

Big History
Threshold 5 -- The origin of life
Compiled by W. Huitt
Erlangen, Germany
March, 2014

1. Life is the expression of composition; and death, the expression of decomposition. In the world or kingdom of the minerals certain materials or elemental substances exist. When through the law of creation they enter into composition, a being or organism comes into existence. For example, certain material atoms are brought together, and man is the result. When this composition is destroyed and disintegrated, decomposition takes place; this is mortality, or death. When certain elements are composed, an animal comes into being. When these elements are scattered or decomposed, this is called the death of the animal. Again, certain atoms are bound together by chemical affinity; a composition called a flower appears. When these atoms are dispersed and the composition they have formed is disintegrated, the flower has come to its end; it is dead. Therefore, it is evident that life is the expression of composition, and mortality, or death, is equivalent to decomposition.

'Abdu'l-Bahá: *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 306

2. ...our kind of life, our form of existence, is limited and that the reality of all accidental phenomena is, likewise, limited. The very fact that the reality of phenomena is limited well indicates that there must needs be an unlimited reality, for were there no unlimited, or infinite, reality in life, the finite being of objects would be inconceivable.

'Abdu'l-Bahá: *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 425

3. When we ponder over the conditions of phenomena, we observe that all phenomena are composed of single elements. This singular cell-element travels and has its coursings through all the grades of existence. I wish you to ponder carefully over this. This cellular element has at some time been in the mineral kingdom. While staying [p. 52] in the mineral kingdom it has had its coursings and transformations through myriads of images and forms. Having perfected its journey in the mineral kingdom, it has ascended to the vegetable kingdom; and in the vegetable kingdom it has again had journeys and transformations through myriads of conditions. Having accomplished its functions in the vegetable kingdom, the cellular element ascends to the animal kingdom.

In the animal kingdom again it goes through the composition of myriads of images, and then we have it in the human kingdom. In the human kingdom likewise it has its transformations and coursings through multitudes of forms. In short, this single primordial atom has had its great journeys through every stage of life, and in every stage it was endowed with a special and particular virtue or characteristic.

Consequently, the great divine philosophers have had the following epigram: All things are involved in all things. For every single phenomenon has enjoyed the postulates of God, and in every form of these infinite electrons it has had its characteristics of perfection.

Thus this flower once upon a time was of the soil. The animal eats the flower or its fruit, and it thereby ascends to the animal kingdom. Man eats the meat of the animal, and there you have its ascent into the human kingdom, because all phenomena are divided into that which eats and that which is eaten. Therefore, every primordial atom of these atoms, singly and indivisible, has had its coursings throughout all the sentient creation, going constantly into the aggregation of the various elements. Hence do you have the conservation of energy and the infinity of

phenomena, the indestructibility of phenomena, changeless and immutable, because life cannot suffer annihilation but only change.

The apparent annihilation is this: that the form, the outward image, goes through all these changes and transformations. Let us again take the example of this flower. The flower is indestructible. The only thing that we can see, this outer form, is indeed destroyed, but the elements, the indivisible elements which have gone into the composition of this flower are eternal and changeless. Therefore the realities of all phenomena are immutable. Extinction or mortality is nothing but the transformation of pictures and images, so to speak—the reality back of these images is eternal. And every reality of the realities is one of the bounties of God.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Foundations of World Unity*, pp. 51-52