

# EXPLORING THE CONCEPT OF THE SOUL IN 'SOME ANSWERED QUESTIONS': IMPLICATIONS AND INSIGHTS<sup>12</sup>

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## Introduction

The exploration of the human soul stands as a cornerstone within *Some Answered Questions*.<sup>3</sup> In this work, Abdul-Baha delves into the Bahá'í perspective on the essence of the soul and its

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a series of presentations given to Radio Baha'I, *Payame Doust*.

<sup>2</sup> Should you choose to utilize this article, I would appreciate it if proper citation provided to acknowledge the source.

<sup>3</sup> This book was written in response to the questions of Mrs. Laura Clifford Barney. She was a leading Bahai teacher, intellectual, and philanthropist. When she visited Abdu'l-Bahá, she would ask questions, and a scribe would write them down. When his answers were collected, Mrs. Barney received permission to publish them from Abdu'l-Bahá in 1906, and its Persian and English publication was realized in 1908. Her husband, Mr. Dreyfus, translated it into French. It should be pointed out that this interview took place when Abdu'l-Bahá, as an exile, faced severe challenges while laying the foundations of a new religion.

*Some Answered Questions'* subjects are diverse and involve various religious, philosophical, scientific, and social topics.

1. **The Influence of Prophets and Messengers:** Abdu'l-Bahá expounds upon the pivotal role of prophets and messengers, including Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muhammad, the Báb, and Bahá'u'lláh, in shaping human development and enlightenment.
2. **Christian Subjects Revisited:** Addressing Mrs. Barney's inquiries rooted in her Christian background, Abdu'l-Bahá elucidates various biblical narratives through the lens of Bahá'í teachings, encompassing the birth, baptism, miracles, and resurrection of Jesus, as well as the story of Adam and Eve.
3. **Theological Depth:** *Some Answered Questions* delves into profound theological inquiries concerning divinity, the knowledge of God, modes of divine communication with humanity, and the indispensable role of divine manifestations and prophets in facilitating this connection.
4. **Human Nature and Spirituality:** Abdu'l-Bahá explores the intricacies of human nature, touching upon themes such as the human spirit, the process of development, faculties and powers, the interplay between body, mind, and soul, the concept of the afterlife, and the pursuit of spiritual advancement.
5. **Philosophical Musings:** The book delves into philosophical quandaries, including reincarnation, the unity of existence, the nature of good and evil, destiny, predestination, and the delicate balance between free will and determinism.
6. **Social Reflections:** *Some Answered Questions* does not shy away from addressing pressing social issues such as crime and punishment, labor disputes, and socioeconomic disparities, providing insightful perspectives rooted in Bahá'í principles.

This comprehensive work explores subjects across theological, philosophical, and scientific realms, embodying a guiding light for both ancient wisdom and contemporary thought. Quotes in this article are from *Some Answered Questions* <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdu-l-baha/some-answered-questions/>

intricate relationship with the body and material existence. While drawing from diverse Eastern and Western religious and philosophical traditions, Abdul-Baha's insights offer a unique perspective on this relationship. Elements of his viewpoint resonate with the philosophies of ancient Greek thinkers like Aristotle and Plato, as well as Islamic philosophers such as Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra. However, *Some Answered Questions* transcends categorization within any specific philosophical school, be it Aristotelian or Ishrāqiyyun.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, Abdul-Baha's discourse on the soul extends beyond philosophical speculation to engage with contemporary scientific understandings of human origins and attributes. Central to his perspective is the concept of progressive manifestations of God, which shape individual and societal transformation over time through divine revelation. These ideas form the basis of a cohesive intellectual framework aimed at guiding humanity towards spiritual perfection and universal civilization.

While *Some Answered Questions* does not claim to unveil all mysteries surrounding the soul, it serves as a foundational introduction to a novel understanding. This evolving perspective holds the potential for profound spiritual and intellectual revelations as it continues to develop in the realms of intellect, science, and philosophy.

### **Investigating the Soul: Exploring the Timeless Quest to Unite Material and Spiritual Realms**

What constitutes the essence of the soul? Is it a manifestation of an underlying primordial realm, or rather an emergent product of material processes within the human body? Across epochs, religious scholars and philosophers have grappled with this fundamental inquiry, striving to delineate its contours. Moreover, the exploration of the soul transcends mere philosophical or

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<sup>4</sup> Illuminationism, also known as hekmat-e eshrāq, emerged as a comprehensive philosophical and mystical tradition within Islam, shaped by the insights of Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi and influenced by Neoplatonism.

metaphysical discourse; it intertwines intimately with notions of self-awareness and self-understanding.

As we venture into this inquiry, the discourse on the soul emerges at the nexus of religious, philosophical, and scientific realms, bearing significant social ramifications. Throughout history, from the musings of Plato to the analyses of Freud, philosophers and scientists alike have endeavored to delineate the nature of the soul, whether through metaphysical or materialistic frameworks, and even within the realm of modern inquiry into the nature dynamics of consciousness.

In traditional terms, the concept of the soul, derived from the Latin word "anima," embodies the principle of breath or life, serving as the animating force within the body. This understanding has given rise to diverse beliefs regarding the nature of the soul, ranging from abstract and non-material perspectives to interpretations that consider it a superior product of material elements, such as the brain.

Throughout history, prominent philosophers have offered varied perspectives on the soul. Socrates viewed the human soul as a true essence transcending the body and material conditions, while Plato regarded it as separate from the body, the source of rational faculties and human personality, and immortal in essence. In contrast, Aristotle saw the soul and body as interdependent, with a relatively materialistic view on the reality of the soul and skepticism regarding its eternal life without the body. Descartes advocated for dualism, positing the soul as a non-material truth beyond matter, liberating humans from material constraints.

Examining religious and philosophical beliefs reveals the soul's characterization as an abstract, non-material, and mental reality, juxtaposed with its connection to the tangible and material body. This intricate relationship between two distinct realities—mental and non-material versus tangible and material—lies at the heart of existential inquiry. Philosophical discourse has navigated this duality, either gravitating towards spiritual and metaphysical interpretations or embracing materialistic viewpoints, deeply entwining science, religion, and ontological debates.

Over millennia, discussions on the relationship—or perceived contradiction—between the soul and body have played a significant role in philosophical and scientific dialogues. Primitive

societies recognized the existence of intangible realities beyond the visible, resorting to magical rituals to influence natural phenomena. With the emergence of traditional religions and the evolution of religious thought towards monotheism, interpretations related to the soul evolved, emphasizing human beings' dual nature and moral implications.

In philosophical contemplations, varying perspectives have emerged, from prioritizing mental and non-material aspects to emphasizing the primacy of matter. Some philosophers emphasize the superiority of spiritual truths over material phenomena, while others interpret mental phenomena as derivative of material entities' actions and interactions. Ultimately, attempts to reconcile these viewpoints into a comprehensive system seek agreement and harmony in the relationship between the soul and matter.

In numerous religious traditions, whether Western religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Eastern religions like Hinduism and Buddhism, or Iranian religions like Zoroastrianism, the concept of the soul and its relationship with the material world, alongside the conditions and requirements for human spiritual progression, occupies a central position within their beliefs, teachings, and intellectual frameworks.

Christian beliefs have historically embraced the notion of the soul and the afterlife, amalgamating elements of Platonic idealism and Aristotelian realism. Greek philosophy notably influenced Christian doctrines concerning the soul. Notable Christian theologians and philosophers like St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas were profoundly shaped by the philosophical legacies of Plato and Aristotle, respectively. Augustine drew inspiration from Plato's thoughts on the immortality of the soul and the pursuit of truth, while Aquinas integrated Aristotle's teachings on reason, ethics, and natural law into Christian theology.

Islamic philosophers, including Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, Al-Farabi, Al-Ghazali, and Islamic mystics, extensively delved into the nature of the soul, leaving behind significant contributions. For instance, Al-Farabi, who translated Aristotle's works into Arabic, regarded the perfection of the soul as residing in intellect and espoused a spiritual afterlife rather than a physical one. Ibn Sina conceptualized rational entities as transcending materiality and distinguished the intellect from the faculties of the soul. While deeply influenced by Aristotle's philosophy, Ibn Sina endeavored

to harmonize it with Islamic principles, employing reason to establish the existence of God. His distinctions between essence and existence profoundly shaped the conception of the soul and its connection with the Creator.

Among Islamic philosophers, there is a discernible inclination towards synthesizing the philosophical frameworks of Aristotle and Plato. This synthesis reflects a nuanced approach to philosophical inquiry within Islamic thought, where scholars sought to reconcile the seemingly divergent perspectives of these two ancient Greek philosophers.

Mulla Sadra, a towering figure in Safavid Persia's Islamic philosophy, sought a grand synthesis. He aimed to bridge the perceived gap between Plato's idealism and Aristotle's realism, forging a new path. This innovative system, Transcendent Theosophy, emphasized the all-encompassing nature of existence (*wahdat al-wujud*) and the concept of ever-changing substances (*harakat al-jawhariyyah*). By weaving together these ideas, Mulla Sadra aimed to reconcile Plato and Aristotle within a broader metaphysical framework.

From Plato, Mulla Sadra borrowed the realm of pure ideas and the notion of perfect, unchanging forms that underlie all creation. From Aristotle, he adopted the importance of observing the natural world and the study of substance and essence. However, Mulla Sadra argued that substances themselves are not static but rather in constant flux.

In essence, Mulla Sadra aimed to transcend the limitations of both Platonic and Aristotelian thought, creating a comprehensive system that addressed existence, the soul, and the material and spiritual realms. This innovative approach continues to influence and spark debate in Islamic philosophy today.

## **Modern Challenges**

It should be noted that theories about the human soul have undergone significant transformations throughout the ebbs and flows of intellectual developments in history. These transformations were not arbitrary or haphazard; rather, they followed a discernible trend, aligning and coordinating with the advancements in scientific and philosophical thought.

Prior to the ascendancy of empirical and sensory studies, conceptions of the soul primarily derived from religious texts or were formulated through mental and rational arguments. Consequently, the soul remained firmly sheltered within the realm of abstract and metaphysical beliefs. Even though Christian and Muslim philosophers and thinkers endeavored to elucidate the soul's relationship to the body and matter, its conceptualization largely retained its abstract and metaphysical nature. Metaphorically speaking, the soul, akin to the philosopher's stone, remained immobile within a wax-sealed box for centuries.

Intellectual developments that emerged around the eighteenth century, gaining momentum in the nineteenth century, gradually began to pry open this sealed box. Scientific thought no longer acquiesced to ancient definitions; rather, the scientific and empirical method sought to unveil the mysteries of the soul definitively, akin to its approach towards natural phenomena. Material interpretations of the soul, which had long lingered at the periphery of spiritual interpretations assumed prominence and began to thrive.

Before Darwin, the soul reigned supreme as the explanation for human thought, consciousness, and even mental illness. It was a separate entity, often seen as divinely bestowed, and largely outside the realm of scientific inquiry. Darwin's theory, however, cast a long shadow. By demonstrating the evolution of physical traits through natural selection, it raised the question: could our mental faculties also be products of a long evolutionary process, with a material basis in the brain? This challenged the idea of the soul as something wholly separate from the physical world.

