

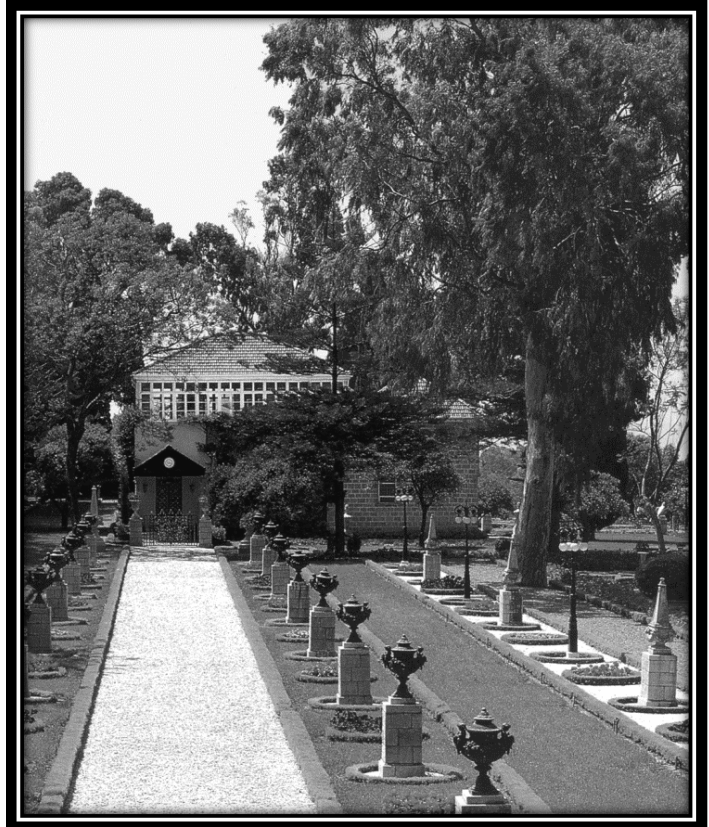
The Importance of Prayer

INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the threshold...*

In the Bahá'í Faith, as in some other Religions, the believers are given specific prayers, revealed by the Manifestation Himself, that are to be said daily. These are called obligatory prayers and are prescribed to ensure our spiritual development. Not only is it essential to one's spiritual progress to recite an obligatory prayer daily, but the devotional attitude of prayer is significant as well. The Báb identified the most desirable attitude and approach to prayer when He wrote: *"The most acceptable prayer is the one offered with the utmost spirituality and radiance.... The more detached and the purer the prayer, the more acceptable is it in the presence of God."*¹

The obligatory prayers can be found in most Bahá'í prayer books. There are many other prayers as well, revealed by the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá, to recite as one chooses.

A summary of guidelines for the obligatory prayers can be found [here](#).



Bahá'ís face this shrine and final resting place of Bahá'u'lláh while offering their obligatory prayers

OBJECTIVE: *A look to the horizon...*

Facilitator

Review the following objective with the participants:

The objective of this study is to understand the fundamental verities or basic truths regarding the importance of prayer, specifically the daily obligatory prayers.

THE STUDY PROCESS: *Attaining the water of life...*

Facilitator

Review the following study process with the participants. Then study the numbered quotations that follow, one at a time as described below.

¹ *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 78

1. **READING:** *A drink from the cup of guidance...*
 - A. **Read the quotation** out loud in its entirety.
2. **CONFIRMING MEANING:** *A spray from the fountain of light...*

To better understand certain words used in the quotation, take turns with the following:

 - A. Each participant **choose a word** from the quotation and **state it** for the whole group to hear. (Like a fun game – pick a word!) Then...
 - B. Read out loud the sentence that contains the **word** you selected, **while substituting for that word**, its given phrase, definition, or synonym from the boxes below the quotation.
 - C. Repeat A and B above until everyone is satisfied with their understanding of the words.
3. **FINDING VALUE:** *Mining the gems of truth...*
 - A. **Read the quotation** out loud again in its entirety.
 - B. Take turns **stating each basic fact or truth** you can find in the quotation about prayer.

