

Divine Reality

God as an unknowable essence

Issues for Discourse with Youth

Bahá'í Discourse - God

Divine reality

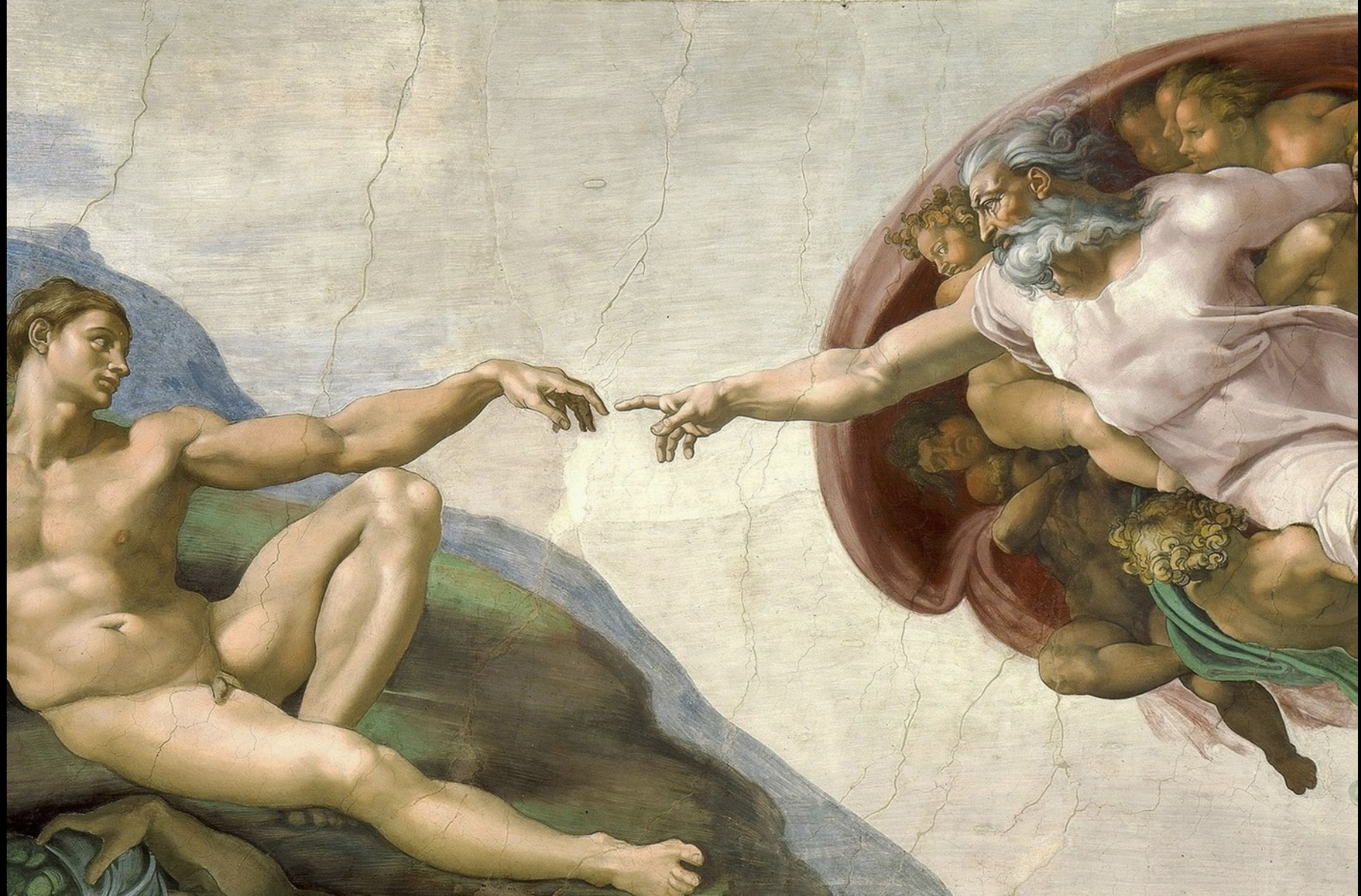
At the centre of all religions and most indigenous belief systems is a concept of a divine reality beyond our physical human reality. This is approached by cultivating some form of spirituality.