Psychology, emerging as a distinct field, further chipped away at the soul's traditional domain. No longer solely reliant on theology or philosophy, psychologists began to explore the workings of the mind through scientific observation and experimentation. This challenged the notion that mental illness stemmed from demonic possession, paving the way for a more scientific understanding of mental health.

With Darwin and psychology, the concept of the soul gained a historical dimension. Perhaps the soul wasn't a fixed entity but rather something that evolved alongside humanity. This opened doors to exploring how different cultures and eras might have understood the soul in various

ways. This empirical approach cast a long shadow on the soul's metaphysical aspects. Darwin's theory of evolution, for instance, suggested a material basis for human thought and behavior, weakening the idea of the soul as a separate entity. Psychology, emerging as a distinct field, further chipped away by exploring the workings of the mind through scientific observation. This shift placed the concept of the soul within a historical context, susceptible to change and evolution just like our bodies.

The rise of scientific materialism provided a powerful counterpoint to the traditional, immaterial soul. Science focused on what could be observed and measured, leaving little room for the soul's intangible aspects. This shift created a tension – how could we reconcile the complexities of human experience with a purely material explanation? This clash between traditional views and scientific progress led to a significant cultural crisis. The very essence of what it meant to be human was called into question. The soul, once a cornerstone of our understanding, became a battleground between science and religion, materialism, and spirituality.

While the crisis may have subsided, the question of the soul and the nature of consciousness persists. Science continues to unravel the mysteries of the brain, pushing the boundaries of our understanding of consciousness. Yet, the concept of the soul, with its spiritual and religious connotations, remains a powerful force in human thought. The journey of reconciling these seemingly opposing views continues to shape our understanding of ourselves and our place in the universe.

The emphasis on material foundation of the soul became a powerful counterpart to the traditional soul, forcing a reevaluation of long-held beliefs. Material interpretations of the soul were considered the natural result of human physical evolution and the product of the brain and nervous system. This aligned with a fundamental movement that encompassed modern thought – a movement that, based on this new scientific understanding, questioned the existence of God and the divine. Humanity was seen as the result of a random evolutionary process, blurring the lines between humans and animals. Beliefs related to the afterlife and moral absolutes were deemed potentially false and rooted in human weakness. Science, in this view, could answer all human questions. Moral values became relative, subject to the requirements of time and place,

lacking any external or independent nature. Religion was seen as opposed to science and reason, with faith considered a superstitious relic from the dark ages.

This trajectory of scientific thinking suggested that modern humans no longer needed supernatural explanations for the unknown or the afterlife as a refuge from pain and suffering. However, this very shift created a new kind of anxiety – metaphysical anxiety. The traditional explanations that had provided comfort and meaning for centuries were challenged, leaving a void that science alone couldn't fill. The crisis of modern thought, then, wasn't just about the soul, but about the human need for purpose and meaning in a universe that seemed increasingly cold and indifferent.

### **Search for the Soul and the Baha'i Response to Metaphysical Anxiety**

The Baha'i approach embraces scientific and rational inquiry, rejecting superstition in favor of reason, experience, and experimentation. It welcomes criticism and scientific analysis as avenues for deeper understanding rather than threats to spiritual discourse. Rather than imposing spiritual discourse onto science, it seeks to integrate spiritual insights within the context of contemporary scientific developments.

The modern metaphysical crisis serves as a catalyst for a more expansive understanding of humanity's spiritual dimension. Scientific advancements in physics, biology, psychology, and sociology contribute to this understanding by revealing the intricate relationship between the material and spiritual realms. These advancements collectively depict humanity as a complex entity evolving towards unity and transcendence.

The contemporary crisis around understanding the soul, far from being a dead end, is seen by the Baha'i faith as an opening. It creates space for a broader perspective on humanity's spiritual nature. Scientific discoveries, such as those in physics questioning the nature of matter itself, studies on the mind-body connection, and research into evolution and social transformation, are all seen as enhancing the concept of the soul, not diminishing it. These advancements, when combined, paint a more comprehensive picture of humanity that acknowledges both our material reality and our spiritual aspirations.



Baha'i teachings regarding the soul cannot be fully understood in isolation; they must be contextualized within the comprehensive framework of Baha'i beliefs. This framework includes perspectives on reality, humanity's place in the universe, the purpose of life, and processes of individual and social transformation. Moreover, it acknowledges the emergence of a new cultural paradigm, reflective of humanity's evolving maturity and the culmination of current global crises.

The Baha'i worldview emphasizes the interconnectedness of various elements, such as the soul, existence, and human society. It recognizes a trajectory of social evolution towards a more unified and spiritually aware civilization, marking a departure from the current era of disenchantment and crisis.

Central to this understanding is the concept of a new *Zeitgeist*, a cultural and spiritual ethos that reflects humanity's collective evolution towards maturity. This new culture is seen as the inevitable outcome of ongoing social transformations and the resolution of contemporary challenges on a global scale.

In studying Baha'i perspectives on the soul, one must consider how they intersect with broader themes of spiritual growth, societal advancement, and the realization of a global civilization. By viewing the soul within this holistic context, one gains a deeper appreciation for its significance in the grand narrative of human existence and progress.

## **Definition of Soul**

Abdul-Baha approaches the definition of the soul in the same manner that philosophy and science employ in defining and identifying all phenomena of existence. That is, the method of classifying objects and phenomena based on their common characteristics and the aspects that distinguish them from other objects and phenomena.

Moreover, this method places the definition and identification of each phenomenon in the context of the essential relationships that connect it to other phenomena. Following this pattern, Abdul-Baha considers existence as having a hierarchical perfection (that is each level representing a higher degree of perfection or closeness to an ideal state) from inanimate objects,

plants, animals, to humans.<sup>5</sup> The distinctive characteristic of inanimate objects is their inherent resistance to external forces. Plants, on the other hand, exhibit growth as their distinguishing feature, which sets them apart from non-living entities. Animals possess the ability of sensation and movement, which distinguishes them from both inanimate objects and plants.

In Abdul-Baha's perspective, each rank of existence acquires unique attributes that define its organization. Plants, while possessing qualities of inanimate objects, develop distinct characteristics that constitute vegetal organization. Similarly, animals, while incorporating traits of both inanimate objects and plants, exhibit a vital combination of sensory perception, natural intelligence, and conditional reflexes.

Abdul-Baha refers to the superior faculties specific to each rank as "the soul" of that rank. Therefore, from this viewpoint, the human soul encompasses the array of faculties that differentiate humans from the animal kingdom. In essence, the human soul comprises the set of powers that elevate humans above the animal rank.

The human organism incorporates attributes from the realms of inanimate objects, plants, and animals, alongside distinct faculties unique to the human rank. These unique faculties constitute what is referred to as the human soul. The souls of plants and animals arise from the fusion and combination of their material and physical aspects. In contrast, while the human soul does relate to material elements, it transcends mere materiality. The human soul is considered an emerging phenomenon, occupying a higher position within the hierarchy of existence.

This understanding suggests that the human soul is not merely a product of physical processes but encompasses aspects beyond the material realm. It reflects a recognition of the spiritual

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<sup>5</sup> This concept shares some similarities with the traditional idea of the Great Chain of Being or the Ladder of Life. However, Abdul Baha's perspective diverges in that while there is a recognizable pattern of progressive development in biological and social evolution—where organisms have transitioned from simpler to more complex forms—it is understood to occur within a framework of dynamic equilibrium or chaotic tension between order and disorder.

Please see the author's article on Baha'i Epistemology from the Perspective of Abdul-Baha

dimension inherent to human nature, distinguishing humans as beings capable of transcending purely physical existence. Abdul-Baha states on the spiritual faculties of man:

*Know that comprehension varies. Its lowest degree consists in the senses of the animal realm, that is, the natural sensations which arise from the powers of the outward senses. This comprehension is common to man and animals, and indeed certain animals surpass man in this regard. In the human realm, however, comprehension differs and varies in accordance with the different degrees occupied by man. The foremost degree of comprehension in the world of nature is that of the rational soul. This power and comprehension is shared in common by all men, whether they be heedless or aware, wayward or faithful. In the creation of God, the rational soul of man encompasses and is distinguished above all other created things: It is by virtue of its nobility and distinction that it encompasses them all. Through the power of the rational soul, man can discover the realities of things, comprehend their properties, and penetrate the mysteries of existence. All the sciences, branches of learning, arts, inventions, institutions, undertakings, and discoveries have resulted from the comprehension of the rational soul. These were once impenetrable secrets, hidden mysteries, and unknown realities, and the rational soul gradually discovered them and brought them out of the invisible plane into the realm of the visible. This is the greatest power of comprehension in the world of nature, and the uttermost limit of its flight is to comprehend the realities, signs, and properties of contingent things.*

In another context, Abdul-Baha states:

*The human spirit, which distinguishes man from the animal, is the rational **soul**, and these two terms—the human **spirit** and the rational soul—designate one and the same thing. This **spirit**, which in the terminology of the philosophers is called the rational **soul**, encompasses all things and as far as human capacity permits, discovers their realities, and becomes aware of the properties and effects, the characteristics, and conditions of earthly things.*

Upon careful examination of Abdul-Baha's teachings, it becomes evident that his definition of the soul represents a rational reality that manifests its inherent powers through combination and arrangement. Just as biological life surpasses mere matter in the hierarchy of existence while providing the groundwork for life to emerge, thought and consciousness likewise surpass biological life while encompassing it. Similarly, the soul transcends reason and consciousness while encompassing them. While reason and consciousness are essential manifestations of the soul, they do not fully encapsulate its entirety.

### **The Relationship between the Soul and the Body**

Opinions regarding the relationship between the soul and the body are divided into several categories:

***The first category*** regarding the nature of the soul is the materialistic perspective. This viewpoint considers the soul as a product of material forces and the complex combination of human existence. According to Abdul-Baha, proponents of this view argue that humans are deemed noble and perfect not because they possess a special power or soul that other animals lack, but because the combination of elements in human existence is more complete. They contend that animals also possess perception and feeling, but human faculties are considered superior.

One aspect of the materialistic theory is Epiphenomenalism. This perspective posits that mental processes, such as thinking, do not have inherent significance. Instead, they are secondary phenomena that arise as byproducts of material and physical actions. Consciousness, under this framework, is viewed as a secondary phenomenon emerging alongside natural mental states like anger or fear, akin to foam appearing on the surface of a river.

***The second category***, idealism, stands in opposition to the materialistic viewpoint. Idealism posits that only the soul or consciousness truly exists, and external material reality is merely a construct of our perceptions. In this perspective, the physical world is seen as a projection or manifestation of the mind.

Idealism suggests that the world we perceive is shaped by our thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions, rather than having an independent existence outside of consciousness. According to this view, the external world is not inherently real but rather a reflection of our subjective experiences and interpretations.

Advocates of idealism argue that reality is fundamentally mental or spiritual in nature, with the material world being a manifestation of the mind's activities. This perspective emphasizes the primacy of consciousness and the subjective nature of reality, challenging the notion of an objective, material universe existing independently of human perception.

