

Daily Readings and Deepening

INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the threshold...*

One of the greatest pleasures for a human being is to commune intimately with loved ones. This can be a cause of great joy and happiness.

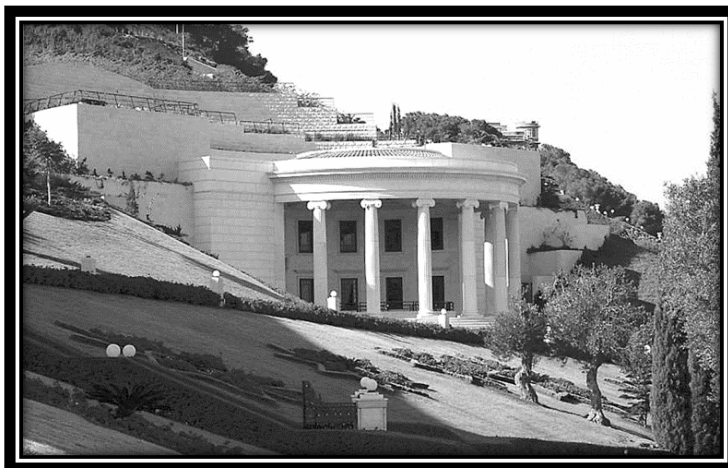
The same is true when we commune with God. We do so through prayer, which is speaking to God, and reading from the *Divine Verses*, which is listening to God. As we are about to discover, this intimate communication with God is the sole cause of spiritual transformation, and the most sought after goal of all, true happiness.

Bahá'u'lláh established an important requirement to help us with our spiritual communion. This requirement is to recite the “verses of God”, which are the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,¹ each morning and evening with joy and radiance. This twice-daily discipline is considered necessary for the nourishment and health of one's very soul.

The Universal House of Justice was asked if the Writings of the Báb or those of earlier Manifestations of God may be included as “verses of God” for the daily readings. The reply was that the believers are free to reach their own understanding on this question.² The Guardian wrote that this spiritual requirement was *not* met by reading his writings, or those of `Abdu'l-Bahá, however, their writings may be read after the required reading.³

Reciting the verses of God each morning and evening may be performed either silently or out loud.⁴

Deepening in the Faith is a separate practice. It requires one to read, meditate on, and study the Writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, `Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice on a regular basis. For the purpose of this study course, study, recitation or attentive reading from these Authors will be considered “deepening” in the Faith.



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

Facilitator

Review the following objectives with the participants:

1. An objective of this study is to understand the fundamental verities or basic truths regarding the spiritual law to read or recite from the verses of God both morning and evening.
2. An objective of this study is to understand the fundamental verities or basic truths regarding the need for continual deepening in the Faith.

¹ *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, pp. 126-27

² Email to the author from the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 4 March 2002

³ *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Notes, p. 236

⁴ Email to the author from the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 4 March 2002

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. **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 **daily readings or deepening in the Faith**.

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

RECITING THE VERSES OF GOD EVERY MORNING AND EVENING

1. Bahá'u'lláh has stated quite clearly in His Writings the essential requisites for our spiritual growth, and these are stressed again and again by `Abdu'l-Bahá in His Talks and Tablets. One can summarize [one of] them briefly in this way: ... [1] The regular reading of the Sacred Scriptures, specifically at least each morning and evening, with reverence, attention and thought.

(Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986: The Third Epoch of the Formative Age, p. 589, #375.5)

attention: mental concentration; careful thinking
essential: most important and necessary
reading: taking in to the mind out loud or silently
requisites: requirements needed
reverence: profound respect mingled with love and awe
Sacred Scriptures: the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh;
[The “verses of God” to be recited each ☞

morning and evening refers to “*all that hath been sent down from the Heaven of Divine Utterance,*” which does not include the writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá or Shoghi Effendi. (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 236)
specifically: clearly and precisely stated
thought: reflection and consideration

2. *Recite ye the verses of God every morn and eventide. Whoso faileth to recite them hath not been faithful to the Covenant of God and His Testament...*

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 73)

Covenant: binding agreement between God and man
eventide: the time of the evening
faileth: falls short and neglects
faithful: true in affection and firm in allegiance
recite: read out loud or repeat from memory

verses of God: the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh; [The “verses of God” refers to “*all that hath been sent down from the Heaven of Divine Utterance,*” which does not include the writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá or Shoghi Effendi. (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 236)

