

Recitation of the Greatest Name

INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the threshold...*

Compared with Dispensations of the past, the Bahá'í Faith has very little ritual, formality, or ceremony. The few prescribed forms of worship remaining are outward expressions that nourish our inward spiritual growth. For the spiritual development of the individual, Bahá'u'lláh has instituted certain spiritual disciplines and laws. One such discipline is for the individual to repeat, in an attitude of prayerful devotion, the Greatest Name of God ninety-five times each day. Shoghi Effendi wrote through his secretary: "Reciting the Greatest Name means to repeat it over and over, silently or out loud..."¹ The Greatest Name of God to be repeated ninety-five times each day is "Alláh-u-Abhá." Translated from Arabic, it means "God is All-Glorious" or "God is Most Glorious."

In Islám there is a tradition that among the many names or attributes of God, one is regarded as the greatest. However, according to Islamic tradition, the identity of that Name is considered hidden. Bahá'u'lláh revealed that the Greatest Name of God is "Bahá," which means "Glory," "Splendor," or "Light." This indicates that Bahá'u'lláh, the supreme Manifestation of God, has appeared in the Station of God's Greatest Name, that is, in His highest or most excellent attribute. There are several forms of the Greatest Name, all derived from the name "Bahá," such as "Abhá," as well as certain phrases like "Alláh-u-Abhá," "Yá Bahá'u'lláh," or "Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá."

"Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá" is an invocation that can be translated either as "O Glory of Glories" or "O Glory of the All-Glorious." "Yá Bahá'u'lláh" means "O Glory of God," "O Splendor of God," or "O Light of God."



Prayer beads of the Báb

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 recitation of the Greatest Name of God ninety-five times a day.

¹ Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community*, (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981), p. 450.

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 **recitation of the Greatest Name of God**.

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

1. *It hath been ordained that every believer in God, the Lord of Judgement, shall, each day, having washed his hands and then his face, seat himself and, turning unto God, repeat “Alláh-u-Abhá” ninety-five times. Such was the decree of the Maker of the Heavens when, with majesty and power, He established Himself upon the thrones of His Names.*

—Bahá'u'lláh

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), par. 18, p. 26.

Alláh-u-Abhá: God is All-Glorious, or God is Most Glorious
decree: divine order
established: firmly set
Maker: One who is the Creator, Fashioner, and Cause of the existence
Names: glorious spiritual Attributes
ordained: established by divine command

repeat: say it over and over, silently or out loud; [see *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community*, (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981), p. 450.]
shall: should under obligation
thrones: supreme positions of heavenly power and dignity
turning: directing one's thought and attention
washed: cleansed with water

2. *Let your joy be the joy born of My Most Great Name, a Name that bringeth rapture to the heart, and filleth with ecstasy the minds of all who have drawn nigh unto God.*

—Bahá'u'lláh

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), par. 51, p. 38.

born of: brought into existence by
ecstasy: extreme and all-consuming emotions of delight beyond reason and self-control [to]
joy: feelings of gladness, pleasure, and delight

Most Great Name: *Alláh-u-Abhá*, meaning God is All-Glorious, or God is Most Glorious
nigh: near
rapture: an overwhelming emotional state of spiritual elation and bliss

3. It is the name of comfort, protection, happiness, illumination, love and unity. ... The use of the Greatest Name and dependence upon it, cause the soul to strip itself of the husks of mortality and to step forth freed, reborn, a new creature.... —`Abdu'l-Bahá

Cited in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), no. 892, p. 267.

comfort: strength, hope, and cheer that eases grief or trouble
dependence: reliance for support and favor
freed: liberated; delivered from desires
Greatest Name: highest invocation or praise of God – Alláh-u-Abhá, Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá, or Yá Bahá'u'lláh
husks: empty shell
illumination: intellectual and spiritual enlightenment, insight, and knowledge
love: warm-hearted affection, compassion, and concern for the good of all, fostered by an unconditional, vulnerable willingness to be spiritually intimate

mortality: the lower nature, subject to sin and death
protection: that which guards or shields from injury or destruction
reborn: changed from a life of the lower nature to one of the spirit
soul: immortal essence of one's rational, spiritual, and emotional self
step forth: become obviously
strip: separate or remove
unity: a heartfelt condition of peace, love, and harmony in human relations, free of conflict, contention, dissension, and the struggle for dominance

4. Call ye to mind the blessed Name of our peerless Beloved, the `Abhá Beauty, in an uplifting spirit of unbounded ecstasy and delight, then unloose your tongues in His Praise in such wise that the realm of the heart may be purged from the woes and sorrows of the world of water and clay, that the great heights of spiritual perception may be unveiled before your eyes, that the glorious signs of His Divine Unity may shine resplendent, a fresh outpouring of His grace may stream forth, and a liberal effusion of celestial confirmations may be vouchsafed unto you. —`Abdu'l-Bahá

Pearls of Bounty: Selections from the Prayers, Tablets, and Talks of `Abdu'l-Bahá, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing, 2021), par. 2, p. 86.