***The third category***, dualism, posits the existence of independent realities for both the soul and the body, considering them as separate and distinct entities. In this framework, the soul is regarded as a non-material reality, while the body is understood as a material entity. Both the soul and the body are believed to have a genuine existence, albeit in different realms.

According to dualism, the soul and the body belong to separate worlds with distinct laws of organization and communication. They are seen as fundamentally different in nature, with the soul representing the spiritual aspect of human existence and the body representing the physical aspect. As such, they are thought to be incapable of direct communication or interaction due to the inherent disparity in their natures.

Dualism suggests that while the soul and the body may coexist within the same individual, they operate according to their own respective principles and languages. This theory underscores the duality of human nature, positing that the soul and the body occupy distinct spheres of existence that are not fully integrated or interconnected.

***The fourth category*** posits that both the soul and the body have remained fixed and unchanging since their creation, unaffected by existential alterations over time. This perspective, often associated with traditional religious interpretations of creation, maintains the absolute and immutable nature of the soul and the body. Consequently, it does not accommodate biological or evolutionary changes, positioning the soul beyond the realm of historical transformations.

In contrast, ***the fifth category***, which may have either a material or spiritual foundation, proposes that both the soul and matter, along with their fundamental relationships, are subject to variation, dynamism, and historical evolution. For instance, Hegel, an idealist philosopher, espoused the concept of the dialectical evolution of the soul, wherein consciousness progresses through a series of conflicting ideas leading to synthesis and advancement. On the other hand, Marx, a materialist thinker, applied the principle of dialectics to a material context, asserting that individual and societal development in history arises from material class contradictions and struggles.

In essence, while the fourth category posits an unchanging and absolute nature for the soul and the body, the fifth category emphasizes their variability, dynamism, and historical development, with implications for both material and spiritual realms.

***The sixth category*** encompasses various perspectives and research endeavors that investigate human mental or psychological faculties. These investigations can either focus on the individual

human being outside of their social relations or consider social relations as the primary source of the formation of mental faculties.

The first group, often referred to as individualistic or introspective, concentrates on understanding mental processes within the individual. For example, Christianity tends to emphasize the salvation of the individual soul, focusing on personal spiritual growth and redemption.

In contrast, the second group, termed external or collective, emphasizes the role of social relations in shaping mental faculties. Religions like Islam and Judaism, for instance, prioritize the collective and social transformation of the soul, viewing individual spiritual development as intricately tied to societal and communal dynamics.

In modern ethical theories, Freud's psychoanalytic perspective exemplifies an individualistic approach, attributing mental characteristics to internal mechanisms and unconscious processes within the individual. In contrast, Behaviorism, another school of thought, adopts an external or collective viewpoint. It views the individual mind as a blank slate influenced by environmental factors and social relations, with personality traits, thoughts, and feelings gradually emerging and shaping through the process of learning and acquisition, according to the laws of behaviorism.

### **Abdul-Baha's Response to the Relationship between the Soul and the Body**

Abdul-Baha unequivocally rejects narrow-minded materialistic views that seek to reduce the soul to a mere byproduct of material phenomena. Instead, he aligns with the arguments put forth by divine philosophers, affirming that the powers of the soul cannot emerge from nature alone. This is because nature lacks the essential faculties of perception, consciousness, and will that characterize the soul. In Abdul-Baha's perspective, the soul represents the fundamental reality of humankind, distinct from the material and natural world.

However, Abdul-Baha also emphasizes the interconnectedness between the soul and the material realm. He posits that material and natural life serve as necessary means for the manifestation of the soul in the physical world. Without the qualities and combination provided by the body, the soul would be unable to fully manifest its powers and perfections.

Abdul-Baha further underscores the role of sensory powers as a medium for perception. He explains that empirical and sensory perception forms the foundation upon which intellectual powers operate, enabling humans to move from the particular to universal understanding.

In Abdul-Baha's view, if the discovering power of the soul had a purely material aspect, humans would remain stagnant and unchanging, bound by the limitations of nature. However, he asserts that humans possess an inner faculty that transcends the constraints of nature, enabling them to challenge and overcome natural forces. This inner faculty allows humans to exercise discernment and evaluate their actions based on their own value systems, rather than blindly following instinctive mechanisms like animals.

Abdul-Baha also emphasizes the importance of sensory experience as a prerequisite for human understanding of realities. He sees knowledge as a multi-layered process, beginning with sensory and material cognition, progressing towards a distancing from nature, and ultimately facilitating human transformation and evolution through the discovery of the nature of the soul.

Abdul-Baha underscores the originality of the soul, rejecting the notion that its effects are solely the result of natural powers and brain functions. He likens the material combination of the body to a magnet that attracts the soul. Using the analogy of a polished mirror attracting and reflecting sunlight, Abdul-Baha illustrates how the physical elements within a human being serve as a magnet for the spirit. When these elements are gathered and combined in harmony, the spirit manifests itself within the individual, revealing its inherent perfections.<sup>6</sup>

To further clarify this point, consider the analogy of a radio. A radio on its own cannot generate radio waves; however, when properly assembled and tuned, it can absorb and transmit these waves. Similarly, a radio without a transmitter is inert, akin to a mere piece of stone. Yet, when it receives radio waves, it becomes a medium for communication. Conversely, radio waves without a suitable receiving device are unable to propagate and remain ineffectual.

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<sup>6</sup> Beyond this, the members, constituent parts, and composition that are found within man attract and act as a magnet for the spirit: The spirit is bound to appear in it. Thus, when a mirror is polished, it is bound to attract the rays of the sun, to be illumined, and to reflect splendid images. That is, when these physical elements are gathered and combined together, according to the natural order and with the utmost perfection, they become a magnet for the spirit, and the spirit will manifest itself therein with all its perfections.

In this analogy, the radio represents the physical body, while the radio waves symbolize the soul or spirit. The body acts as a receptor and conduit for the soul, allowing it to manifest and express its qualities. Without the proper combination and alignment of physical elements, the soul's influence remains dormant. Conversely, without the presence of the soul, the body lacks vitality and purpose, akin to a radio without waves or a transmitter. Thus, Abdul-Baha highlights the interdependence and symbiotic relationship between the soul and the body in facilitating human existence and expression.

The essential point to grasp is that while the soul and the body are distinct phenomena, they are inherently interdependent, it is impossible to conceive of one without the other, as they are intricately linked and mutually influential. Therefore, while acknowledging the duality between the soul and the body, it is essential to recognize their interdependence.

In Abdul-Bahá's explanations concerning the nature of the soul, the concept of existential compositions holds significant importance. According to this perspective, everything in the world, whether humans, animals, plants, or even inanimate objects, is composed of elemental combinations. These diverse entities consist of various elements that are intricately interrelated.

For instance, humans are also composed of a myriad of elements, and each of their characteristics and qualities arises from these compositional elements. Within this framework, there exists a primary substance—a fundamental essence—that manifests uniquely in each element. This differentiation in manifestation gives rise to the diverse forms and shapes observed in the world.

In essence, Abdul-Bahá's teachings emphasize the interconnectedness and interdependence of all things, highlighting the fundamental role of elemental compositions in shaping the characteristics and qualities of beings across the spectrum of existence. He stated:

*It is therefore evident that originally matter was one, and that one matter appeared in a different form in each element. Thus, various forms appeared, and as they appeared, they each assumed an independent form and became a specific element. But this distinction attained its full completion and realization only after a very long time. Then these elements were composed, arranged, and combined in infinite forms; in other words, from the composition and combination of these elements countless beings appeared.*



The discussion of existential compositions necessitates a deeper exploration into the nature of elements and their interactions. When we examine the individual elements that constitute living organisms in isolation, they lack vital properties. For instance, the element carbon present in a human being is the same carbon found in a piece of coal. However, it is the nature of their composition, cooperation, and coordination among these elements that leads to the emergence and manifestation of life.

Drawing from these examples, some scientists and philosophers propose that consciousness, thought, and perception are emergent properties that potentially exist within the combination of human organisms. These properties gradually manifest themselves over time through the complex interactions and organization of these elements.

This perspective challenges the notion of epiphenomenalism, which suggests that the emergence of reason and mind is merely a secondary occurrence, tangential to the evolution of the visible world. Instead, proponents of the emergent properties view argue that the emergence of thought and perception is the primary purpose and guiding principle of creation.

The discussion of existential compositions invites a closer examination of the intricate interplay between elements and their emergent properties. It challenges traditional perspectives and underscores the dynamic nature of existence, wherein consciousness and perception are seen as fundamental aspects woven into the fabric of creation rather than mere byproducts of material processes.

Abdul-Bahá offers a novel interpretation of the traditional duality between the soul and body, seeking to reconcile their relationship within the context of material and social evolution. In this framework, physical and cultural evolution are viewed as distinct yet interconnected aspects of a unified process guiding the world towards its ultimate purpose: the establishment of an elevated spiritual and moral civilization. The soul, while retaining its individuality within the framework of necessary social and historical relations, undergoes a process of progress. Education and the environment play pivotal roles in bringing forth the latent spiritual truths inherent within individuals, akin to revealing jewels of meaning from within the soul's depths.

Abdul-Bahá perceives the human soul as the principal catalyst driving cultural evolution, guiding physical and biological progress towards the establishment of civilization and diverse cultural expressions encompassing poetry, music, literature, architecture, science and technology, as well as the organization of societal institutions and the fostering of moral virtues. Unlike material entities composed of atoms or matter, the soul is a conceptual entity, abstract and rational, devoid of physical presence or confinement to a specific location, akin to the intangible nature of freedom and love. Consequently, Abdul-Bahá rejects reductionist perspectives that seek to attribute the soul's essence solely to cellular brain transformations, emphasizing instead its transcendental narrative, likening it to a story crafted from letters and words, residing within a book or repository but surpassing mere linguistic or physical confines.

### **The Heavenly Spirit or the Spirit of Faith**

To provide a more precise understanding of the faithful spirit (soul), it is imperative to examine its constituent elements, dimensions, and the principles guiding its metamorphosis systematically. Abdul-Bahá, describes the heavenly spirit or the spirit of faith *as the outpouring grace of the All-Merciful. This spirit proceeds from the breath of the Holy Spirit, and through a power born of God it becomes the cause of everlasting life. It is that power which makes the earthly soul heavenly and the imperfect man perfect. It cleanses the impure, unlooses the tongue of the silent, sanctifies the bondslaves of passion and desire, and confers knowledge upon the ignorant.*

According to Abdul-Bahá's statement, the spirit of faith embodies the knowledge and trust transmitted through the Holy Spirit by the Manifestations of God, uplifting the human soul and imbuing it with spiritual and moral attributes. Hence, the spirit of faith should not be regarded as existing in a realm beyond the soul. It is the potential for transcendence that resides within the soul. In other words, it does not occupy a distinct ontological position within the hierarchy of creation. Instead, it is intimately interconnected with the human soul, forming an integral aspect of its essence and expression. When the human soul embarks on the pursuit of truth, catalyzing ethical conduct and virtues, an internal transformation transpires, giving rise to a quality that serves as a manifestation of the spirit of faith. Thus, the spirit of faith is not detached from the human soul but rather an extension thereof.

