

**“The immortality of the spirit is the
fundamental basis of Divine Religions.”**

—'ABDU'L-BAHA

**THE HUMAN SOUL
AND
ITS IMMORTALITY**

A handwritten signature in black ink, slanted upwards from left to right. The signature appears to be 'Ali Akbar Furutan' written in a cursive style. There is a small mark at the beginning of the signature.

By Ali Akbar Furutan

*Translated into English from the
original Persian.*

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CHAPTER I

Divisions and Definition of the Spirit

The Sages and thinkers of old, have often divided the Spirit, or the living soul¹, into three categories.

1. The Vegetable Spirit. 2. The Animal Spirit. 3. The Human Spirit. But even then, some ancient philosophers believed that the mineral also possessed life. For instance, Plotinus² has regarded the Soul to be the cause of life and movement, and that all moving objects are animated by a Spirit. In this way it is concluded that having an intrinsic movement, the mineral is also possessed of a Spirit.

In past ages, men of insight and learning gradually became aware, and were assured, that the mineral also had a Spirit. For instance Fechner³ has considered that all creation that has movement, has a Spirit; while Jean Marie Guysu⁴ ascribes life to the mineral, but with the qualification that its life is feeble.

- (1) In this connection the "Spirit or the living Soul" denotes the animating force which is the origin and the cause of all actions.
- (2) Plotinus the celebrated Greek philosopher. (Died-270 A.D.)
- (3) German philosopher. (1810-1887)
- (4) French philosopher. (1854-1888)

In His Tablet to Professor Forel, Abdu'l-Baha states :

"...The spirit . however possesseth various grades and stations. As to the existence of spirit in the mineral; it is indubitable that minerals are endowed with a spirit and life according to the requirements of that stage. This unknown secret, too, hath become known unto the materialists who now maintain that all beings are endowed with life, even as He saith in the Quran, "All things are living". In the vegetable world, too, there is the power of growth, and that power of growth is the spirit. In the animal world there is the sense of feeling, but in the human world there is an all-embracing power..."

Elucidating the degrees of Spirit, Abdu'l-Baha in "Some Answered Questions" makes the following definitions :

"The vegetable spirit : This is a power which results from the combination of elements and the mingling of substances by the decree of the Supreme God, and from the influence, the effect, and connection of other existences. To use another figure, electricity results from the combination of elements, and when these substances and elements are seperated from each other, the power of growth also ceases to exist.

*"The animal spirit:...*also results from the mingling and combination of elements, but this combination is more complete, and through the decree of the Almighty Lord a perfect mingling is obtained, and the animal spirit, in other words, the power of the senses, is produced...After the dissociation and decomposition of the combined elements, this spirit also

will naturally disappear...

"The human spirit : may be likened to the bounty of the sun shining on crystal...Nevertheless, if the crystal breaks, the bounty of the sun continues ; and if the crystal is destroyed or ceases to exist, no harm will happen to the bounty of the sun which is everlasting. This spirit has the power of discovery ; it encompasses all things. All these wonderful signs, these scientific discoveries, great enterprises and important historical events...are due to it. From the realm of the invisible and hidden, through spiritual power, it brought them to the plane of the visible."

CHAPTER II

Proofs of the existence of the Human Soul.

First Proof

"...The theologians say...Though man has powers and outer senses in common with the animal, yet an extraordinary power exists in him of which the animal is bereft. The sciences, arts, inventions, trades, and discoveries of realities, are the results of this spiritual power. This is a power which encompasses all things, comprehends their realities, discovers all the hidden mysteries of beings, and through this knowledge controls them: it even perceives things which do not exist outwardly; that is to say, intellectual realities which are not sensible, and which have no outward existence, because they are invisible; so it comprehends the mind, the spirit, the qualities, the characters, the love and sorrow of man, which are intellectual realities. Moreover, these existing sciences, arts, laws, and endless inventions of man at one time were invisible, mysterious, and hidden secrets; it is only the all-encompassing human power which has discovered and brought them out from the plane of the invisible to the plane of the visible...If there were not in man a power different from any of those of the animals, the latter would be superior to man in inventions and the

comprehension of realities. Therefore... man has a gift which the animal does not possess."⁵