`Abhá Beauty: the Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh [one of His titles]; `Abhá meaning 'Most Glorious'
celestial: heavenly
confirmations: validations and assurances that cause spiritual strength
delight: extreme pleasure and satisfaction
Divine Unity: *"Regard thou the one true God as One Who is apart from, and immeasurably exalted above, all created things. The whole universe reflecteth His glory, while He is Himself independent of, and transcendeth His creatures. This is the true meaning of Divine unity. He Who is the Eternal Truth is the one Power Who exerciseth undisputed sovereignty over the world of being, Whose image is reflected in the mirror of the entire creation. All existence is dependent upon Him, and from Him is derived the source of the sustenance of all things. This is what is meant by Divine unity; this is its fundamental principle."*—Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1952, 1971 printing), LXXXIV, p. 166.
ecstasy: entrancing emotion of joy

effusion: pouring out
grace: gifts of loving kindness that make one morally pure and strong
heart: aspect of human nature that becomes attracted, loves, and grows attached
liberal: broad and generous
outpouring: full and continuous outflowing
perception: awareness and understanding
praise: glorification and exaltation by attributing value through song, chant, or prayer
purged: made clean and free
realm: place or sphere of reality
resplendent: with glowing brilliance
signs: indications of the presence or existence
sorrows: uneasiness or pain of mind due to real or supposed loss of any good
such wise: such a way
tongues: expressions of speech
unbounded: unlimited; unrestricted
unloose: release from restraints and set free
unveiled: opened; revealed
vouchsafed: given or bestowed out of graciousness
woes: conditions of great sorrow, grief, or distress

5. His Name is indeed the healing medicine for every illness, and imparteth warmth unto those starving with cold. It is the sovereign remedy and the supreme talisman. It is the source of life in both worlds, and of salvation unto such as have gone astray. Today this hallowed Name serveth as a shield for all mankind, and as a veritable refuge for the children of men. It is the wondrous accent of the Lord of Mercy, and His celestial melody.

—`Abdu'l-Bahá

Pearls of Bounty: Selections from the Prayers, Tablets, and Talks of `Abdu'l-Bahá, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing, 2021), par. 3, p. 86-87.

accent: distinguishing mode of expression
astray: the path of error
celestial: heavenly
children of men: the people
cold: lack of spirit or normal human emotion
hallowed: holy; sacred
imparteth: causes to be given
melody: sweet and agreeable arrangement of sounds
refuge: shelter or protection from danger or distress
salvation: spiritual rescue and safety from the consequences of sin, danger, evil, difficulty, or ↻

destruction
shield: guard and protection
source: origin or cause
sovereign: all-encompassing, all-pervading, and greatest [spiritual]
starving: being destroyed or suffering greatly
supreme: most excellent and greatest possible
talisman: combination of words for producing wonderful and extraordinary effects
veritable: true and genuine
warmth: passion and enthusiasm
wondrous: wonderful; marvelous

6. Remembrance of God is like the rain and dew which bestow freshness and grace on flowers and hyacinths, revive them and cause them to acquire fragrance, redolence and renewed charm. ... Strive thou, then, to praise and glorify God by night and by day, that thou mayest attain infinite freshness and beauty.

—`Abdu'l-Bahá

“Prayer, Meditation and the Devotional Attitude.” In *The Compilation of Compilations: Prepared by the Universal House of Justice 1963-1990*, (Maryborough: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991), vol. II, no. 1745, p. 232.

acquire: gain new or added
beauty: brilliant, attractive, and pleasing spiritual attributes and qualities
bestow: gives the gift of
charm: traits that fascinate, allure, and delight
dew: pure condensed moisture
fragrance: sweet and pleasant smells
freshness: restored strength and liveliness
glorify: magnify in worship by giving glory to
grace: natural elegance, charm, and beauty
hyacinths: a specific plant with fragrant flowers

infinite: limitless amounts and an endless duration of
praise: honor and exalt through song, chant, or prayer
redolence: the quality of emitting distinct and agreeable odors
remembrance: bringing to mind by making mention
revive: from a state of suspension or neglect, returns activity and life to
strive: devote serious energy or effort