It has been observed that within the hierarchy of existence, essential relationships are established while each rank retains its unique qualities. From an epistemological standpoint, there exists no clear demarcation between the human soul and the faithful spirit. As the human soul undergoes transformation, it inherently encompasses the faithful spirit. In the stage of embodying the spirit of faith, the transformative process turns inward, unfolding within the boundless sacred realms of eternal existence.

The spirit of faith represents a qualitative, spiritual, and ethical attribute inherent within the human soul. It serves as a guiding principle and goal of human life, harmonizing the integrity of existence with the faculties of the soul—such as thought, feeling, will, and action—into a spiritual current that fosters profound transformation within the individual's entire being. Concepts such as spiritual perfection, maturity, eternal life, divine proximity, and the emergence of a new creation are intricately intertwined with the notion of the spirit of faith, symbolizing its profound significance in human existence.

The components, dimensions, and coordinates of the spirit of faith can be summarized as follows:

1. The spirit of faith is a qualitative attribute inherent to humanity, arising as the outcome of profound human experiences. Discussion of the spirit of faith holds no relevance in the realm of animals, as they lack human attributes such as rational thought, discernment, and free will.
2. The human soul encompasses various potentials, with faculties such as reason and discernment playing pivotal roles in perceiving the essential relationships inherent in truths. Thus, the recognition and comprehension of these truths serve as the bedrock for the emergence and evolution of the spirit of faith. According to Abdul-Baha's perspective, faith commences with the acknowledgment of the Manifestation of God and evolves within the framework of progressive manifestations as outlined in the principles of the Bahá'í Faith. True recognition is not confined to a singular moment but rather aims to foster a comprehensive, transformative, and universal understanding that evolves across time and space.

3. Another facet of the spirit of faith, subsequent to recognition and genuine understanding, manifests in righteous actions and behavior. Abdul-Baha affirms, "The foundation of success and salvation is the recognition of God, and that good deeds, which are the fruit of faith, derive from this recognition." Hence, we discern that the spirit of faith commences with recognition—an internal and rational process—and translates into action, serving as the outward reflection of internal transformation. However, given humans' social nature, actions are construed within the context of social interactions. Consequently, the outcome of faith is the demonstration and cultivation of ethical virtues in social life. Thus, faith encompasses both an individual dimension, originating internally within the individual's psyche, and a collective dimension, manifested through ethical conduct within the societal milieu.
4. The spirit of faith represents a qualitative transformation within the human soul, arising from the dynamic interplay between the recognition of truth and the embodiment of ethical action. This transformation animates spiritual growth and development, both on an individual and collective scale. For instance, individuals endowed with discernment may utilize their understanding of natural laws to harness discoveries and inventions, fostering prosperity and enhancing material comforts. However, the spirit of faith does not prioritize facilitating livelihood; rather, it serves as a conduit for individuals to serve humanity and cultivate detachment and contentment.
5. Through its illuminating power, the soul lays the groundwork for material civilization, while the spirit of faith integrates this civilization with divine morality. Consequently, the spirit of faith becomes synonymous with the continual acquisition of spiritual and moral virtues and perfections. At its essence, this journey of existential perfection is guided by divine Manifestations, fostering meaning and coherence. Thus, while the purpose and perspective of the spirit of faith reside in spiritual and metaphysical realms, its attainment within this world and society takes the form of manifestations of altruism and moral values.
6. According to Abdul-Baha's teachings in *Some Answered Questions*, human beings possess diverse potentials that exist in a stage of capacity, awaiting a process to guide them toward actualization. The spirit of faith serves as the unifying and transcending

force that nurtures these potentials and directs them toward the ultimate goal and purpose of life, which includes the recognition of truth, discovering meanings, and fulfilling a divine purpose.

7. The spirit of faith necessitates certain attributes, understood as purity of heart, conscience, and sincere intentions. These attributes come to fruition when the animalistic inclinations within humans, which tend towards self-centeredness and dominance, are subdued by their spiritual and ethical aspirations. In this state, the human heart metaphorically becomes receptive to receiving the spirit of faith. Conversely, when the heart is filled with animosity and selfish desires, individuals are unable to benefit from the manifestations and mysteries of divine mercy and the grace of the Holy Spirit. As the spirit of faith progresses, it purifies and refines the essence, heart, and soul of humans, enabling them to reflect spiritual truths like a mirror. This process leads to the attainment of surrender and contentment, as individuals submit their will to divine providence, epitomizing the utmost unity within themselves.
8. The spirit of faith should be regarded as an integral component of the educational process and upbringing. Abdul-Baha emphasizes the fundamental role of education in the transformation and development of individuals. Abdul-Baha delineates human nature into three constituent elements: the physical aspect, the innate spiritual dimension inherent in humans' soul with various potentials and abilities, and the acquisitive powers and characteristics resulting from education and upbringing. Thus, both the material and spiritual facets of humanity necessitate the influence of education and upbringing. In this context, the spirit of faith emerges as a manifestation of the expansive flow of education and upbringing. Abdul-Baha states,

*Man is in the ultimate degree of materiality and the beginning of spirituality; that is, he is at the end of imperfection and the beginning of perfection. He is at the furthestmost degree of darkness and the beginning of the light. That is why the station of man is said to be the end of night and the beginning of day, meaning that he encompasses all the degrees of imperfection and that he potentially possesses all the degrees of perfection. He has both an animal side and an angelic side, and the role of the educator is to so train human souls that the angelic side may overcome the animal.*

Abdul-Baha concludes that when the spirit of faith arises as the culmination of the educative process, humans transcend their vices and embody every human virtue, deeming this

transformation the ultimate reward akin to true paradise. Conversely, they regard spiritual punishment as being relegated to the realm of nature, where they are estranged from God, entangled in ignorance and worldly desires, dominated by base instincts, and marked by falsehood, tyranny, and iniquity—a condition they perceive as the most severe form of torment and punishment.

## **Spiritual Psychology<sup>7</sup>**

According to Abdul-Baha's perspective, the soul is a subtle essence from which the personality, conscience, and awareness of humanity originate, constituting their true essence. This comprehensive definition implies that concepts and insights regarding human thought, feelings, behavior, motivations, drives, and their interaction with the social environment are shared subjects between psychology and the exploration of the soul. In essence, the definition of the soul provided in *Some Answered Questions* has the potential to introduce a novel definition and approach to the field of psychology.

It is inadequate to define the soul with such vast dimensions and then confine its study solely to philosophical or metaphysical realms. Research findings, empirical observations of behavior, practical psychology, and related topics should not be divorced from the subject of the soul.

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<sup>7</sup> The concept of spiritual psychology, along with various interpretations of it, has garnered significant attention in the writings of humanist psychologists, integral philosophers, scholars studying human behavior from a religious perspective, and proponents of the harmony between science and religion. In Bahá'í discourse, individuals such as Hussein Danesh, William Hatcher, Nossrat Peseschkian, Michael Penn, Rhett Diessner, and others have contributed to this multifaceted subject.

The field of spiritual psychology is not a modern or emerging discipline. For most of human history, topics related to psychology were discussed in religious contexts or in philosophy by philosophers who primarily believed in the metaphysical nature of the human soul. In modern times, after the emergence of empirical models, psychology, like many other disciplines, separated itself from its traditional purview of theology and philosophy. However, in the 20th century, amidst the reign of materialistic approaches to psychology, a number of modern psychologists started to develop a new conceptual framework for psychology with a strong spiritual orientation. Among them were Carl Jung, Abraham Maslow, Viktor Frankl, William James, Gordon Allport, and Alfred Adler. Gordon Allport, in his 1939 APA Presidential Address, summarized the sentiment of this emerging field: “My plea... is that we avoid authoritarianism, that we keep psychology from becoming a cult from which original and daring inquiry is ruled out by the application of one-sided tests of method; that we come to evaluate our science rather by its success in enhancing... our powers of predicting, understanding, and controlling human action. As an aid to progress I have tried especially to strengthen the case for research upon complex patterns of human mental organization, frames of reference, the subject's point of view, and the act of understanding.”

Therefore, the theoretical and practical development of spiritual psychology naturally emerges from Abdul Baha's comprehensive discourse on the concept of the soul in *Some Answered Questions*. However, it is essential to approach this issue with mindfulness, caution, and wisdom, avoiding the imposition of theology on psychology. Enriching psychology with spiritual perspectives should lead to its evolution as a scientific field, arising from the mutually enriching relationships between science, religion, and reason. Considering Abdul-Baha's statements regarding the human station as the ultimate degree of materiality and the beginning of spirituality, spiritual psychology should emerge at the intersection where biology ends, and culture begins to manifest.

### **A Brief Overview of the Philosophical and Theological Roots of Early Psychology and the Emergence of Modern Psychology**

Psychology etymologically derives from the Greek language and comprises two parts: *psyche*, meaning soul or spirit, and *logos*, meaning knowledge. Generally, it refers to understanding and awareness, which, akin to the soul, facilitates life. In the past, the subject matter studied under psychology was considered part of the science of the soul. It was believed that comprehending the soul and understanding human thoughts, feelings, and behavior were only attainable through grasping the non-material truth of the soul. However, this definition primarily existed at the level of generalities and abstract discussions, lacking precise scientific observation, practical aspects, and detailed descriptions of the complexities of human behavior. Ancient philosophers and thinkers made limited references to the intricate mechanisms explaining the relationship between the soul and personality and behavior. For instance, in Plato's pursuit of presenting the characteristics of an ideal society, he categorized individuals into three groups based on their existential motivations and established specific behaviors and social positions for each group, grounded in their psychological characteristics and motivations. This laid the foundation for preliminary typology and behavior analysis. Aristotle also delved into the study of natural human reflexes and reactions to the environment, exploring the relationship between biology and psychology. However, psychology largely remained within the domain of philosophy and theology until recent centuries. From the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the groundwork for psychology as an independent science was established, gradually evolving into what is now recognized as scientific psychology.

In the seventeenth century, René Descartes presented one of the most significant studies and opinions regarding the relationship between the mind and body. He considered the mind non-material and the body material, distinguishing the two based on this duality while establishing a form of mechanical relationship between them. Similarly, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, a prominent figure in philosophy during the same period, introduced a theory suggesting that the soul and body do not have a direct causal relationship but, according to divine providence, their functions run in parallel to each other.

One of the most significant developments contributing to the growth of scientific psychology occurred in the eighteenth century, where views and theories began to distinguish psychology based on the primacy of reason from empirical and sensory psychology. Empirical psychology viewed scientific psychology akin to other sciences, aiming to study the behavior of organisms, especially humans, as natural phenomena. However, this view faced challenges regarding the nature of thought and its classification as non-material, potentially undermining psychology's scientific nature. In the nineteenth century, the establishment of the first psychology laboratory mirrored advancements in physics and chemistry. Nevertheless, psychology retains a fundamental distinction from the natural sciences: its subject matter lacks predictability and control, presenting challenges in research. Human behavior encompasses multiple pathways, highlighting the complexity of choice and decision-making inherent to self-awareness. Thus, psychology continues to navigate its unique position at the intersection of science, philosophy, and theology.