Second Proof

"...Man from known things proves unknown things, and discovers unknown truths. For example, man sees the curve of the horizon, and from this he infers the roundness of the earth...This is impossible for the animal to perceive. In the same way, it cannot understand that the sun is the centre and that the earth revolves around it. The animal is the captive of the senses and bound by them; all that is beyond the senses, the things that they do not control, the animal can never understand; although in the outer senses it is greater than man. HENCE IT IS PROVED AND VERIFIED THAT IN MAN THERE IS A POWER OF DISCOVERY BY WHICH HE IS DISTINGUISHED FROM THE ANIMALS AND THIS IS THE SPIRIT OF MAN..."⁶

Third Proof

"...All things are subdued by the hand of man; he can resist nature while all other creatures are captives of nature, none can depart from her requirements. Man alone can resist nature. Nature attracts bodies to the centre of the earth; man through mechanical means goes far from it, and soars in the air. Nature prevents man from crossing the seas, man builds a ship, and he travels and voyages across the great ocean...All this is contrary to nature...What then, is the power in this small body of man

(5) "Some Answered Questions"

(6) "Some Answered Questions"

which encompasses all this ? What is this ruling power by which he subdues all things ?..."⁷

Fourth Proof

"...Man hath the powers of will and understanding, but nature hath them not. Nature is constrained, man is free. Nature is bereft of understanding, man understandeth. Nature is unaware of past events, but man is aware of them. Nature forecasteth not the future ; man by his discerning power seeth that which is to come. Nature hath no consciousness of itself, man knoweth about all things.

"Should any one suppose that man is but a part of the world of nature, and he being endowed with these perfections, these being but manifestations of the world of nature, and thus nature is the originator of these perfections and is not deprived therefrom, to him we make reply and say : the part dependeth upon the whole; the part cannot possess perfections whereof the whole is deprived..."⁸

Fifth Proof

Man often consults with himself ; he counsels and withholds himself from entry into selfish desires, anger and rage. It is obvious that this counsellor is distinct from limbs and organs of the body.

That comprehending, wise and intelligent entity, which acts as an excellent adviser and a skilful director, guiding the person and protecting the body from physical dangers and spiritual pitfalls, is the Rational Soul ; the reality of man, which

(7) "Some Answered Questions"

(8) 'Tablet to Dr. Forel' by 'Abdu'l-Baha

is totally different from, and completely independent of, all limbs and organs of the body.

Sixth Proof

In dreams, sometimes, a person may discover solutions to difficult problems, which seemed beyond his capacity to visualise in wakefulness. And yet when asleep, the body is fully resting and all the powers and senses are inoperative and idle.

The discovery, in one's dreams, of some abstruse mysteries, would have been impossible if it were not for the existence of a spiritual reality other than the body.

Seventh Proof

In his book, "The Miracle of the Spirit", Dr. Karl Schleich,⁹ an eminent German surgeon, refutes with ample proofs and testimonies, the arguments of some materialistic scientists who regard the brain as the focal point and even the cause of such things as love, emotions, thoughts and will. Whereas, a surgeon removes some of the brain and disposes of a great quantity of this grey substance, yet the personality, the identity and the reality of the patient remain unaltered. This notable surgeon has testified that frequently he had removed some part of the brain, and the patient had remained in perfect health.

Eighth Proof

The shape of an object is dependent on the object itself. No object can take on a different shape unless the original one is first removed. For example, an article

(9) Born 1859 A.D.

cannot remain both a triangle and a square at the same time. One has to alter the contour of a triangle in order to create a square. This is a characteristic of matter. The human spirit becomes more enriched in capacity and perceptivity when it becomes a carrier for additional learning. It is capable of acquiring different forms at the same time. For instance, in the store of human knowledge all geometrical shapes exist simultaneously ; at every moment one can refer to them and yet the soul remains unaltered and unaffected. Therefore we conclude that the soul is not a physical object and is independent of the body.