QUOTATIONS: *Within the meadows of Thy nearness...*

1. ...the core of religious faith is that mystic feeling which unites Man with God. This state of spiritual communion can be brought about and maintained by means of meditation and prayer. And this is the reason why Bahá'u'lláh has so much stressed the importance of worship. It is not sufficient for a believer merely to accept and observe the teachings. He should, in addition, cultivate the sense of spirituality which he can acquire chiefly by means of prayer. The Bahá'í Faith, like all other Divine Religions, is thus fundamentally mystic in character. Its chief goal is the development of the individual and society, through the acquisition of spiritual virtues and powers. It is the soul of man which has first to be fed. And this spiritual nourishment prayer can best provide.

(Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, cited in *Directives from the Guardian*, pp. 86-87)

acquisition: effort of acquiring or gaining
chiefly: above all or especially
communion: intimate sharing of thoughts and emotions
core: essence or most important part
Divine: God inspired; holy; sacred
fundamentally: basically and essentially
meditation: deep reflection or contemplation on sacred matters
mystic: wonder and awe like

nourishment: act that promotes, maintains, and supports growth and development
powers: abilities to produce effect, or influence things or people
prayer: "Prayer is essentially communion between man and God..." (Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, p. 78)
sufficient: enough to fill the need or achieve the goal
virtues: qualities whereby one's actions conform to standards of moral excellence

2. The friends are free to choose any one of these three [obligatory] prayers, but have to follow the instructions revealed by Bahá'u'lláh concerning them. The long prayer should be recited once in every 24 hours, and is accompanied by certain physical acts. The short prayer, consisting of one verse, should be recited once a day at noon; while the medium prayer should be said three times a day: in the morning, at noon and in the evening. The believer is *entirely free* to choose any one of these three prayers for daily use.

(Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Dawn of a New Day: Messages to India 1923-1957*, p. 66)

morning; noon; or evening: "The allowable times for Obligatory Prayers are from morning till noon, from noon till sunset, and from sunset till two hours thereafter." (*The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 131)

obligatory: morally binding, required, or mandatory
recited: read or repeated from memory, out loud or silently (*Lights of Guidance*, p. 460, ¶1502)

3. The obligatory prayers are binding inasmuch as they are conducive to humility and submissiveness, to setting one's face towards God and expressing devotion to Him. Through such prayer man holdeth communion with God, seeketh to draw near unto Him, converseth with the true Beloved of one's heart, and attaineth spiritual stations.

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in *Spiritual Foundations: Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude*, p. 8, ¶23)

binding: an imposed obligation
communion: intimate sharing of one's thoughts and emotions
conducive: tending to promote and lead
converseth: speaks or talks
devotion: acts of ardent dedication and affection
humility: consciousness of one's defects and shortcomings, making one free of an arrogant, ↗

prideful, or assertive manner
obligatory: morally binding, required, or mandatory
spiritual: higher, divine, or heavenly oriented
stations: states or conditions for a period of time
submissiveness: obediently yielding to God's will without resistance

4. Know thou that prayer is indispensable and obligatory, and man under no pretext whatsoever is excused from performing the prayer unless he be mentally unsound, or an insurmountable obstacle prevent him. The wisdom of prayer is this: That it causeth a connection between the servant and the True One ... prayer and fasting is the cause of awakening and mindfulness and conducive to protection and preservation from tests....

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 368)

awakening: rousing or stirring to become aware, active, and alert
conducive: tends to lead
excused: granted exemption or released
indispensable: absolutely necessary and not subject to being set aside or neglected
insurmountable: incapable of being overcome or prevailed over
mindfulness: being attentive and thoughtful in mind

obligatory: morally binding, required, or mandatory
preservation: safety from injury, harm, or destruction
pretext: false reason or motive put forth to hide the real one; excuse
tests: trying situations in which one is tempted to act or behave in ways contrary to the teaching of the Faith; difficulties, hardships, and calamities
unsound: abnormal or not wholly sane

5. Moreover, the friends must observe the specific times for the remembrance of God, meditation, devotion and prayer, as it is highly unlikely, nay impossible, for any enterprise to prosper and develop when deprived of divine bestowals and confirmation.

