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Some Answered Questions

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59: MAN'S KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

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Question.—To what extent can the understanding of man comprehend God?

Answer.—This subject requires ample time, and to explain it thus at table is not easy; nevertheless, we will speak of it briefly.

Know that there are two kinds of knowledge: the knowledge of the essence of a thing and the knowledge of its qualities. The essence of a thing is known through its qualities; otherwise, it is unknown and hidden.

As our knowledge of things, even of created and limited things, is knowledge of their qualities and not of their essence, how is it possible to comprehend in its essence the Divine Reality, which is unlimited? For the inner essence of anything is not comprehended, but only its qualities. For example, the inner essence of the sun is unknown, but is understood by its qualities, which are heat and light. The inner essence of man is unknown and not evident, but by its qualities it is characterized and known. Thus everything is known by its qualities and not by its essence. Although the mind encompasses all things, and the outward beings are comprehended by it, nevertheless these beings with regard to their essence are unknown; they are only known with regard to their qualities.

Then how can the eternal everlasting Lord, Who is held sanctified from comprehension and conception, be known by His essence? That is to say, as things can only be known by their qualities and not by their essence, it is certain that the Divine Reality is unknown with regard to 221 its essence and is known with regard to its attributes. Besides, how can the phenomenal reality embrace the Preexistent Reality? For comprehension is the result of encompassing—embracing must be, so that comprehension may be—and the Essence of Unity surrounds all and is not surrounded.

Also the difference of conditions in the world of beings is an obstacle to comprehension. For example, this mineral belongs to the mineral kingdom; however far it may rise, it can never comprehend the power of growth. The plants,

the trees, whatever progress they may make, cannot conceive of the power of sight or the powers of the other senses; and the animal cannot imagine the condition of man—that is to say, his spiritual powers. Difference of condition is an obstacle to knowledge; the inferior degree cannot comprehend the superior degree. How then can the phenomenal reality comprehend the Preexistent Reality? Knowing God, therefore, means the comprehension and the knowledge of His attributes, and not of His Reality. This knowledge of the attributes is also proportioned to the capacity and power of man; it is not absolute. Philosophy consists in comprehending the reality of things as they exist, according to the capacity and the power of man. For the phenomenal reality can comprehend the Preexistent attributes only to the extent of the human capacity. The mystery of Divinity is sanctified and purified from the comprehension of the beings, for all that comes to the imagination is that which man understands, and the power of the understanding of man does not embrace the Reality of the Divine Essence. All that man is able to understand are the attributes of Divinity, the radiance of which appears and is visible in the world and within men's souls.

When we look at the world and within men's souls, we see wonderful signs of the divine perfections, which are clear and apparent; for the reality of things proves the
222 Universal Reality. The Reality of Divinity may be compared to the sun, which from the height of its magnificence shines upon all the horizons; and each horizon, and each soul, receives a share of its radiance. If this light and these rays did not exist, beings would not exist; all beings express something and partake of some ray and portion of this light. The splendors of the perfections, bounties and attributes of God shine forth and radiate from the reality of the Perfect Man—that is to say, the Unique One, the supreme Manifestation of God. Other beings receive only one ray, but the supreme Manifestation is the mirror for this Sun, which appears and becomes manifest in it, with all its perfections, attributes, signs and wonders.

The knowledge of the Reality of the Divinity is impossible and unattainable, but the knowledge of the Manifestations of God is the knowledge of God, for the bounties, splendors and divine attributes are apparent in Them. Therefore, if man attains to the knowledge of the Manifestations of God, he will attain to the knowledge of God; and if he be neglectful of the knowledge of the Holy Manifestations, he will be bereft of the knowledge of God. It is then ascertained and proved that the Holy Manifestations are the center of the bounty, signs and perfections of God. Blessed are those who receive the light of the divine bounties from the enlightened Dawning-points!

We hope that the Friends of God, like an attractive force, will draw these bounties from the source itself, and that they will arise with such illumination and signs that they will be evident proofs of the Sun of Reality.

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