Ninth Proof

Some people perform all kinds of work while asleep with their eyes closed. For example they write, or walk down the stairs and along narrow pathways without the slightest deviation or faltering. This condition is technically known as "somnambulism". Therefore there must be a spiritual force within man, which manifests such marvellous phenomena. It is the spiritual force that causes man to see without eyes ; to hear without ears ; to solve difficult problems when his faculties are inoperative ; to walk in twisting and unsafe pathways ; to control without any physical contact the influence of the outside environment ; to suppress the sensitivity of the nervous system and to produce various physical and chemical changes in the body.

We cannot find any explanation for this extraordinary behaviour. Scientists have clearly acknowledged their failure to discover the cause of all this.

Scientists with materialistic persuasion have described hypnotism as follows: "Hypnotism is an act of inducement, which affects the hypnotised person through the hypnotiser. It results in a hypnotic sleep, whereby the hypnotised carries out the instructions of the hypnotiser, without the former using his own brain or will power."

How can such affairs take place without the existence of a spiritual non-material force ?

Man must possess an intangible reality which we regard as the spirit or soul ; and it is this reality which manifests such amazing and fascinating phenomena.

In concluding this chapter, the readers are asked to note the following points :

In this material world, every lower being is unable to understand the creatures of a higher grade. For example, the mineral kingdom cannot comprehend the vegetable kingdom ; the vegetable is unaware of the animal world ; and the animal cannot fathom the station of man. It is the same within human society, where men of a lower calibre cannot comprehend the knowledge and virtues of greater souls.

Now, if through our limitations—both physical and spiritual—we fail to understand the worlds of God, the reality of man and all the spiritual values, we should not then try to introduce into our minds a negative attitude.

On the contrary, through concentration of effort ; through perseverance ; through prayer and meditation ; and through con-

templation on the words of the Manifestations of God, we should endeavour to discover and understand spiritual realities. Indeed many people through perseverance and abstinence from selfish desires, have attained to very great heights of spirituality and have set an example in the field of virtue and nobility.

CHAPTER III

Proofs of the Immortality of the Human Soul.

First Proof

"...No sign can come from a non-existing thing ; that is to say, it is impossible that from absolute non-existence signs should appear, for the signs are the consequence of an existence, and the consequence depends upon the existence of the principle. So, from a non-existing sun no light can radiate, from a non-existing sea no waves appear, from a non-existing cloud no rain falls ; a non-existing tree yields no fruit ; a non-existing man neither manifests nor produces anything. Therefore as long as signs of existence appear, they are a proof that the possessor of the sign is existent.

Consider that to-day the Kingdom of Christ exists : from a non-existing king how could such a great kingdom be manifested ?..."¹⁰

Second Proof

"...The power and the comprehension of the human spirit are of two kinds :

"...One way is through instruments and organs : thus with this eye it sees, with

(10) "Some Answered Questions"

this ear it hears, with this tongue it talks ... The other manifestation of the powers and actions of the spirit is without instruments and organs. For example, in the state of sleep without eyes it sees, without an ear it hears, without a tongue it speaks, without feet it runs...How often it happens that it sees a dream in the world of sleep, and its significance becomes apparent a year afterwards in corresponding events. In the same way, how many times it happens that a question which one cannot solve in the world of wakefulness, is solved in the world of dreams...The spirit of man is not in the body, because it is freed and sanctified from entrance and exit, which are bodily conditions. The connection of the spirit with the body is like that of the sun with the mirror...Therefore...the spirit is different from the body, and that its duration is independent of that of the body..."¹¹

Third Proof

"...The body becomes weak, or heavy, or sick, or it finds health ; it becomes tired or rested...briefly, the body may have all the imperfections. Nevertheless, the spirit in its original state, in its own spiritual perception, will be eternal and perpetual ; it neither finds any imperfection nor will it become crippled..."¹²

For example, many famous scholars have had prolonged spells of illness during which they suffered agonising pains for long periods ; and yet during moments of relief, they have continued their studies and demonstrated the genius and power of their minds. Now,

(11) "Some Answered Questions"

(12) "Some Answered Questions"

if the spirit and the body were to be one and the same thing ; or the spirit a property of matter, then man's spiritual powers, like a lamp whose light grows dim as the oil runs out, should diminish along with bodily weakness and infirmity.