3. *...recite the verses revealed by the merciful Lord. By so doing the doors to true knowledge will be opened to your inner beings, and ye will then feel your souls endowed with steadfastness and your hearts filled with radiant joy.*

(Bahá'u'lláh, cited in *The Compilation of Compilations*, Prepared by the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1990, Vol. I, p. 188, #364)

endowed: furnished, gifted, or provided
recite: read out loud or repeat from memory
steadfastness: firm belief and determined constancy
verses: Writings of Bahá'u'lláh; [The “verses ↗

of God” refers to “*all that hath been sent down from the Heaven of Divine Utterance,*” which does not include the writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá or Shoghi Effendi. (see *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 236)

4. *They who recite the verses of the All-Merciful in the most melodious of tones will perceive in them that with which the sovereignty of earth and heaven can never be compared. From them they will inhale the divine fragrance of My worlds—worlds which today none can discern save those who have been endowed with vision through this sublime, this beauteous Revelation. Say: These verses draw hearts that are pure unto those spiritual worlds that can neither be expressed in words nor intimated by allusion. Blessed be those who hearken.*

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 61)

allusion: implying or suggesting in a figurative or indirect way
All-Merciful: sole One completely full of kindness and compassion towards the suffering or condemned; God
blessed: granted joy, prosperity, happiness, and bliss
discern: perceive, recognize, or make out clearly
divine: God inspired; holy; sacred
endowed: furnished or provided as a gift
fragrance: pleasant and favorable impression
hearken: give careful attention or consideration in order to comply
inhale: take in eagerly
intimated: communicated indirectly
melodious: sweet succession of sounds pleasing ↗

to the ear; tuneful
perceive: become aware and understand
recite: read out loud or repeat from memory
sovereignty: supreme and independent authority and rule
sublime: awe inspiring because of supreme spiritual, intellectual, or moral worth
tones: accented sounds or inflections expressing the mood or emotion of the speaker
verses: Writings of Bahá'u'lláh; [The “verses of God” refers to “*all that hath been sent down from the Heaven of Divine Utterance,*” which does not include the writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá or Shoghi Effendi. (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 236)
worlds: domains of existence; states of being or reality

5. *The corrosion of ungodliness is eating into the vitals of human society; what else but the Elixir of His potent Revelation can cleanse and revive it? ...converting satanic strength into heavenly power is one that We have been empowered to accomplish. ... The Word of God, alone, can claim the distinction of being endowed with the capacity required for so great and far-reaching a change.*
(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 200)

capacity: receptive power and potential
cleanse: remove the moral defilement and sin
converting: producing a spiritual change [from]
corrosion: weakening and destructive nature
distinction: special characteristics
Elixir: single essence capable of causing change
empowered: given the faculties and abilities
endowed: furnished, gifted, or provided
heavenly: a holy and sacred
potent: powerfully effective
power: substantial spiritual force

Revelation: Communication of God and His will to man, today the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh
revive it: return [it] from suspension and neglect to activity and life
satanic: selfish, wicked, or evil
strength: powers to use or resist force
vitals: essential parts
We: used by one in authority to denote himself
Word of God: God's Revelation to humanity, today Bahá'u'lláh's Writings

6. *It behooveth thee to exert thine utmost to attain unto this Elixir which, in one fleeting breath, causeth the west of ignorance to reach the east of knowledge, illuminates the darkness of night with the resplendence of the morn, guideth the wanderer in the wilderness of doubt to the well-spring of the Divine Presence and Fount of certitude, and conferreth upon mortal souls the honour of acceptance into the Ridván of immortality.*
(Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán, pp. 157-58)

acceptance: being received willingly and favorably
behooveth: is advantageous and necessary for
certitude: a condition of unfailing certainty and sureness; *"With a certitude that none can question, all men would cleave to His commandments, and would scrupulously observe them."* (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 117)
conferreth upon: gives graciously to
darkness of night: figuratively — absence of spiritual knowledge and goodness
Divine: relating directly to God's
doubt: faithlessness in God
east: figuratively — farthest reaches
Elixir: single essence capable of causing change — the transforming power of the Word of God
exert: energetically put forth