Personification of the divine

This divine reality is given various names: God, Allah, Jehova, Mother Earth, etc. for which there is a natural tendency to apply some personification, imagining some human attributes, as in Michelangelo's depiction of God reaching down to Adam in his mural on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. These personifications are often the reason that materialists dispute and deny the existence of God.

Michelangelo
Sistine
Chapel

God
giving
life
to
Adam



Absolute reality of God

In the Bahá'í Faith, this problem is avoided by distinguishing between God as an Absolute Reality beyond any limited human conception, and the Attributes of God as revealed in the physical world and our human reality, which we must learn about and try to apply as we grow spiritually. The Bahá'í Writings educate us to this reality.

Unknowable beyond human attributes

To every discerning and illumined heart it is evident that God, the unknowable Essence, the divine Being, is immensely exalted beyond every human attribute, such as corporeal existence, ascent and descent, egress and regress. Far be it from His glory that human tongue should adequately recount His praise, or that human heart comprehend His fathomless mystery. He is and hath ever been veiled in the ancient eternity of His Essence, and will remain in His Reality everlastingly hidden from the sight of men.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán, The Book of Certitude*, p. 98)

No direct intercourse

No tie of direct intercourse can possibly bind Him to His creatures. He standeth exalted beyond and above all separation and union, all proximity and remoteness. No sign can indicate His presence or His absence; inasmuch as by a word of His command all that are in heaven and on earth have come to exist, and by His wish, which is the Primal Will itself, all have stepped out of utter nothingness into the realm of being, the world of the visible.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán, The Book of Certitude*, p. 98)

Absolute reality beyond reach

All the Prophets of God and their chosen Ones, all the divines, the sages, and the wise of every generation, unanimously recognize their inability to attain unto the comprehension of that Quintessence of all truth, and confess their incapacity to grasp Him, Who is the inmost Reality of all things.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán, The Book of Certitude*, p. 99)

God is unknowable

When we recite the Long Obligatory Prayer, we remind ourselves that God is unknowable.

God sanctified above all attributes

Exalted art Thou above the description of anyone save Thyself, and the comprehension of aught else except Thee.

Too high art Thou for the praise of those who are nigh unto Thee to ascend unto the heaven of Thy nearness, or for the birds of the hearts of them who are devoted to Thee to attain to the door of Thy gate. I testify that Thou hast been sanctified above all attributes and holy above all names.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Long Obligatory Prayer)

We know of God through religion

Since direct knowledge of God is beyond our limited human capacity, God sends educators to teach us about the spiritual attributes we can cultivate and the names we can apply to these qualities of God. God is like the sun, shedding His light upon us, reflected by His perfect mirrors in human form. This is the purpose of all religions, brought to us by Manifestations of God.

Manifesting divine reality

The door of the knowledge of the Ancient of Days being thus closed in the face of all beings, the Source of infinite grace... hath caused those luminous Gems of Holiness to appear out of the realm of the spirit, in the noble form of the human temple, and be made manifest unto all men, that they may impart unto the world the mysteries of the unchangeable Being, and tell of the subtleties of His imperishable Essence.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán, The Book of Certitude*, p. 99)

Mirrors reflecting God's light

These sanctified Mirrors, these Daysprings of ancient glory are one and all the Exponents on earth of Him Who is the central Orb of the universe, its Essence and ultimate Purpose. From Him proceed their knowledge and power; from Him is derived their sovereignty. The beauty of their countenance is but a reflection of His image, and their revelation a sign of His deathless glory. They are the Treasuries of divine knowledge, and the Repositories of celestial wisdom.

(Bahá'u'lláh, [The Kitáb-i-Íqán](#), [The Book of Certitude](#), p.99-100)

Revelation of God's attributes

...whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God, inasmuch as within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that most great Light.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán, The Book of Certitude, p. 100)

Divine attributes in physical reality

Note that this text applies to the physical reality explored by science as well as our spiritual reality, created in the image of God. From scientific research into the subatomic realm, and into the vast reaches of the universe, we see the power of gravity, a force of attraction which could be another expression of love on the levels of quantum entities and stars and galaxies. In turning to the physical world of nature we can discover many names and attributes of God.