Fourth Proof

The body is subject to the laws of nature. The spirit is not. The physical and chemical laws do not control the rational soul. The love for beauty, the social sentiments, human affection, friendship, and intelligence, all these and other manifestations of the soul are not under the control of the laws of nature. Therefore the spirit is different from the body, and the immortality of the soul does not depend upon it.

Fifth Proof

The working of the human body is subject to the principle of metabolism ; *i.e.* the specific chemical conversion of substances within the body. When the body is completely resting the ratio between oxygen inhaled, and carbon dioxide exhaled, constitutes the standard measure of metabolism. Against this standard one can assess different degrees of metabolism.

For example, metabolism increases when through the expansion and contraction of muscles, the body performs some physical work.

The exception to this however, as attested by great scientists, among them Dr. Alexis Carrel, is the act of meditation which is regarded as one of the three manifestations of the human spirit.

The gist of Dr. Carrel's conclusions is as follows : strangely, mental work does

not increase metabolism...It is surprising that mental energy used during meditation—meditation which brings about such profound changes on the surface of the earth, or causes the discovery of new worlds in this limitless space—is so insignificant that one cannot even measure it.

The most profound mental activity does not raise the measure of metabolism, as would, the contraction of a muscle when lifting a book from the table. The mental exertions of Newton, the inspired works of Beethoven, the deep thoughts and profound studies of Pasteur, did not increase the degree of metabolism, as the exertions of a few microscopic creatures, or a slight increase in the activity of the thyroid glands.

Sixth Proof

According to the law of nature the nervous system feels pain. When pain becomes intolerable man's endurance comes to an end, and often under such circumstances he will collapse and faint. But there have been, and will be, men who through the power of faith, can so master their nervous system as to overcome pain. These men willingly endure all forms of calamity and affliction with joy and gratitude. In the path of their beliefs they welcome death and, with feelings of ecstasy and rapture, rush to the scene of martyrdom. The history of religions is replete with such moving accounts.

The study of Nabil's narrative and other documents depicting the lives of the martyrs in the Baha'i Faith will provide ample testimony on this point.

Seventh Proof

The spirit or the rational soul, is original, independent and self-subsisting. It is free from any form of composition or combination. Therefore it cannot be destroyed or obliterated; nor can change overtake it. Immortality is an inherent quality of the soul.

Eighth Proof

The cause of death is that as a result of constant work, the body gradually degenerates and is worn out. When weakness and infirmity overtake it, the body loses its resistance, and the limbs and organs fail to respond in their natural functions. At this point death, which can be described as "inactivity of all faculties", takes place and the body disintegrates. The spirit does not follow this pattern. Hard work and passage of time do not weaken it. On the contrary, the more strenuous the exertions the more will it grow in strength and vitality. In this way death cannot be considered for the soul. When the body is weak and frail the spirit does not withdraw from activity. How many a masterpiece, whether in arts, literature, or science has come into the world through the genius of some man who was passing through the rigours of old age, and yet till the end, continued to enrich posterity with his brilliant mind.

We, therefore, conclude that since the spirit is not affected by weariness and old age, it is immortal.

Ninth Proof

In one sense, death can be described as "change in the state of an object". In other words, when the original form is

dissociated from a created being, and the body decomposed and disintegrated, then death takes place.

But as the human soul can assume all forms at the same time, and all geometrical patterns exist in the mind simultaneously, there can be no transformation from one form into another. In other words death cannot overtake the soul.