During the growth and evolution of scientific psychology in the twentieth century, marked by unprecedented intensity and dynamism, the conflict between mental aspects of humans, such as thought and will, and material and sensory methods persisted strongly. Modern psychology grappled with either ignoring these aspects or attempting to explain their function with materialistic explanations. Concurrently, psychology gained significant social acceptance, to the extent that it began to fulfill a role in guiding and advising daily life akin to the function religion served in past centuries.



Some branches of psychology have emphasized human behavior and biological aspects. Evolutionary psychology, for instance, sought to trace the roots of behavior to the mechanisms of natural selection, arguing that underlying motives for dominance, competition, and instinctual gratification are inherited from our animal ancestors. Genetic studies have also played a significant role in modern psychology, exploring the effects of genetics on behavior.

Behavioral psychology took a different approach, focusing on environmental influences rather than introspection. It negated the importance of internal mental processes and emphasized the impact of external factors on the development of personality structure.

Sigmund Freud, with his groundbreaking theories, introduced a new scientific perspective on the mind. He fearlessly delved into the depths of human consciousness, challenging traditional religious and ethical norms that had historically dominated discussions of the psyche. Freud's theories aimed to uncover the relationship between behavior and subconscious instincts, revolutionizing the field of psychology.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, a group of psychologists including Jung, Erikson, Maslow, and Frankl diverged from the Freudian school and materialistic views of psychology. Instead, they introduced new schools of thought that emphasized human potential, the quest for meaning and values beyond the material realm, and the belief in individuals' capacity to transcend instinctual compulsions and environmental constraints. These schools did not adhere to the religious concept of the soul but also rejected the material reductionism of previous explanations.

Gestalt psychology, in contrast to the reductionist approach of behaviorism, viewed human experience and behavior as an integrated whole that could only be understood in its entirety and completeness. Piagetian psychology explored the structure and stages of cognitive development, linking them to biological growth from concrete to abstract thinking.

Furthermore, in recent decades, various schools of thought influenced by Eastern religions and mystical perspectives have emerged. These schools emphasize the unity of existence and the non-material aspects of humanity, seeking to reconcile spiritual concepts with the principles of modern psychology. This movement can be broadly categorized into two branches: a popular

branch that simplifies spiritual concepts, and a smaller scientific branch that rigorously integrates spiritual ideas into psychological inquiry without deviation from scientific discourse.

Modern psychology emerged as part of the Enlightenment movement, which brought about fundamental shifts in contemporary thought and reshaped perceptions of humanity. Initially, modern psychology aligned itself with the principles of materialist philosophy, considering religious beliefs as illusions stemming from ignorance, unawareness, or fear, with the aim of alleviating existential anxiety. This perspective asserted that no evidence of God or the soul could be discerned in the observation and experience of the universe.

These materialistic ideas held sway over the Enlightenment movement until the mid-twentieth century, exerting significant dominance and influence. However, two major currents emerged in the twentieth century that challenged the foundations of materialistic thought. Firstly, the crisis of values and the collapse of political systems and materialistic ideologies, which had positioned themselves as successors to previous religious systems, led to a disillusionment with materialism. Despite scientific advancements, which unraveled many mysteries, they failed to offer comprehensive insights to guide human action. The devastation wrought by two world wars heightened violence and precipitated intellectual and psychological crises, prompting reflection on the need for new spiritual and ethical concepts. Criticisms of religious dogmatism did not necessarily entail a denial of God and the soul.

Secondly, scientific breakthroughs in physics and cosmology shook the underpinnings of materialistic and mechanistic views of reality. These developments underscored the limitations of materialistic thinking in explaining the intricacies of existence. The views and opinions of modern psychology explained various aspects of human reality and its relationship with the social environment, but none could present itself as a comprehensive model. A necessary condition for a comprehensive model is that it must constantly evolve and creatively utilize the diversity and abundance of opinions, views, and scientific findings, and within the framework of that model, psychology can continue to grow, rather than approaching in a dogmatic manner. A look at the evolution of modern psychology shows that this science has been able to transform itself internally and in its external discourse with other sciences. For example, Freudian psychology, despite all its influences, gradually lost its dominance. Or behavioral engineering

models, due to their dogmatism and reduction of complex human behavior to behavioral reflections of animals in the laboratory environment, came under criticism.

### **Abdul Baha's Response to Spiritual Psychology**

The discussion brought up the notion that a comprehensive understanding of the soul must integrate with the theoretical and practical foundations of psychology. In this context, the perspectives of Abdul-Baha on the soul and human spiritual transformation offer a potentially comprehensive framework that extends psychology's dimensions to include the systematic study of human behavior. The term "spiritual psychology" does not oppose scientific psychology; rather, it aims to identify which aspects should complement scientific psychology to foster human potential and the balanced development of innate faculties.

In essence, the focus lies on a psychology dedicated to exploring beliefs, values, and meanings that transcend mere human thoughts and actions. This approach seeks to delve into the deeper aspects of human existence, contemplating the spiritual dimensions that influence behavior and cognition. By acknowledging and studying these transcendent elements, psychologists can gain a more comprehensive understanding of human potential and the complexities of human experience.

Through the lens of Abdul-Baha's teachings, it is proposed that this perspective can provide a holistic insight and cultural impact, allowing psychology to reconcile the soul with the natural aspects of the human organism and the multifaceted manifestations of behavior. It's important to note that while psychology has its own methods and specific subjects that have evolved over time, it is also embedded within the social structure and cultural values of its environment. Therefore, examining psychology from a Baha'i perspective should encompass broader social, civilizational, and cultural dimensions, aligning with the goals of establishing unity and harmony in society.

Abdul-Baha has emphasized the transformative impact of spiritual psychology on individual inner development and its outward expression in societal behavior. He has provided principles for achieving inner peace, maintaining a balance between thought and emotion, and guiding behavior. This underscores the inherent presence of psychological elements within religious

teachings, integral to the overarching goals and ideals of religion. According to him, religion primarily concerns the relationship between the human soul and its Creator, constituting a metaphysical concept. However, the practical outcomes of this relationship are evident in their effects on individual cognitive and behavioral mechanisms, subjects studied within the realm of psychology today.

For instance, beliefs in the afterlife and the soul's immortality are metaphysical concepts, yet their impact is tangible in fostering inner peace, detachment from transient material pursuits, discovering life's meaning, bolstering coping mechanisms during hardships, and nurturing hope for the future. These effects contribute to harmonizing individuals' lives and psyches, alleviating anxieties, and empowering them to engage in life with enthusiasm, establish families, nurture children, and promote societal advancement. Similarly, practices such as prayer and supplication, often seen as avenues for spiritual elevation, exert profound effects on an individual's psychological well-being and behavior.

Serious scientific research has indeed highlighted the significant positive effects of practices like supplication, trust, and surrender on both physical and mental health. These practices equip individuals with resilience in facing life's challenges while concurrently decreasing levels of anxiety and depression. Consequently, the intersection between metaphysical spiritual concepts and psychological mechanisms is not an arbitrary or unwarranted intrusion, and it is unjust to criticize religion for its engagement with psychology.

The critical question to explore is whether these psychological effects stem solely from some form of positive suggestion or if they have deeper roots in genuine cognition. For instance, does the beneficial impact of prayer and supplication on overall well-being emerge solely from the intervention of spiritual and metaphysical forces, or does it predominantly arise from the augmentation of cognitive processes? It's essential to investigate whether these practices primarily serve to enhance thought mechanisms, which, when positively reinforced, trigger favorable responses leading to improved physiological and psychological functioning. Understanding the underlying mechanisms at play can provide valuable insights into the intricate relationship between spirituality and psychology, enriching our comprehension of human behavior and well-being.

It's worth noting that researchers have indeed begun to investigate whether there exists an empirical presence and influence of forces beyond the thought mechanism in the functioning and effects of prayer and supplication. However, these studies are still in their preliminary stages, and it's prudent to await their results without preemptively imposing any particular bias on them.

Even if we set aside the possibility of spiritual forces intervening, we are still left with the question of why the thought mechanism leads to improvements in organismic function through positive reinforcement. Why is it that hope, love, and encouragement have the power to transform the thought mechanism from negativity to positivity, resulting in both quantitative and qualitative enhancements in life? Can we not deduce from this that the thought mechanism is inherently structured to align with values and general laws that we term spiritual values, affirmed in all religions?

Abdul Baha emphasizes the interconnection between metaphysical laws and the thought mechanism within material and social life, illustrating a continuous chain of fundamental elements that enriches our understanding of human nature. In essence, the design of the thought and behavior mechanism inherently seeks equilibrium by adhering to values prescribed by divine ordinances or universal educators. Delving deeper into this connection can unveil fundamental principles governing human behavior and well-being, providing valuable insights into the intersection of spirituality and psychology and fostering a more holistic understanding of human nature.

Psychology or any other disciplines revolving around human behavior, whether they believe in the concept of the human soul or not, do not deny the fact that serving one's fellow beings as a desirable human value is necessary for a healthy and balanced life. However, defining serving others only in terms of material and human values has its limits. Without a spiritual motivation derived from purity and faith, and without rewards beyond material gain or social recognition, the efficacy of serving others reaches a stage in human and social life and then stagnates. In other words, without a spiritual dimension, the human capacity for benevolent actions becomes saturated, and a psychological vacuum takes its place. What brings satisfaction to the soul and intrinsic joy to human beings is attention to eternal spiritual truths.

Aldous Huxley, a renowned thinker, suggests that even the brilliance and creativity in science and art do not fulfill that psychological need or bring desired contentment, and in moments of despair, individuals even question whether all of that is worthwhile, including luminaries like Shakespeare and Beethoven. Discussions of this nature indicate that psychology inherently requires the transcending concept of spiritual development.

The concept of psychology devoted to spiritual components can also be sought in the realm of love and emotional feelings. Love at the physical stage has its roots in needs and material instincts. At the human stage, love manifests in mutual relationships and social commitments. At the spiritual stage, love transcends physical and human dimensions and appears as a liberating force free from any condition or attachment. If love is confined to physical attachments, it can metamorphose into a destructive force of insistent self, leading to selfish desires, disrupting inner peace, and fueling social relationships into paths of competition and conflict.

Since all three qualities of physical, human, and spiritual exist simultaneously in the human organism, individuals constantly need to refine the force of love at each stage of life and transform it into a tool for spiritual perfection. This is where divine love, which transcends the constraints and conditions of the phenomenal world, becomes necessary. From the Bahá'í perspective, Manifestations of God serve as expressions of spiritual truths capable of freeing individuals' emotional forces from physical attachments and guiding them towards the fruition of what is called true love. Hence, symbolic references to love as the beauty of the divine are observed in sacred texts. The beauty inherent in the universe acts as a magnet, drawing the human soul towards its essence.

Within Abdul Baha's perspective, the refinement of human love originates from an appreciation for the true beauty of the divine. This divine beauty serves as a guiding force, inspiring individuals to elevate their capacity for love. Moreover, he emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between cognition and action in nurturing love. Initially, cognition draws love from raw emotions, transforming it into a conscious force. Subsequently, ethical actions refine this love, shaping it into the catalyst for acts of sacrifice and altruism, thus embodying the essence of spiritual growth and service to humanity.

