conceivable without causation. No effect can be conceived of without some primal cause. For example, this heat is an effect; but that energy which gives forth this phenomenon of heat is the cause. This light is an effect, but back of it is the energy which is the cause. Is it possible for this light to be separated from the energy whereof it is a property? That is impossible and inconceivable. It is self-evidently false. Accidental composition is, therefore, a false theory and may be excluded.

As to the second form of composition — involuntary: This means that each element has within itself as an inherent property the power of composition. For example, the inherent quality of fire is burning, or heat; heat is a property of fire. Humidity is the inherent nature or property of water. You cannot conceive H₂O, which is the chemical form of water, without having humidity associated; for that is an inherent quality of water. The power of attraction has as its function attractive, or magnetic, qualities. We cannot separate attraction from that power. The power of repulsion has as its function repelling — sending off. You cannot separate the effect from the cause. If these premises be true — and they are self-evident — then it would be impossible for a composite being, for the elements which have gone into the makeup of a composite

organism, ever to be decomposed because the inherent nature of each element would be to hold fast together. As fire cannot be separated from heat, likewise the elemental being could not be subjected to decomposition, and this does not hold true because we see decomposition everywhere. Hence this theory is untrue, inasmuch as we observe that after each composition there is a process of decomposition which forever ends it. By this we learn that composition as regards phenomena is neither accidental nor involuntary.

Then what have we left as a form of composition? It is the voluntary form of composition, which means that composition is effected through a superior will, that there is will expressed in this motive or action. It is thus proved that the existence of phenomena is effected through the eternal Will, the Will of the Living, Eternal and Self-subsistent, and this is a rational proof concerning composition whereof there is no doubt or uncertainty. Furthermore, it [pg 425] is quite evident that our kind of life, our form of existence, is limited and that the reality of all accidental phenomena is, likewise, limited. The very fact that the reality of phenomena is limited well indicates that there must needs be an unlimited reality, for were there no unlimited, or infinite, reality in life, the finite being of objects would be inconceivable. To make it plainer for you, if there were no wealth in the world, you would not have poverty. If there were no light in the world, you could not conceive of darkness, for we know things philosophically by their antitheses. We know, for example, that poverty is the lack of wealth. Where there is no knowledge, there is no ignorance. What is ignorance? It is the absence of knowledge. Therefore, our limited existence is a conclusive proof that there is an unlimited reality, and this is a shining proof and evident argument. Many are the proofs concerning this matter, but there is not time to go into the subject further.

This is our last evening, and I ask God that His confirmations may encompass you, that your hearts may become radiant, that your eyes become illumined through witnessing the signs of God, that your ears hearken to the anthems of heaven, that your faces be set aglow with the radiant light of the Word of God. May you all be united, may you be agreed, may you serve the solidarity of mankind. May you be well-wishers of all humanity. May you be assistants of every poor one. May you be nurses for the sick. May you be sources of comfort to the broken in heart. May you be a refuge for the wanderer. May you be a source of courage to the affrighted one. Thus, through the favor and assistance of God may the standard of the happiness of humanity be held aloft in the center of the world and the ensign of universal agreement be unfurled.

