

Evolution: The Human Race, Maturing Past Materialism

Badi Shams

The popular evolutionary belief declares that we have been created like all other animals and have evolved to become human beings.

From a Baha'i perspective, though, that scientific conclusion doesn't tell the whole human story.

In fact, that view can be understood in a way that undermines the spiritual station and destiny of humanity. It sets the bar low for working towards our goals, and creates the expectation of violence, wars and other destructive forces as acceptable behavior.

That view basically asks: If we're animals, shouldn't we act like animals?

The Baha'i teachings and all other religions, however, have a very different view—that we in essence are spiritual beings, and have been created to gain human experience. We come from the Creator, which means we have a spiritual destiny—a spiritual journey to traverse in order to transform our souls so that we gain the presence of God:

God in his wisdom has created all things. Nothing has been created without a special destiny, for every creature has an innate station of attainment. This flower has been created to mirror forth a harmonious ensemble of color and perfume. Each kingdom of nature holds potentialities, and each must be cultivated in order to reach its fulfillment. The divine teachers desire man to be educated that he may attain to the high rank of his own reality ... – Abdu'l-Baha, *Divine Philosophy*, p. 110.

History proves that so far humanity has not lived a very humane life overall, and has acted too often on its animal impulses. So, in that sense human history has not yet begun. The so-called human history to date records a welter of wars, conflicts, aggression, destruction and misery. To achieve our destiny—to fully mature into our spiritual reality—humanity must first discover its true nature, and then take steps to begin a spiritual transformation in all aspects of its collective life.

In order to accomplish that transition, we will need to find ways to subordinate our lower natures, then find the true purpose of our creation and move towards it.

At this time in our history it is almost impossible to imagine the qualities and abilities of that new, spiritual race of human beings. Because our understanding is limited and we do not have the spiritual insight to picture it, all we can do at this time is to continue on our path of personal growth by relying on the spiritual guidance given to us by Baha'u'llah, keeping in mind what our Creator intended for our existence:

O Son of Spirit! Noble have I created thee, yet thou hast abased thyself. Rise then unto that for which thou wast created. – Baha'u'llah, *The Hidden Words*, p. 9.

Once we begin the process of transformation, we have to redefine many of the concepts from our past. The definitions of such concepts as success, wealth and possessions need to reflect their true meanings, connecting our material achievements and aspirations with spiritual ones:

Then it is clear that the honour and exaltation of man cannot reside solely in material delights and earthly benefits. This material felicity is wholly secondary, while the exaltation of man resides primarily in such virtues and attainments as are the adornments of the human reality. These consist in divine blessings, heavenly bounties, heartfelt emotions, the love and knowledge of God, the education of the people, the perceptions of the mind, and the discoveries of science. They consist in justice and equity, truthfulness and benevolence, inner courage and innate humanity, safeguarding the rights of others and preserving the sanctity of covenants and agreements. They consist in rectitude of conduct under all circumstances, love of truth under all conditions, self-abnegation for the good of all people, kindness and compassion for all nations, obedience to the teachings of God, service to the heavenly Kingdom, guidance for all mankind, and education for all races and nations. This is the felicity of the human world! This is the exaltation of man in the contingent realm! This is the eternal life and heavenly honour! – Abdu'l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions*, newly revised edition, pp. 89-90.

Past generations have spent so much energy to gain material possessions, believing them to represent the ultimate goals in life, and, as a result, have neglected their spiritual needs and growth. Humanity's vision of itself and its destiny has been misguided, and in the end, led to nothing of real value in the eyes of God:

The All-Merciful hath conferred upon man the faculty of vision, and endowed him with the power of hearing. Some have described him as the "lesser world," when, in reality, he should be regarded as the "greater world." The potentialities inherent in the station of man, the full measure of his destiny on earth, the innate excellence of his reality, must all be manifested in this promised Day of God. – Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, p. 340.

As we move forward, both as individuals and as the human race, we have to change our external tools and replace them with spiritual tools and concepts to guide us to our true destiny. We need to shed our animalistic tendencies and acquire virtues that will allow us to follow a spiritual path toward peace and unity.

That means many of the criteria which we have used as tools for measuring our achievements, such as money and wealth, have to be transformed into spiritual ones. We are on a spiritual journey, and our lives should reflect that powerful reality.