Tenth Proof

In another sense, death is realised when man's limbs and organs become inoperative, and the power of the senses, both physical and intellectual, cease to exist. So the eyes cannot see ; the ears cannot hear ; the legs cannot move ; and the lamp of intellect and intelligence is extinguished. Under these circumstances if the soul is still able to function without physical limbs and organs, then we can be assured that it is not affected by death, and cannot be disintegrated or decomposed.

The mightiest proof and the most eloquent testimony for this is the condition of sleep.

When sleeping the body is at complete rest and according to scientific discoveries, during sleep the following changes take place :

- a) Heartbeat is reduced and respiration is slowed down.
- b) Metabolism, *i.e.* conversion of chemical substances, is considerably reduced.
- c) The body's response to environmental stimulation is lost, and the Central

Nervous System (except the Autonomic Nervous System) is insensitive.

d) Mental activity is ceased.

Notwithstanding all this, in the world of dreams man walks without the use of feet ; sees without eyes ; hears without ears ; solves difficult problems which are beyond him in wakefulness ; and discovers future events exactly as they take place in reality.

It is interesting to note that Mendelief, the notable scientist, discovered his famous "periodic classification of the atomic weight of elements" in a dream.

Eleventh Proof

According to materialists, man, like animal, is composed of elements ; and after decomposition his life comes to an end for ever. If this is true, then what is the wisdom of creation and what is the purpose of so much suffering and hardship ? In this case is not an animal in a much more enviable position than man ?

Our intellect and conscience cannot accept this theory. Instead it confirms that the Worlds of God, after this one, are innumerable, and that the human spirit is everlasting and indestructible. In this way creation reaches its ultimate purpose and bears its fruits in the Worlds of God.

Twelfth Proof

Assuming that the human spirit is not immortal and the life-after a mere fraud, and there is no punishment or reward in the next life, then it seems that creation as a whole is founded on injustice.

The word justice becomes meaningless when people neither reap reward nor receive punishment for their deeds. Does it not seem inconceivable that the Creator who has fashioned this universe with marvellous regularity and order, has in the end, established such a feeble foundation for His Creation that there is no distinction between good and evil or just and unjust ?

Thirteenth Proof

If we suppose that the soul is not immortal, and man's life is only limited to this physical domain, then let us see for what reason the Messengers of God and His Manifestations, who are regarded by their supporters as well as their enemies, as the wisest and the most discerning among all people, allow themselves, in spite of their power and foresight, to be persecuted by their adversaries ? They sacrifice their lives and their families and possessions with forbearance and meekness.

The same applies to men of God and His Chosen Ones, who with much longing enthusiasm enter the arena of sacrifice, discarding their rank, their honour and their possessions, and leaving the world and all its pleasures to those who are attached to them.

If we assume that all this is done to obtain fame, it seems strange that they did not compromise in their attitude, and did not employ adulatory and flattering methods in their dealing with man.

Indeed, their detachment from this world is ample testimony to men of insight that there must be spiritual worlds beyond this mortal life and that the soul of man is above destruction and death.

CHAPTER IV

Miscellaneous matters relating to the human soul

- a) "... Though in infancy the signs of the mind and spirit appear in man, they do not reach the degree of perfection; they are imperfect. Only when man attains maturity do the mind and the spirit appear and become evident in utmost perfection. . . . In the womb of the world, mind and spirit also existed in the embryo, but they were concealed; afterwards they appeared. So it is that in the seed the tree exists, but it is hidden and concealed; when it develops and grows, the complete tree appears . . . "13
- b) "... The spirit, which . . . embraces all beings, and as far as human ability permits discovers the realities of things and becomes cognizant of their peculiarities and effects, and of the qualities and properties of beings. **But the human spirit, unless assisted by the spirit of faith, does not become acquainted with the divine secrets and the heavenly realities.** It is like a mirror which, although clear, polished, and brilliant, is still in need of light. Until a ray of the sun reflects upon it, it