(Shoghi Effendi, cited in *Living the Life*, pp. 1-2)

bestowals: gifts given
confirmation: validations and assurances that cause spiritual strength
develop: gradually improve or advance
devotion: acts of ardent dedication and affection
divine: God inspired; holy; sacred
enterprise: purposeful project or undertaking ↗

requiring energy and courage
meditation: deep reflection or contemplation on sacred matters
prayer: "Prayer is essentially communion between man and God..." (Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, p. 78)
prosper: be successful

6. *Intone, O My servant, the verses of God that have been received by thee, as intoned by them who have drawn nigh unto Him, that the sweetness of thy melody may kindle thine own soul, and attract the hearts of all men. Whoso reciteth, in the privacy of his chamber, the verses revealed by God, the scattering angels of the Almighty shall scatter abroad the fragrance of the words uttered by his mouth, and shall cause the heart of every righteous man to throb. Though he may, at first, remain unaware of its effect, yet the virtue of the grace vouchsafed unto him must needs sooner or later exercise its influence upon his soul.*

(*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 295)

Almighty: God; One having absolute power over all
angels: “The meaning of ‘angels’ is the confirmations of God and His celestial powers.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 81)
chamber: room; natural or artificially enclosed space
exercise: carry out and perform
fragrance: pleasant and favorable impression
grace: special favors that makes one morally pure and strong
heart(s): nature that becomes attracted, loves, and grows attached
intone: chant or recite in singing tones
intoned: chanted or recited in singing tones
kindle: stir up, excite, or arouse
must needs: of necessity or requirement [will]
privacy: place of seclusion apart from public view or company; “*The reason why privacy hath* ☞

been enjoined in moments of devotion is this, that thou mayest give thy best attention to the remembrance of God, that thy heart may at all times be animated with His Spirit, and not shut out as by a veil from thy Best Beloved. Let not thy tongue pay lip service in praise of God while thy heart be not attuned to the exalted Summit of Glory, and the Focal Point of communion.” (The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, pp. 93-4)
reciteth: reads or repeats out loud or silently (*Lights of Guidance*, p. 460, ¶1502)
righteous: morally right, fair, and just behaving
scatter: spread in different directions
throb: vibrate with excitement
uttered: spoken; expressed
verses: sentences of the written Word
virtue: goodness, excellence, and value
vouchsafed: given or bestowed out of graciousness

SHARING EXERCISE: A breath from the spirit of inspiration...

Facilitator

Ask the participants to complete the statements below. When everyone has finished, have each person share, in a round, one thing that was outstanding or inspiring and what spiritual feelings it enkindled. Please remind everyone not to remark on the comments of others.

One thing from the quotations that was outstanding or inspiring to me was _____

It made me feel _____

Explain _____

SOME QUESTIONS: A cup from the showers of confirmation...

Facilitator

Ask the participants to answer the following questions. They can usually find answers in the quotations just studied or in the introduction. When everyone has finished, review the questions, then share and discuss the answers.

1. Bahá'ís are instructed by Bahá'u'lláh to say one of three prayers daily. These prayers are referred to as the _____ prayers.
2. No individual or Bahá'í institution monitors whether or not an individual recites an obligatory prayer daily, as the responsibility is between the individual and _____ only.
3. Bahá'u'lláh was asked whether one is obligated to say the obligatory prayers when sick. He replied: *“In truth, I say that obligatory prayer and fasting occupy an exalted station in the sight of God. It is, however, in a state of health that their virtue can be realized. In time of ill-health it is not permissible to observe these obligations; such hath been the bidding of the Lord, exalted be His glory, at all times.”*¹ What does this mean? _____