Fount: sustaining source
illuminate: gives intellectual and spiritual enlightenment, insight, and knowledge to
immortality: unending existence; eternal life
morn: figuratively — dawn of spiritual knowledge and goodness
mortal: subject to death
Presence: *"By Presence, therefore, is meant the Presence of the One Who is His Viceregent amongst men."* (Bahá'u'lláh, The Epistle to the son of the Wolf, p. 118)
resplendence: great brilliance
Ridván: paradise
utmost: able best
well-spring: source of continual supply
west: figuratively — farthest reaches
wilderness: empty or pathless region

THE NEED FOR CONTINUAL DEEPENING IN THE FAITH

7. His advice to you is to continue deepening your knowledge and understanding of this Revelation, both by means of patient and thorough study of Bahá'í writings, and through active association with your fellow-believers and close participation in the activities of your local Bahá'í community.
(Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, cited in The Compilation of Compilations, Prepared by the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1990, Vol. I, p. 425, #491)

association: joint action in common interests or activities
means: the use
participation: partaking in common

patient: calm endurance under suffering or provocation
thorough: carried through to completion with full detail and exactness

8. Deepening is far more a matter of developing a spiritual attitude, devotion and selflessness than it is of acquiring information, although this, of course, is also important.

(*Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986: The Third Epoch of the Formative Age*, p. 499, #289.4)

attitude: mind set, disposition, or emotional state
devotion: acts of ardent dedication and affection

selflessness: devotion to the welfare and concerns of others and not one's own

9. Indeed if an avowed follower of Bahá'u'lláh were to immerse himself in, and fathom the depths of, the ocean of these heavenly teachings, and with utmost care and attention deduce from each of them the subtle mysteries and consummate wisdom that lie enshrined therein, such a person's life, materially, intellectually and spiritually, will be safe from toil and trouble, and unaffected by setbacks and perils, or any sadness or despondency.

(Shoghi Effendi, cited in *The Compilation of Compilations*, Prepared by the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1990, Vol. I, p. 204, #427)

attention: mental concentration; careful thinking
avowed: openly declared or frankly acknowledged
consummate: complete, perfect, and of the highest quality
deduce: determine by logical reasoning; infer
depths: abundant inmost parts; profoundness
despondency: temporary or partial loss of courage or hope; dejection
enshrined: held as sacred; cherished
fathom: penetrate and come to thorough understanding of; comprehend
immerse: engross the attention of; absorb
mysteries: things unexplained or unknown that ↗

remains so secret or obscure as to excite curiosity and wonder
perils: exposure to risk, danger, harm or loss
safe: free of harm, danger, or loss; protected
setbacks: that which reverses or hinders progress; impediments
subtle: marked by or requiring mental keenness
teachings: specific beliefs, concepts, perceptions, principles, standards, morals, ideals and truths taught [in the Bahá'í Faith]
toil: long, strenuous, and fatiguing labor; drudgery
unaffected: not changed, affected, or influenced
utmost: the greatest or highest degree of

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. What is the Divine “Elixir” that alone can convert satanic strength into heavenly power?

2. Reciting the verses of God can “...draw hearts that are pure unto those spiritual _____ that can neither be expressed in words nor intimated by allusion.”
3. Bahá’ís can continue to deepen their knowledge of the spirit and truths of the Bahá’í Faith...
 - a. by means of patient and thorough study of the Bahá’í Writings.
 - b. by wearing sacred things.
 - c. from genetic memory passed on from being born to Bahá’í parents.
 - d. by close participation in the activities of the local Bahá’í community.
4. What might be the outcomes if one did *not* continually deepen in the Faith? _____

5. Bahá’u’lláh instructs the believers in *The Most Holy Book*: “Recite ye the verses of God every morn and eventide.”¹ When asked whether it fulfils this responsibility if the individual listens in the morning or evening to the reading of Sacred Writings in a group, such as during family devotions, a Nineteen-Day Feast, or other devotional gatherings, the Universal House of Justice wrote: “It is left to the individual to determine the manner in which he can carry it out.”²
 - a. How will you put these instructions into practice? _____

 - b. Reciting the verses of God every morning and evening will be of what value to your soul?

6. Shoghi Effendi wrote: “If you read the utterances of Bahá’u’lláh and `Abdu’l-Bahá with selflessness and care and concentrate upon them, you will discover truths unknown to you before and will obtain an insight into the problems that have baffled the great thinkers of the world.”³ How could this be? _____

7. Bahá’u’lláh and `Abdu’l-Bahá have made it clear that the regular reading of the Sacred Scriptures, specifically at least each morning and evening, with reverence, attention and thought, are essential requisites for spiritual growth. Can spiritual growth be maintained or developed without doing this?
 - Yes
 - No Explain: _____

Continued on next page...