This passage from *Some Answered Questions* explores the essential interactions between spirituality and human thoughts, emotions, actions, and rectitude of conduct. It is best understood in its entirety to grasp the essence of the discourse.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> **Good Deeds and Their Spiritual Prerequisites**

*QUESTION: THOSE WHO do good works, who are well-wishers of all mankind, who have a praiseworthy character, who show forth love and kindness to all people, who care for the poor, and who work for universal peace—what need do they have of the divine teachings, with which they believe they can well afford to dispense? What is the condition of such people?*

Know that such ways, words, and deeds are to be lauded and approved, and they redound to the glory of the human world. But these actions alone are not sufficient: They are a body of the greatest beauty, but without a spirit. No, that which leads to everlasting life, eternal honour, universal enlightenment, and true success and salvation is, first and foremost, the knowledge of God. It is clear that this knowledge takes precedence over every other knowledge and constitutes the greatest virtue of the human world. For the understanding of the reality of things confers a material advantage in the realm of being and brings about the progress of outward civilization, but the knowledge of God is the cause of spiritual progress and attraction, true vision and insight, the exaltation of humanity, the appearance of divine civilization, the rectification of morals, and the illumination of the conscience.

Second comes the love of God. The light of this love is kindled, through the knowledge of God, in the lamp of the heart, and its spreading rays illumine the world and bestow upon man the life of the Kingdom. And in truth the fruit of human existence is the love of God, which is the spirit of life and grace everlasting. Were it not for the love of God, the contingent world would be plunged in darkness. Were it not for the love of God, the hearts of men would be bereft of life and deprived of the stirrings of conscience. Were it not for the love of God, the perfections of the human world would entirely vanish. Were it not for the love of God, no real connection could exist between human hearts. Were it not for the love of God, spiritual union would be lost. Were it not for the love of God, the light of the oneness of mankind would be extinguished. Were it not for the love of God, the East and the West would not embrace as two lovers. Were it not for the love of God, discord and division would not be transmuted into fellowship. Were it not for the love of God, estrangement would not give way to unity. Were it not for the love of God, the stranger would not become the friend. Indeed, love in the human world is a ray of the love of God and a reflection of the grace of His bounty.

It is clear that human realities differ one from another, that opinions and perceptions vary, and that this divergence of thoughts, opinions, understandings, and sentiments among individuals is an essential requirement. For differences of degree in creation are among the essential requirements of existence, which is resolved into countless forms. We stand therefore in need of a universal power which can prevail over the thoughts, opinions, and sentiments of all, which can annul these divisions and bring all souls under the sway of the principle of the oneness of humanity. And it is clear and evident that the greatest power in the human world is the love of God. It gathers diverse peoples under the shade of the tabernacle of oneness and fosters the greatest love and fellowship among hostile and contending peoples and nations.

Observe how numerous were the diverse nations, races, clans, and tribes who, after the advent of Christ, gathered through the power of the love of God under the shadow of His Word. Consider how the differences and divisions of a thousand years were entirely abolished, how the delusion of the superiority of race and nation was dispelled, how the unity of souls and sentiments was attained, and how all became Christians in truth and in spirit.

The third virtue of humanity is goodly intention, which is the foundation of all good deeds. Some seekers after truth have held intention to be superior to action, for a goodly intention is absolute light and is entirely sanctified from the least trace of malice, scheming, or deception. Now, one can perform an action which appears to be righteous, but which is in reality prompted by self-interest. For example, a butcher raises a sheep and guards its safety, but this good deed of the butcher is motivated by the hope of profit, and the end result of all this care will be the slaughter of the poor sheep. How many are the goodly and righteous deeds that are in reality prompted by self-interest! But the pure intention is sanctified above such faults.

Briefly, good deeds become perfect and complete only after the knowledge of God has been acquired, the love of God has been manifested, and spiritual attractions and goodly motives have been attained. Otherwise, though good deeds be praiseworthy, if they do not spring from the knowledge of God, from the love of God, and from a sincere intention, they will be imperfect. For example, human existence must encompass all perfections in order to be complete. The power of sight is highly prized and precious, but it must be aided by that of hearing; the hearing is highly prized, but it must be aided by the power of speech; the power of speech is highly prized, but it must be aided by that of reason; and so on with the other powers, organs, and members of man. When all these powers, senses, parts, and organs are combined together, perfection is attained.

## Sources and Origins of Spiritual Psychology

1- 'Abdu'l-Bahá acknowledges the true essence of human beings lies in their spiritual nature, with the recognition of the Manifestations of God serving as the catalyst for the movement and dynamism of the soul. Thus, knowledge derived from revelation concerning the states and perfections of the soul becomes a yardstick for comprehending and evaluating human behavior,

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In the world today we meet with souls who sincerely desire the good of all people, who do all that lies in their power to assist the poor and succour the oppressed, and who are devoted to universal peace and well-being. Yet, however perfect they may be from this perspective, they remain deprived of the knowledge and the love of God and, as such, are imperfect.

Galen the physician wrote in his commentary on Plato's treatise on the art of governance that religious beliefs exert a profound influence on true civilization, the proof being as follows: Most people cannot grasp a sequence of logical arguments and stand therefore in need of symbolic allusions heralding the rewards and punishments of the next world. The sign of this is that we see today a people called Christians who believe in the rewards and punishments of the next world and who show forth goodly deeds that are like those of a true philosopher. Thus we all plainly see that they have no fear of death and that they are, by virtue of their ardent yearning for justice and equity, to be regarded as though they were true philosophers.

Now observe closely how great the sincerity, the self-abnegation, the spiritual emotions, the pure intentions, and the good deeds of the Christian believers must have been for Galen—a philosopher and physician who was not himself a Christian—to attest to the morals and the perfections of these people and call them true philosophers. Such virtues and qualities cannot be attained through good deeds alone. If virtue only meant that some good be obtained and bestowed, then why do we not praise this burning lamp which lights the room, even though its light is without a doubt a good thing? The sun nurtures all earthly things and fosters their growth and development by its heat and light—what greater good is there than this? Nonetheless, since this good does not flow from goodly motives and from the love and knowledge of God, it does not impress in the least. But when someone offers a cup of water to another, he is shown appreciation and gratitude. An unthinking person might say, “This sun which gives light to the world and manifests this great bounty must surely be praised and glorified. For why should we praise a man for such a modest gift and not yield thanks to the sun?” But if we were to gaze with the eye of truth, we would see that the modest gift bestowed by this person stems from the stirrings of conscience and is therefore praiseworthy, whereas the light and heat of the sun are not due to this and thus are not worthy of our praise and gratitude. In like manner, while those who perform good deeds are to be lauded, if these deeds do not flow from the knowledge and love of God, they are assuredly imperfect.

Aside from this, if you consider the matter with fairness, you will see that these good deeds of the non-believers also have their origin in the divine teachings. That is, the Prophets of old exhorted men to perform them, explained their advantages, and expounded their positive effects; these teachings then spread among mankind, successively reaching the non-believing souls and inclining their hearts towards these perfections; and when they found these actions to be laudable and to bring about joy and happiness among men, they too conformed to them. Thus these actions also arise from the divine teachings. But to see this, a measure of fair-mindedness is called for and not dispute and controversy.

Praise be to God, you have visited Persia and have witnessed the loving-kindness which, through the sanctified breezes of Bahá'u'lláh, Persians have come to show forth to all humanity. Formerly, if they chanced upon a follower of another religion, they would set upon him, display the utmost enmity, hatred, and malice, and even regard him as impure. They would burn the Gospel and the Torah and would wash their hands if they had been soiled by touching these Books. But now, most of them recite and interpret, as required by the occasion, from the contents of these two Books in their assemblies and gatherings and expound and elucidate their inner meanings and mysteries. They show kindness to their enemies and treat bloodthirsty wolves with tender care, as they would the gazelles of the meadows of God's love. You have seen their conduct and character, and you have heard of the morals which the Persians had in former times. Can this transformation of morals and this rectification of speech and conduct be brought about other than through the love of God? No, by God! If we undertook to spread such morals and manners merely by means of knowledge and learning, a thousand years would pass and still they would not have been achieved among the masses.

In this day, thanks to the love of God, this has been achieved with the greatest ease. Take heed, then, O ye of understanding heart!



termed the spiritual source. This spiritual source introduces a novel concept of religion from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's perspective, rooted in divine ordinances and evolving through the gradual progression of divine manifestations, which connect all religions throughout history and civilization. Since divine revelation undergoes continuous renewal, religion is not a static concept but a dynamic and evolving entity susceptible to fluctuations and decline. While religion, in its dynamic form, can positively influence personality and behavioral development, its efficacy may be limited without embracing change, potentially leading to dogmatic mental rigidity. Furthermore, when intertwined with emotional prejudice, religion can inadvertently foster biased and destructive behavior.

The differentiation between these two facets of religion offers a fresh perspective in the examination of religious behavior. Behavior stemming from religious faith is not solely a metaphysical concern beyond the reach of psychology but rather falls within the broader domain of behavior. For instance, power-seeking behavior observed in religious contexts shares conceptual parallels with similar manifestations in political and secular spheres. Psychological dynamics, whether within religious or secular contexts, operate under a unified mechanism. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's interpretations challenge nineteenth-century criticisms of religion's role by asserting that when the spirituality of religions diminishes, only nominal religion remains. This shift leads to a decline in spiritual vitality, resulting in lifeless souls, withered hearts, and despondent spirits.

From this perspective, the historical narratives of religions undergo a re-examination. Here, the behaviors of individuals and collectives within a religious framework are not relegated to the supernatural, beyond the purview of scientific inquiry. Rather, believers are seen as ordinary individuals confronting common challenges, albeit influenced by the values espoused by their religion. This viewpoint permits the investigation of both the internal evolution and the spiritual and moral progress of adherents, as well as the decline and subsequent behavioral consequences within their societies.

Within their societies, this perspective encapsulates the ethos of thought, behavior, and culture, encompassing both spiritual flourishing and moral decline. This also highlights that the psychological examination of believers in figures such as Christ, Moses, and Bahá'u'lláh

fundamentally shares common ground. What has evolved over time are the complexities arising from accumulated social experiences. Delving into religious texts, believers' conduct, and historical religious occurrences offers a fertile domain for the exploration of human behavior. Therefore, inquiries such as these can pave the way for a deeper understanding of the principles of spiritual psychology: What motivations have driven the opposition, persecution, and harassment of every new prophet? What lessons do these motivations impart about human thought and behavior? How have psychological motivations for power and dominance manifested throughout religious history, and what calamitous consequences have they wrought? Why does the element of sacrifice and selflessness, exemplified in the life of Christ, resonate with believers across centuries? Why does suffering, within the context of faith, often strengthen rather than weaken it? Delving into these questions can yield a treasure trove for new psychological studies.