4. There are two conditions identified in one of the quotations, which relieve one of the requirement to say the obligatory prayer. What are those conditions? _____

5. Bahá'ís are instructed to say at least one of the three obligatory prayers daily. If one chooses the short prayer, when is it to be said? _____. If one chooses the medium prayer, it is to be said _____ times a day at what times? _____
_____. If one chooses the long obligatory prayer, when can it be said? _____

6. Describe how you will create a pattern for saying your daily obligatory prayer.
Where? _____
Which prayer? _____
When? _____
How will you remember? _____
Where will you say it when you are away from home? _____
7. The reality of humankind is that we are spiritual beings. That is, the purpose of our experience here in this physical world is the development of our soul. The spiritual nourishment for this development is *best* provided by _____
8. Prayer is necessary...
 - a. for cultivating a sense of spirituality.
 - b. for any enterprise to prosper and develop.
 - c. only for weak souls who can't do things for themselves.
 - d. to remain true to the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh and His holy Laws.
9. The Universal House of Justice wrote: “As soon as a Bahá'í family unit emerges, the members should feel responsible for making the collective life of the family a spiritual reality, animated by divine love and inspired by the ennobling principles of the Faith. To achieve this purpose, the reading of the Sacred Writings and prayers should ideally become a daily family activity.”² How will you set about to achieve this ideal? _____

¹ *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 134

² *Lights of Guidance*, p. 225, ¶746

APPLICATION: Showing forth divine light...

Facilitator

Read through #1 together and proceed as stated. Then take time for the participants to write out their individual plans for action in #2. (these are not shared) When everyone has finished, move on to the closing reading.

1. IMAGINING THE POSSIBILITIES: *Visions of radiant lights...*

Bahá'u'lláh wrote: “*It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action....*” Imagine how the Bahá'í Teachings in this study class could be translated into reality and action. Take turns sharing the possibilities. Begin your statements with: “*One could....*” Suggest as many ideas as you want.

2. DECIDING ACTION: *Mirroring forth a beam of light...*

From your experience in this study class on the Bahá'í Fast, describe what **you** are inspired to put into reality and action. ***I will make conscious efforts to...*** _____

My next step will be... _____

CLOSING MEDITATION: A heart song...

From a talk delivered by `Abdu'l-Bahá in 1912.

Spirit has influence; prayer has spiritual effect. Therefore, we pray, “O God! Heal this sick one!” Perchance God will answer. Does it matter who prays? God will answer the prayer of every servant if that prayer is urgent. His mercy is vast, illimitable. He answers the prayers of all His servants...

But we ask for things which the divine wisdom does not desire for us, and there is no answer to our prayer. His wisdom does not sanction what we wish. We pray, “O God! Make me wealthy!” If this prayer were universally answered, human affairs would be at a standstill. There would be none left to work in the streets, none to till the soil, none to build, none to run the trains. Therefore, it is evident that it would not be well for us if all prayers were answered. The affairs of the world would be interfered with, energies crippled and progress hindered. But whatever we ask for which is in accord with divine wisdom, God will answer. Assuredly!

For instance, a very feeble patient may ask the doctor to give him food which would be positively dangerous to his life and condition. He may beg for roast meat. The doctor is kind and wise. He knows it would be dangerous to his patient so he refuses to allow it. The doctor is merciful; the patient, ignorant. Through the doctor's kindness the patient recovers; his life is saved. Yet the patient may cry out that the doctor is unkind, not good, because he refuses to answer his pleading.

God is merciful. In His mercy He answers the prayers of all His servants when according to His supreme wisdom it is necessary.

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 246-47)

ANSWERS: Affirming treasures...

1. obligatory
2. God
3. in times of ill-health it is not permissible to observe the obligatory prayers
4. he be mentally unsound, or an insurmountable obstacle prevent him
5. once a day at noon; three times a day; in the morning, at noon and in the evening; once in 24 hours
6. all answers are valuable
7. prayer
8. a, b, and d
9. all answers are valuable

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