¹ *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 143

² Email to the author from the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 14 May 2002

³ *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, p. 205, ¶430

8. Does participation in this study course constitute “deepening”?
- Yes No
9. To read each morning and evening from the “verses of God”, means to read silently or out loud from...
- a. the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh.
 b. the Writings of the Báb or other earlier Manifestations of God.
 c. the writings of `Abdu’l-Bahá.
 d. the writings of the Guardian, Shoghi Effendi.
 e. the writings of the Universal House of Justice.
10. Deepening in the Faith means to read, recite, or study...
- a. the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh.
 b. the Writings of the Báb.
 c. the writings of `Abdu’l-Bahá.
 d. the writings of the Guardian, Shoghi Effendi.
 e. the writings of the Universal House of Justice.

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...

A Talk by `Abdu’l-Bahá to a Bible class in 1912.

I have been informed that the purpose of your class meeting is to study the significances and mysteries of the Holy Scriptures and understand the meaning of the divine Testaments. It is a cause of great happiness to me that you are turning unto the Kingdom of God, that you desire to approach the presence of God and to become informed of the realities and precepts of God. It is my hope that you may put forth your most earnest endeavor to accomplish this end, that you may investigate and study the Holy Scriptures word by word so that you may attain knowledge of the mysteries hidden therein. Be not satisfied with words, but seek to understand the spiritual meanings hidden in the heart

of the words. ... It is difficult to comprehend even the words of a philosopher; how much more difficult it is to understand the Words of God. The divine Words are not to be taken according to their outer sense. They are symbolical and contain realities of spiritual meaning. For instance, in the book of Solomon's songs you will read about the bride and bridegroom. It is evident that the physical bride and bridegroom are not intended. Obviously, these are symbols conveying a hidden and inner significance. In the same way the Revelations of St. John are not to be taken literally, but spiritually. These are the mysteries of God. It is not the reading of the words that profits you; it is the understanding of their meanings. Therefore, pray God that you may be enabled to comprehend the mysteries of the divine Testaments.

Consider the symbolical meanings of the Words and teachings of Christ. He said, "*I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever.*" When the Jews heard this, they took it literally and failed to understand the significance of His meaning and teaching. The spiritual truth which Christ wished to convey to them was that the reality of Divinity within Him was like a blessing which had come down from heaven and that he who partook of this blessing should never die. That is to say, bread was the symbol of the perfections which had descended upon Him from God, and he who ate of this bread, or endowed himself with the perfections of Christ, would undoubtedly attain to everlasting life. The Jews did not understand Him, and taking the words literally, said, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Had they understood the real meaning of the Holy Book, they would have become believers in Christ.

All the texts and teachings of the holy Testaments have intrinsic spiritual meanings. They are not to be taken literally. I, therefore, pray in your behalf that you may be given the power of understanding these inner real meanings of the Holy Scriptures and may become informed of the mysteries deposited in the words of the Bible so that you may attain eternal life and that your hearts may be attracted to the Kingdom of God. May your souls be illumined by the light of the Words of God, and may you become repositories of the mysteries of God, for no comfort is greater and no happiness is sweeter than spiritual comprehension of the divine teachings. If a man understands the real meaning of a poet's verses such as those of Shakespeare, he is pleased and rejoiced. How much greater his joy and pleasure when he perceives the reality of the Holy Scriptures and becomes informed of the mysteries of the Kingdom!

I pray that the divine blessings may descend upon you day by day, that your hearts may be opened to perceive the inner significances of the Word of God. There is no fruit in knowing the mere letters of the Book. ... I pray that you may be quickened by the breaths of the Holy Spirit and illumined by the rays of the Sun of Truth. May you be favored with heavenly blessings in the threshold of God and attain to eternal life. This is my prayer. May God bless and enlighten you.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 458-60)

ANSWERS: Affirming treasures...

1. the Word of God (Bahá'u'lláh's Writings)
2. worlds
3. a and d
4. a person's life, materially, intellectually and spiritually, **may not** be safe from toil and trouble, or unaffected by setbacks and perils, or any sadness or despondency
5. all answers are valuable
6. all answers are valuable
7. no, because it is an *essential requisite*
8. yes
9. a, and possibly b
10. a, b, c, d, and e

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