

Aspects of Spirit

(*Abdu'l-Bahá* mentions five, for Year 1 we only consider three.)

Know that, speaking generally, there are five divisions of the spirit. First the vegetable spirit: this is a power which results from the combination of elements and the mingling of substances by the decree of the Supreme God. When these substances and elements are separated from each other, the power of growth also ceases to exist.

After this is the animal spirit, which also results from the mingling and combination of elements; but this combination is more complete, and through the decree of the Almighty Lord a perfect mingling is obtained, and the animal spirit, in other words the power of the senses, is produced. It will perceive the reality of things from that which is seen and visible, audible, edible, tangible, and that which can be smelt. After the dissociation and decomposition of the combined elements, this spirit also will naturally disappear. It is like this lamp which you see: when the oil and wick and fire are brought together, light is the result; but when the oil is finished and the wick consumed, the light will also vanish and be lost.

The human spirit may be likened to the bounty of the sun shining on crystal. The body of man, which is composed from the elements, is combined and mingled in the most perfect form; it is the most solid construction, the noblest combination, the most perfect existence. It grows and develops through the animal spirit. The human spirit has the power of discovery; it encompasses all things. All these wonderful signs, these scientific discoveries, great enterprises and important historical events which you know, are due to it.

But the spirit of man has two aspects: one divine, one satanic; that is to say, it is capable of the utmost perfection, or it is capable of the utmost imperfection. If it acquires virtues it is the most noble of the existing beings, and if it acquires vices it becomes the most degraded existence.