Discovering divine attributes

...whatever I behold I readily discover that it maketh Thee known unto me, and it remindeth me of Thy signs, and of Thy tokens, and of Thy testimonies. By Thy glory! Every time I lift up mine eyes unto Thy heaven, I call to mind Thy highness and Thy loftiness, and Thine incomparable glory and greatness; and every time I turn my gaze to Thine earth, I am made to recognize the evidences of Thy power and the tokens of Thy bounty. And when I behold the sea, I find that it speaketh to me of Thy majesty, and of the potency of Thy might, and of Thy sovereignty and Thy grandeur. And at whatever time I contemplate the mountains, I am led to discover the ensigns of Thy victory and the standards of Thine omnipotence.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh, CLXXVI)

Nature is God's Will

Nature in its essence is the embodiment of My Name, the Maker, the Creator. Its manifestations are diversified by varying causes, and in this diversity there are signs for men of discernment. Nature is God's Will and is its expression in and through the contingent world. It is a dispensation of Providence ordained by the Ordainer, the All-Wise.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet of Wisdom, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas)

Attributes of God in all things

From that which hath been said it becometh evident that all things, in their inmost reality, testify to the revelation of the names and attributes of God within them. Each according to its capacity, indicateth, and is expressive of, the knowledge of God. So potent and universal is this revelation, that it hath encompassed all things, visible and invisible.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán, The Book of Certitude*, p. 102)

All attributes revealed in man

How resplendent the luminaries of knowledge that shine in an atom, and how vast the oceans of wisdom that surge within a drop! To a supreme degree is this true of man, who, among all created things, hath been invested with the robe of such gifts, and hath been singled out for the glory of such distinction. For in him are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled or surpassed. All these names and attributes are applicable to him.

Manifestations of God

Man, the noblest and most perfect of all created things, excelleth them all in the intensity of this revelation, and is a fuller expression of its glory. And of all men, the most accomplished, the most distinguished and the most excellent are the Manifestations of the Sun of Truth.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán, The Book of Certitude, p. 102-103)

Manifesting divine attributes

These Tabernacles of holiness, these primal Mirrors which reflect the light of unfading glory, are but expressions of Him Who is the Invisible of the Invisibles. By the revelation of these gems of divine virtue all the names and attributes of God, such as knowledge and power, sovereignty and dominion, mercy and wisdom, glory, bounty and grace, are made manifest.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán, The Book of Certitude*, p. 103)

Limitations of our creation

Exalted, immeasurably exalted, art Thou above the strivings of mortal man to unravel Thy mystery, to describe Thy glory, or even to hint at the nature of Thine Essence. For whatever such strivings may accomplish, they never can hope to transcend the limitations imposed upon Thy creatures, inasmuch as these efforts are actuated by Thy decree, and are begotten of Thine invention.

Discovering our own selves

Whatever duty Thou hast prescribed unto Thy servants of extolling to the utmost Thy majesty and glory is but a token of Thy grace unto them, that they may be enabled to ascend unto the station conferred upon their own inmost being, the station of the knowledge of their own selves.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, I p. 4-5)

Absolute is unknowable

Bahá'u'lláh tells us that we shall struggle with the concept of an unknowable absolute reality. A scientist also has difficulty understanding infinity, something with no limits, or dimensions of quantum physics.

Beyond human capacity

Ye shall be hindered from loving Me and souls shall be perturbed as they make mention of Me. For minds cannot grasp Me nor hearts contain Me.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic 66)

Giving and receiving Love

Only by cultivating the love of God in our hearts will we be open to receiving His love. That love, and cultivating attributes of God within us, are all that we can receive of that absolute Divine Reality.

Love God

O Son of Being! Love Me, that I may love thee. If thou lovest Me not, My love can in no wise reach thee. Know this, O servant.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic 5)

Manifest Divine Attributes

*O Son of Being! Thy heart is My home;
sanctify it for My descent. Thy spirit is My
place of revelation; cleanse it for My
manifestation.*

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic 59)

Loving the unknown

Learning to love the unknown and unknowable can help us in many ways. By turning towards God and developing our love for Him, expressing thanks for the Manifestations of God sent to us for our education, we discover our own hidden potentials and grow in our own spiritual reality. We can more easily turn in love to all those around us and help them to bring forth their own potentials and capacities. Love for the unknown also drives scientific investigation, uncovering the divine attributes that are reflected in the physical creation. While we must have the humility to acknowledge that we shall always fall short, we can strive endlessly to grow towards the light that comes from that Divine Reality.