One reason modern psychology has overlooked these experiences is the empirical and skeptical spirit of the modern age, which has rigidly categorized religion as unequivocal. This classification has often relegated religious experiences to mythical interpretations deemed incompatible with objectivity and neutrality. However, a broader integrative framework of spiritual psychology introduces a new concept of the role of religion. This framework offers fertile ground to explore religious experiences with an approach more compatible with accepted models of inquiry in human sciences.

2- Another source of spiritual psychology is philosophical thought, which has evolved since ancient times and is a testament to human rational inference. In the Bahá'í context, philosophical thought is not only affirmed but also praised for its broad-mindedness. Some Answered Questions, for example, delves into the intricate relationship between religion, philosophy, and scientific thought. Throughout history, both ancient and modern philosophical thinking has centered on the study of human nature and self-awareness, making philosophy a valuable source of knowledge and understanding for studying human behavior. Rooted in rational inference, philosophy holds a prominent place in the Bahá'í Faith, where the intellect is revered as an essential attribute of the soul. Abdul-Bahá aptly compares the soul to a lamp and the intellect to its light, emphasizing the integral role of intellect in illuminating the depths of human understanding.

In Abdul-Bahá's teachings, intellect is esteemed when grounded in empirical observations and illuminated by spiritual insight. Philosophical thought, for the most part, upholds the primacy of the soul over matter and affirms the personality and eternity of the human soul. However, in modern empirical psychology, which places a strong emphasis on scientific rigor, philosophical criteria, offering a comprehensive understanding of human life and behavior, have been somewhat neglected. Instead, the focus has primarily been on the material aspects of behavior and conditional reactions.

Nevertheless, philosophical thought, with its propensity for generalizing observations and experiences, holds the capacity to derive universal truths from specific instances. Therefore, there exists a fundamental unity between religion, which emphasizes the soul, and philosophy, which celebrates the intellect. Religion, philosophy, and science all elucidate the essential relationships between phenomena, inherently interconnected in their pursuit of understanding.

3- The third pillar of spiritual psychology rests on ethics. Abdul-Bahá posits that human conscience, and the emergence of moral virtues emanate from the soul. Therefore, ethics serves as the practical expression of spirituality in behavior and social interactions. Consequently, any discourse on behavioral psychology inherently involves ethical values.

At a fundamental level, individual psychology and social ethics are interconnected. What occurs within an individual's inner self reverberates and reciprocates within society. However, contemporary psychological discourse often neglects moral discipline and concepts such as rectitude of conduct. Ethics should not be imposed but rather understood as a subject for exploration. Indeed, one reason for the emergence of relativistic ethical theories may have been an attempt to dissociate ethics from oppressive constraints. A potential focus for a new psychology could then involve reconciling freedom of thought and conscience with ethical action.

4- The fourth cornerstone of spiritual psychology lies in empirical research, which delves into the physical and material states and capacities of human beings. Abdul-Bahá's perspective sheds light on the intricate relationship between the soul and the body, acknowledging the mutual influence of physical conditions and spiritual states and powers. This viewpoint doesn't diminish

human behavior to mere material actions and reactions; instead, it recognizes the significance of physical aspects and genetic factors in shaping behavior.

In spiritual psychology, the affirmation of spiritual aspects does not entail disregarding the material dimensions of behavior. Rather, it emphasizes the importance of detailed empirical studies, laboratory experiments, and rigorous mathematical and statistical analyses in understanding human behavior. Thus, behavioral psychology necessitates a comprehensive theoretical framework that integrates empirical research on human material organisms with concepts and values drawn from religion, philosophy, and ethics. This framework should be both cohesive and dynamic, elevating our understanding of human behavior.

Furthermore, scientific advancements, including progress in medical science, pharmacology, and genetic research, hold the promise of improving the health of future generations and mitigating hereditary afflictions. These developments will contribute to manifesting spirituality in behavior in a more genuine and transparent manner.

5- The fifth principle of spiritual psychology revolves around the coordinates and outcomes of the evolving social system, which is progressively moving towards the realization of the unity and oneness of humankind. According to this perspective, individual spiritual growth unfolds within a societal framework, and the mechanisms of collective transformation directly influence individual behavior. From this viewpoint, the human world is perceived as a unified living entity that has collectively traversed evolutionary stages and is now poised at the threshold of acknowledging the unity of humankind, establishing global unity, and fostering a new international order.

Each divine revelation throughout history has empowered humanity to progress through phases of growth and evolution. Therefore, spiritual, and ethical values must be interpreted within the context of this broader objective and the cultural spirit of the contemporary era. Understanding and transforming individual behavior cannot be divorced from the set of forces and transformations propelling humanity towards a global civilization. The defining spirit of a time or cultural milieu, composed of prevalent ideas and beliefs, holds significant sway over shaping individual minds and behaviors. The cultural environment cultivated by a global civilization

plays a pivotal role in providing the necessary conditions for the development of spiritual psychology. In fact, without the presence of this collective milieu, the concept and practice of spiritual psychology may never have come to fruition.

The goals of a united community and the foundational movements rapidly propelling the world towards a unified global entity challenge and reshape the theoretical foundations of all behavioral sciences, including psychology. This alignment with the reality of a global civilization rooted in justice and compassion suggests that the theory of a united world can be considered as one significant supplement to spiritual psychology. Only the crystallization of a balanced and robust global system can provide an environment conducive to nurturing human talents, refining behavior, and ensuring mental health and peace of mind in a world marked by turmoil and conflict.

### **Immortality of Human Soul**

The concept of the survival of the soul, found across various religions and philosophical traditions, underpins the continuation of existence beyond death and the perpetuation of one's true essence. This essence, often considered the focal point of consciousness, personality, and individuality, has been a subject of contemplation since ancient times. Figures like Socrates and Plato in ancient Greek philosophy posited arguments for the immortality of the soul, suggesting that its non-material nature renders it immune to destruction. Similar discussions on the soul's enduring nature and its connection to divine wisdom have echoed throughout philosophical discourse, both ancient and modern. Ethical philosophers have further emphasized the significance of soul survival, viewing it as a prerequisite for ethical action in the world.

The belief in the survival of the soul holds profound implications for conscience and moral guidance, as it suggests an afterlife and the possibility of ultimate salvation. Without this belief, ethical teachings and values may lack existential motivation. In Islam and Christianity, two prominent Abrahamic faiths, the concept of soul survival is often depicted through the lens of paradise and hell. According to these traditions, righteous individuals are rewarded in paradise for their virtuous deeds, while wrongdoers face punishment in hell. While these religions acknowledge the transition from one existential stage to another, they also emphasize divine

intervention, particularly in the form of resurrection on the Day of Judgment. In many interpretations, resurrection is understood in a physical sense, involving the reassembly of bodily components and the restoration of life by God. Notably, the descriptions of heaven and hell, along with the rewards and punishments, often take on physical dimensions, with bodily pleasures for the virtuous and physical torment for the sinful. However, it's worth mentioning that some philosophers and theologians within these traditions have interpreted the afterlife more symbolically, focusing on the spiritual rather than the physical aspects of resurrection.

In "Some Answered Questions," Abdul Baha underscores the significance of the survival of the soul, considering it the bedrock of divine religions. He presents compelling philosophical arguments in support of this notion, notably emphasizing the immaterial nature of the soul, which exempts it from the laws of disintegration. Abdul Baha posits that while the body is contingent upon the soul, the essence of the soul persists even after the body's demise. Rejecting the notion of the soul's confinement to a specific location, he likens its relationship with the body to that of the sun's rays with a mirror, suggesting an immaterial yet intrinsic connection. Drawing parallels with the physical weaknesses of humans, Abdul Baha asserts that bodily deficiencies do not diminish the soul's powers or effects, highlighting its independent nature. He likens the soul's influence to sunlight reflected by a mirror, noting that disruptions in the mirror's transparency may temporarily obscure its brilliance but do not diminish its inherent radiance. Thus, Abdul Baha suggests that while bodily weaknesses may obscure the soul's influence, its essence remains steadfast, awaiting the restoration of bodily harmony to manifest its full splendor once again.

This intricate relationship between the body and the soul delves into a profoundly significant and nuanced subject that holds the potential to enhance our comprehension of the enigmatic nature of the soul and its immortality. Within the realm of medicine, numerous documented cases exist where individuals, following accidents or other disorders, lapse into a state of unconsciousness. In these instances, their brains and nervous systems sustain damage, severing all sensory connections with their surrounding environment. Astonishingly, some individuals remain in this unconscious state for extended periods—sometimes years or even decades—until, either through medical intervention or spontaneously, they regain consciousness and recollection of their past,

thereby fully restoring their connection with the external world from the exact point where it had been severed.

Researchers who have delved into these cases have observed intriguing phenomena. Despite the apparent absence of senses, awareness, and perception, these individuals have exhibited signs of attempting to establish a connection with their surroundings. There exists a palpable vitality within them, albeit suppressed by bodily disorder, preventing its full manifestation. However, upon the removal or repair of the bodily ailment, this vital force resurfaces in its entirety, akin to the radiant rays of the sun breaking through clouds. The wealth of research and evidence in this domain underscores the need for deeper scientific scrutiny and exploration.

Another significant advancement lies in the study of near-death experiences, which has amassed substantial evidence from around the globe, prompting a paradigm shift in our understanding of the metaphysical nature of consciousness. Presently, there exists a pervasive sentiment within near-death research that we stand on the cusp of profound discoveries. Charlotte Martial, a neuroscientist at the University of Liège in Belgium, renowned for her pioneering work on near-death experiences within a physicalist framework, anticipates the imminent emergence of a novel comprehension regarding the intricate interplay between the internal experience of consciousness and its observable manifestations, particularly evident in coma patients. We are currently standing at a crucial crossroads where it is imperative to untangle consciousness from mere responsiveness and, potentially, reassess the conventional categorization of states considered unconscious. This pivotal moment beckons us to delve deeper into the complexities of consciousness, questioning the traditional boundaries that have defined our understanding of awareness. In doing so, we open the door to a reimagined perspective on the spectrum of human consciousness, shedding light on previously unexplored realms of the mind and cognition.

It is crucial to exercise utmost precision and caution when utilizing scientific research and evidence to affirm and validate spiritual truths. Care must be taken to ensure that scientific integrity is not compromised, and that scientific findings are not manipulated to justify religious beliefs. Therefore, when discussing such phenomena, it is imperative to approach them with caution and to refrain from making definitive conclusions prematurely. Instead, these phenomena should be highlighted with discretion, leaving the task of definitive confirmation to further

research and empirical experience. This approach ensures that the boundaries between scientific inquiry and religious belief remain clear and that both domains are respected in their respective capacities.