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 _____

I felt this way because _____

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 to repeat the Greatest Name of God, “Alláh-u-Abhá”, _____ times every day.
2. The repetition of “Alláh-u-Abhá” is to be preceded by the performance of ablutions. If one has already performed ablutions for an Obligatory Prayer and wants to proceed with repetition of the Greatest Name, an additional ablution is not necessary. If one has just bathed and is preparing to repeat the Greatest Name, ablutions must be performed. If there is no water available for ablutions, Bahá'ís are to instead repeat five times the words, “*In the Name of God, the Most Pure, the Most Pure,*” and then proceed with repetition of the Greatest Name.¹ Ablutions are...
 - a. washing the hands and face with water.
 - b. exercises for the stomach muscles.
 - c. also performed for the daily obligatory prayers.
 - d. also performed before eating.
 - e. an outward form with inward spiritual significance.
3. The Bahá'í day begins and ends at sunset. (answer not found in the quotations or introduction)
 - true
 - false
4. Daily repetition of the Greatest Name of God should be performed while...
 - a. standing facing the shrine of Bahá'u'lláh.
 - b. sitting facing the east.
 - c. seated.
 - d. prostrate. [kneeling with the forehead bowed to the ground]

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¹ See *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, The Most Holy book*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), par. 18, p. 26, Notes: no. 18, pp. 112-13, no. 77, p. 129, and no. 34, pp. 180-81.

5. The Greatest Name of God to be repeated ninety-five times a day is...
- a. Yá Bahá'u'lláh. c. Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá.
 b. Alláh-u-Abhá. d. Bahá'u'lláh.
6. Traditionally, around the world, believers of various religions have used a string of beads to count specific verses or chants during devotional practices. An individual Bahá'í wrote to Shoghi Effendi about using prayer beads to keep count while repeating the Greatest Name of God. He responded through his secretary: "As regards the repeating of the Greatest Name ninety-five times, this also has been mentioned by Bahá'u'lláh, but He has given no directions as to how the prayer beads should be used in this connection."¹ This counsel leaves the Bahá'ís free to decide for themselves whether to use prayer beads to keep count during recitation of the Greatest Name.
- Some believers use another way to count: Using the tip of your thumb, touch on the same hand the tip of a finger, and then successively the three knuckles on the palm side of the same finger, repeat with each finger to a count of 16. Then, use your pointing finger to touch and count the tip and two knuckles of your thumb. That's 19! Stick one finger out on your other hand, and repeat. When all five fingers are out, you're finished.

How will you keep track during your recitation? _____

7. The Greatest Name of God is to be repeated...
- a. out loud.
 b. silently.
 c. either silently or out loud.
8. Recitation of the Greatest Name of God, like the other personal devotional exercises of prayer and meditation, is to be done in private.² How will you make arrangements in your life for private recitation of the Greatest Name of God? _____

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 "Recitation of the Greatest Name," describe what **you** are inspired to put into reality and action. **I will make conscious efforts to...** _____

My next step will be... _____

¹ Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, cited in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), no. 1525, p. 466.
² Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, cited in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), no. 1836 and 1838, p. 542.

CLOSING MEDITATION: *A heart song...*

A Prayer from Bahá'u'lláh, cited in the Tablet of Tarázát “Ornaments”.

Glory be unto Thee, O Lord of the world and Desire of the nations, O Thou Who hast become manifest in the Greatest Name whereby the pearls of wisdom and utterance have appeared from the shells of the great sea of Thy knowledge, and the heavens of divine revelation have been adorned with the light of the appearance of the Sun of Thy countenance.

I beg of Thee, by that Word through which Thy proof was perfected among Thy creatures and Thy testimony was fulfilled among Thy servants to strengthen Thy people in that whereby the face of the Cause will radiate in Thy dominion, the standards of Thy power will be planted among Thy servants, and the banners of Thy guidance will be raised throughout Thy dominions.

O my Lord! Thou beholdest them clinging to the rope of Thy grace and holding fast unto the hem of the mantle of Thy beneficence. Ordain for them that which may draw them nearer unto Thee, and withhold them from all else save Thee. I beg of Thee, O Thou King of existence and Protector of the seen and the unseen, to make whosoever ariseth to serve Thy Cause as a sea moving by Thy desire, as one ablaze with the fire of Thy Sacred Tree, shining from the horizon of the heaven of Thy Will. Verily Thou art the mighty One Whom neither the power of all the world nor the strength of nations can weaken. There is no God but Thee, the One, the Incomparable, the Protector, the Self-Subsistent.

—Bahá'u'lláh

Fountain of Wisdom, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing, 2016), par. 4.3-4.5, p. 28.

ANSWERS: *Affirming treasures...*

1. ninety-five (95)
2. a, c, and e
3. true (see *Lights of Guidance*, A Bahá'í Reference File, no. 1020, p. 301.), unless ruled upon otherwise by National Spiritual Assemblies in the extreme northern or southern regions of the earth, that may determine the beginning of the day be established by clocks instead of the setting of the sun
4. c
5. b
6. all answers are valuable
7. c
8. all answers are valuable

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