cannot discover the heavenly secrets . . ."¹⁴

- c) "... The mind is the power of the human spirit. Spirit is the lamp; mind is the light which shines from the lamp. Spirit is the tree and the mind is the fruit. Mind is the perfection of the spirit, and is its essential quality, as the sun's rays are the essential necessity of the sun . . ."¹⁵
- d) "... As the spirit continues to exist after death, it necessarily progresses or declines; and in the other world, to cease to progress is the same as to decline; but it never leaves its own condition, in which it continues to develop. For example, the reality of the spirit of Peter, however far it may progress, will not reach the condition of the Reality of Christ; it progresses only in its own environment. . . . However far the disciples might progress, they could never become Christ. It is true that coal could become a diamond, but both are in the mineral condition and their component elements are the same"¹⁶
- e) "... The human spirit, does not descend into the body; . . . for descent and entrance are characteristics of bodies . . . The spirit is connected with the body, as this light is with this mirror . . . the human spirit, has neither entered this body nor existed through it . . ."¹⁷
- f) "The progress of man's spirit in the divine world, after the severance of

(14) "Some Answered Questions"

(15) "Some Answered Questions"

(16) "Some Answered Questions"

(17) "Some Answered Questions"

its connection with the body of dust, is through the bounty and grace of the Lord alone, or through the intercession and the sincere prayers of other human souls, or through the charities and important good works which are performed in its name."¹⁸

- g) "... Children who die before attaining the age of discretion, or before the appointed time of birth: these infants are under the shadow of the favour of God; and as they have not committed any sin, and are not soiled with the impurities of the world of nature, they are the centres of the manifestations of bounty, and Eye of Compassion will be turned upon them."¹⁹

Conclusion

In conclusion the following utterances of the Bab and Baha'u'llah are quoted. May Their exalted Words diffuse their musk-laden fragrance on this article.

- A) "To those who are endowed with pure hearts, all the worlds are realised under the shadow of this world and are manifested therein."²⁰
- B) "Although all the worlds of God, hath been and wilt ever be, revolving around this world; yet, in every world for each soul, a particular condition hath been decreed and established . . . The meaning of paradise in this life hath been to attain to His good pleasure and to enter into His Cause.

(18) "Some Answered Questions"

(19) Kita'b-i-Baya'n, Chapter 8, 2nd Va'hid

(20) "Some Answered Questions"

After their ascension from this earthly life, the believers shall enter into Paradises of incomparable glory, and bounties of immeasurable greatness will be vouchsafed unto them. These Paradises are the deeds they have performed in this world."²¹

- C) "He Who is the Day Star of the Heaven of Understanding beareth me witness: that whatever hath been revealed by the Pen of the Most High for those who have ascended to the Kingdom of Abha, hath caused those holy souls, at that moment, to be endowed with power and might, and to be invested with greater measure of glory and bounty, of ascendancy and wellbeing."²²
- D) "And now concerning thy question whether human souls continue to be conscious one of another after their separation from the body . . . The people of Baha, who are the inmates of the Ark of God, are, one and all, well aware of one another's state and condition, and are united in the bonds of intimacy and fellowship. Such a state, however, must depend upon their faith and their conduct. They that are of the same grade and station are fully aware of one another's capacity, character, accomplishments and merits. They that are of a lower grade, however, are incapable of comprehending adequately the station, or of estimating the merits, of those that rank above them. Each shall receive his share from thy Lord. . . . It is clear and evident that all men shall, after their physi-

(21) Tablets of Baha'u'llah

(22) Tablets of Baha'u'llah

cal death, estimate the worth of their deeds, and realize all that their hands have wrought. I swear by the Day Star that shineth above the horizon of Divine power! They that are the followers of the one true God shall, the moment they depart out of this life, experience such joy and gladness as would be impossible to describe, while they that live in error shall be seized with such fear and trembling, and shall be filled with such consternation, as nothing can exceed. Well is it with him that hath quaffed the choice and incorruptible wine of faith through the gracious favour and the manifold bounties of Him Who is the Lord of all Faiths."²³