In another context, Abdul-Baha delves into the realm of dreams, shedding light on the soul's activities and experiences in this ethereal domain. He posits that in the world of dreams, where sensory powers and physical faculties are suspended, the soul transcends earthly limitations and gains access to profound spiritual truths. Abdul-Baha eloquently illustrates this phenomenon, stating:

*Know that the influence and perception of the human spirit is of two kinds; that is, the human spirit has two modes of operation and understanding. One mode is through the mediation of bodily instruments and organs. Thus it sees with the eye, hears with the ear, speaks with the tongue. These are actions of the spirit and operations of the human reality, but they occur through the mediation of bodily instruments. Thus, it is the spirit that sees, but by means of the eye; it is the spirit that hears, but by means of the ear; it is the spirit that speaks, but by means of the tongue.*

*The other mode of the spirit's influence and action is without these bodily instruments and organs. For example, in the state of sleep, it sees without eyes, it hears without ears, it speaks without a tongue, it runs without feet—in brief, all these powers are exerted without the mediation of instruments and organs. How often it happens that the spirit has a dream in the realm of sleep whose purport comes to be exactly materialized two years hence! Likewise, how often it happens that in the world of dreams the spirit solves a problem that it could not solve in the realm of wakefulness. Awake, the eye sees only a short distance, but in the realm of dreams one who is in the East may see the West. Awake, he sees only the present; in sleep he beholds the future. Awake, by the fastest means he travels at most seventy miles in an hour; in sleep he traverses East and West in the blink of an eye. For the spirit has two modes of travel: without means, or spiritual travel, and with means, or material travel—as birds that fly, or as being carried in a vehicle.*

Abdul-Baha draws a captivating analogy, likening the body during sleep to a lifeless vessel, devoid of sensory perception, while the soul remains vibrant and active, delving into realms unreachable in waking life. He emphasizes the soul's capacity for heightened awareness and expanded perception in the dream state, suggesting that if the soul were to perish with the body, it would be akin to imagining a bird within a cage – even if the cage were to break, the essence of the bird remains intact and enduring, with its faculties heightened and perceptions expanded.



Moreover, Abdul-Baha categorizes dreams into distinct types: some are mere reflections of daily experiences, while others carry symbolic significance, requiring interpretation to discern spiritual revelations from subconscious biases and fears. Additionally, he identifies a class of dreams characterized by their truthfulness, where reality or glimpses of the future are unveiled directly, unobscured by intermediaries, akin to the pure light of dawn illuminating the path ahead. Through his profound insights, Abdul-Baha invites contemplation on the multifaceted nature of dreams and their profound significance in unraveling the mysteries of the soul.

The exploration of dreams and visions stands as one of the most captivating and intricate aspects of human existence. From the earliest stages of human civilization, there is evidence of a profound fascination with this enigmatic realm, permeating various facets of culture including religion, philosophy, poetry, literature, and art across diverse societies and civilizations. In more recent centuries, dreams have captured the attention of modern psychology, emerging as a focal point of study within the realm of psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalytic theory, pioneered by Sigmund Freud, brought dreams to the forefront, highlighting their role in uncovering the depths of the unconscious mind and in the therapeutic treatment of psychological disorders. Building upon Freud's work, Carl Jung expanded the study of dreams into a broader, more metaphysical domain, delving into the realms of archetypes, collective unconsciousness, and even telepathic communication, viewing dreams as profound manifestations of the soul's activities and insights.

Simultaneously, scientific research has shed light on the biological and physiological aspects of dreams, delving into the mechanisms of sleep and the intricate patterns of brain activity during different sleep cycles. Through the study of brain waves and physiological responses during sleep, researchers have gained new insights into the functions and potential significance of dreams.

As scientific exploration continues to evolve, it promises to unveil further layers of understanding regarding the nature and potential capabilities of dreams. With each new

discovery, the veil shrouding this mysterious realm is lifted, offering glimpses into the profound depths of human consciousness and the intricate workings of the human mind.

Abdul-Baha also delves into a crucial facet of the soul's survival, which is its enduring impact on others and the broader social environment even after the individual's physical passing. He elucidates how the effects and influence of an individual persist beyond their earthly existence, serving as enduring markers of their essence and presence.

This concept highlights the profound and lasting imprint that individuals leave on the world through their thoughts, actions, and contributions to society. Even after their physical departure, the essence of their character, values, and teachings continues to resonate within the hearts and minds of those they have touched.

In essence, Abdul-Baha underscores the notion that the legacy of an individual extends far beyond their mortal life, shaping the course of human history and inspiring future generations. It speaks to the timeless impact of noble deeds, altruistic acts, and the pursuit of truth and justice, which transcend the confines of time and space, perpetuating the enduring spirit of the soul.

He states:

*A rational proof for the immortality of the spirit is this, that no effect can be produced by a non-existent thing; that is, it is impossible that any effect should appear from absolute nothingness. For the effect of a thing is secondary to its existence, and that which is secondary is conditioned upon the existence of that which is primary. So from a nonexistent sun no rays can shine; from a non-existent sea no waves can surge; from a non-existent cloud no rain can fall; from a non-existent tree no fruit can appear; from a non-existent man nothing can be manifested or produced. Therefore, so long as the effects of existence are visible, they prove that the author of that effect exists.*

6. *Consider how, to this day, the sovereignty of Christ has endured. How can a sovereignty of such greatness be manifested by a non-existent sovereign? How can such waves surge from a non-existent sea? How can such heavenly breezes waft from a non-existent garden? Consider that as soon as the constituent parts of anything, be it mineral, plant, or animal, are disintegrated and its elemental composition is dissolved, all effect, influence, and trace thereof vanish. But it is not so with the human spirit and reality, which continues to manifest its signs, to exert its influence, and to sustain its effects even after the dissociation and decomposition of the various parts and members of the body.*

This perspective gains further depth when viewed through the lens of the Bahá'í Faith, where the souls transitioning to the next realm continue to exert influence on the unfolding developments of this world. From this vantage point, every individual, regardless of their perceived stature or role, contributes to the tapestry of civilization and culture.

Indeed, the soul, an intrinsic characteristic of every human being, retains its potency both in the material realm and beyond. Its impact reverberates through the fabric of social interactions, propelling society forward on its evolutionary journey. In this light, it becomes evident that every individual, through their thoughts, actions, and contributions, leaves an indelible mark on the course of human history.

Moreover, the essence of existence itself carries an inherent influence that transcends the boundaries of mortality. Death, in this context, assumes a different significance, as the vitality of those who have passed may continue to shape the living world, perhaps even more vibrantly than those who remain in the realm of the living.

Ultimately, this perspective underscores the interconnectedness of all souls and the enduring legacy of their collective endeavors, weaving a rich tapestry of human experience that spans both realms of existence.

The coherence and cohesion within the book *Some Answered Questions* are evident in its interconnected concepts, each integral to the overall truth system presented. Removing any component would compromise the intellectual, logical, and theoretical integrity of the system as a whole. Each chapter not only delves into a specific topic but also intricately links it with previous and subsequent discussions.

For instance, the definition of the soul inherently implies its perpetuity. Without considering the soul-body relationship, both concepts become abstract and detached from the dynamic fabric of existence and social reality. Abdul-Baha's perspective critiques abstract metaphysics, emphasizing the soul's primary role in animating the material world and, secondarily, in shaping social life.

In this framework, the perpetuity of the soul is inseparable from its cultural and societal influences. Even after ascension and separation from the body, the soul maintains a dynamic relationship with the world. Contrary to distant and terrifying depictions, the afterlife is portrayed as intimately close to humans, concealed only by a thin veil.

While life in this realm is bound by time and space, the soul transcends such limitations. It does not occupy physical space, and the concept of time holds no inherent sway over its essence. Thus, the understanding of the soul's continuity extends beyond mortal confines, enriching our perception of existence and the unseen dimensions that intertwine with our everyday reality.

Abdul-Baha's teachings underscore the transient nature of the physical world, emphasizing its subservience to the eternal essence of the soul. He posits that the soul's evolution and perfection hinge upon experiences and progress within both the natural and social realms. For Abdul-Baha, the manifestations of the soul's perfections are imperative in this earthly domain, as they contribute to the endless expansion of the universe and enable the physical body to receive divine radiance.

In this perspective, all divine realms orbit around the material world, and their evolution is intertwined with the progression of earthly existence. Abdul-Baha's teachings emphasize that souls close to God willingly desire to manifest themselves in human form, aspiring to contribute to the advancement of the divine cause. Thus, seeking departure from this world is deemed inappropriate; instead, individuals are encouraged to supplicate to God for opportunities to serve and manifest their spiritual potential. This perspective illuminates the profound interconnectedness between the material and spiritual dimensions of existence, emphasizing the significance of human life in the cosmic tapestry of creation.

In this context, we recognize that the afterlife is intricately connected to the ongoing cycle of existence, revolving around the dynamic flow of transformation. Knowledge and action serve as the foundational elements driving the transformation of the world. Those who acknowledge truth and act virtuously to enhance the world's well-being find themselves in a state akin to paradise, while those who reject truth and engage in conflict with it, driven by selfishness, egoism, and base instincts, experience a state akin to hell.

Thus, paradise and hell are not merely distant concepts relegated to the afterlife; they also manifest in this world. Paradise and hell are qualities of the soul's journey towards perfection. As observable in daily life, one person may be at peace and harmony with themselves and the world, while another is in constant conflict and strife. One may prioritize the well-being and happiness of others, while another harbors hatred and animosity. One may pursue power, fame, and prestige at the expense of others, while another dedicates their life to serving humanity. One may be ensnared by prejudices, while another strives for the unity of humanity.

The interplay of these two facets of behavior determines the quality of paradise and hell, both in this world and in the afterlife.

Furthermore, as the world of existence undergoes its cycles, the prophets and manifestations of divine revelation serve as the initiators and founders of these cycles. In this context, the concept of paradise and hell is also contextualized within the framework of cultural and civilizational renewal. With the advent of cultural and civilizational renewal, new values emerge, revitalizing the world. Paradise, therefore, becomes synonymous with the values that usher in a new era and lay the foundation for a new spiritual civilization. Conversely, hell becomes associated with ancient values that have decayed and disintegrated, hindering progress and societal advancement.

In various traditions, outward literal concepts are used to define the quality of paradise, such as gardens, streams, milk, and honey, as well as the outward concepts defining hell, such as fire, snakes, and physical torments. However, 'Abdu'l-Bahá argues that these examples and metaphors must be interpreted and explained with spiritual and rational concepts. He suggests that as humans evolve spiritually, they will reach a stage of maturity where the impulse for seeking perfection and advancement will be the primary motivator of their actions, rather than the desire for the apparent blessings of paradise or the fear of punishment and torment in hell. 'Abdu'l-Bahá views the movement towards perfection as inherent in the soul, stating that the human soul is always in a state of progression after separation from the body, continually striving towards infinite perfections.

Another topic emphasized in all religions, including the Bahá'í Faith, is the awareness of the inevitability of death<sup>9</sup> and, consequently, the impermanence and transience of the material world. 'Abdu'l-Bahá reiterates this theme multiple times in his works, emphasizing that the material world is fleeting and illusory, and finding delight solely in it is akin to delusion. He advocates living in the material world but using it as a means for personal progress and service to humanity.

According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the fleeting joy and pleasure derived from the material body quickly fade away, leaving behind only a sense of emptiness and desolation. He urges individuals to reflect on history to gain insight into the future. What becomes of those who pursue self-glorification and seek rulership? Ultimately, 'Abdu'l-Bahá suggests that the transient nature of material existence, akin to dust, mirage, and illusory shadows, will come to an end. Only the effects of pure actions and intentions will endure beyond this ephemeral world.

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<sup>9</sup> *Memento mori*