

The Importance of Prayer, Meditation and the Devotional Attitude: A Compilation

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Extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words, that ye may unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths. Take heed that ye do not vacillate in your determination to embrace the truth of this Cause—a Cause through which the potentialities of the might of God have been revealed, and His sovereignty established. With faces beaming with joy, hasten ye unto Him. This is the changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future. Let him that seeketh, attain it; and as to him that hath refused to seek it—verily, God is Self-Sufficient, above any need of His creatures.

(“A Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book of Bahá'u'lláh”, 1st ed. (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1973), pp. 27–28) [1]

Recite ye the verses of God every morning and evening. Whoso reciteth them not hath truly failed to fulfil his pledge to the Covenant of God and His Testament, and whoso in this day turneth away therefrom hath indeed turned away from God since time immemorial. Fear ye God, O concourse of My servants!

Take heed lest excessive reading and too many acts of piety in the daytime and in the night season make you vainglorious. Should a person recite but a single verse from the Holy Writings in a spirit of joy and radiance, this would be better for him than reciting wearily all the Scriptures of God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. Recite ye the verses of God in such measure that ye be not overtaken with fatigue or boredom. Burden not your souls so as to cause exhaustion and weigh them down, but rather endeavour to lighten them, that they may soar on the wings of revealed Verses unto the dawning-place of His signs. This is conducive to nearer access unto God, were ye to comprehend.

(“Kitáb-i-Aqdas”—provisional translation from the Arabic) [2]

The wine of renunciation must needs be quaffed, the lofty heights of detachment must needs be attained, and the meditation referred to in the words “One hour’s reflection is preferable to seventy years of pious worship” must needs be observed, so that the secret of the wretched behaviour of the people might be discovered, those people who, despite the love and yearning for truth which they profess, curse the followers of Truth when once He hath been made manifest...

(“Kitáb-i-Íqán” [rev. ed.], (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985), p. 238) [3]

In like manner, those words that have streamed forth from the source of power and descended from the heaven of glory are innumerable and beyond the ordinary comprehension of man. To them that are possessed of true understanding and insight the Súrah of Húd surely sufficeth. Ponder a while those holy words in your heart, and, with utter detachment, strive to grasp their meaning...

(“Kitáb-i-Íqán”, p. 5) [4]

O brother, we should open our eyes, meditate upon His Word, and seek the sheltering shadow of the Manifestations of God, that perchance we may be warned by the unmistakable counsels of the Book, and give heed to the admonitions recorded in the holy Tablets; that we may not cavil at

the Revealer of the verses, that we may resign ourselves wholly to His Cause, and embrace wholeheartedly His law, that haply we may enter the court of His mercy, and dwell upon the shore of His grace. He, verily, is merciful, and forgiving towards His servants.

(“Kitáb-i-Íqán”, p. 217)

[5]

O SON OF GLORY!

Be swift in the path of holiness, and enter the heaven of communion with Me. Cleanse thy heart with the burnish of the spirit, and hasten to the court of the Most High.

(“The Hidden Words of Bahá’u’lláh”, Persian no. 8, rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1985), p. 24)

[6]

Say: Deliver your souls, O people, from the bondage of self, and purify them from all attachment to anything besides Me. Remembrance of Me cleanseth all things from defilement, could ye but perceive it. Say: Were all created things to be entirely divested of the veil of worldly vanity and desire, the Hand of God would in this Day clothe them, one and all, with the robe “He doeth whatsoever He willeth in the kingdom of creation,” that thereby the sign of His sovereignty might be manifested in all things. Exalted then be He, the Sovereign Lord of all, the Almighty, the Supreme Protector, the All-Glorious, the Most Powerful.

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. Thus have the mysteries of the Revelation of God been decreed by virtue of the Will of Him Who is the Source of power and wisdom.

(“Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh”, rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1984), sec. 136, pp. 294–95)

[7]

O Salmán! All that the sages and mystics have said or written have never exceeded, nor can they ever hope to exceed, the limitations to which man’s finite mind hath been strictly subjected. To whatever heights the mind of the most exalted of men may soar, however great the depths which the detached and understanding heart can penetrate, such mind and heart can never transcend that which is the creature of their own conceptions and the product of their own thoughts. The meditations of the profoundest thinker, the devotions of the holiest of saints, the highest expressions of praise from either human pen or tongue, are but a reflection of that which hath been created within themselves, through the revelation of the Lord, their God. Whoever pondereth this truth in his heart will readily admit that there are certain limits which no human being can possibly transgress. Every attempt which, from the beginning that hath no beginning, hath been made to visualize and know God is limited by the exigencies of His own creation—a creation which He, through the operation of His own Will and for the purposes of none other but His own Self, hath called into being. Immeasurably exalted is He above the strivings of human mind to grasp His Essence, or of human tongue to describe His mystery...

(“Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh”, sec. 148, pp. 317–18)

[8]

Do thou meditate on that which We have revealed unto thee, that thou mayest discover the purpose of God, thy Lord, and the Lord of all worlds. In these words the mysteries of Divine Wisdom have been treasured...

“Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh”, sec. 79, p. 153)

[9]

Were any man to ponder in his heart that which the Pen of the Most High hath revealed and to taste of its sweetness, he would, of a certainty, find himself emptied and delivered from his own desires, and utterly subservient to the Will of the Almighty. Happy is the man that hath attained so high a station, and hath not deprived himself of so bountiful a grace.

(“Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh”, sec. 163, p. 343)

[10]

Occupy thyself in remembrance of the Beauty of Him Who is the Unconstrained at early morn, and seek communion with Him at the hour of dawn. O ‘Alí! Remembrance of Me is a healing medicine to the souls and a light to the hearts of men.

(From a Tablet to an individual believer—translated from the Persian)

[11]

Extracts from the Writings of the Báb

It is seemly that the servant should, after each prayer, supplicate God to bestow mercy and forgiveness upon his parents. Thereupon God’s call will be raised: ‘Thousand upon thousand of what thou hast asked for thy parents shall be thy recompense!’ Blessed is he who remembereth his parents when communing with God. There is, verily, no God but Him, the Mighty, the Well-Beloved.

(“Selections from the Writings of the Báb” [rev. ed.], (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1982), p. 94)

[12]

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 be 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. Thus if haply thou dost live in the Day of Resurrection, the mirror of thy heart will be set towards Him Who is the Day-Star of Truth; and no sooner will His light shine forth than the splendour thereof shall forthwith be reflected in thy heart. For He is the Source of all goodness, and unto Him revert all things. But if He appeareth while thou hast turned unto thyself in meditation, this shall not profit thee, unless thou shalt mention His Name by words He hath revealed. For in the forthcoming Revelation it is He Who is the Remembrance of God, whereas the devotions which thou art offering at present have been prescribed by the Point of the Bayán, while He Who will shine resplendent in the Day of Resurrection is the Revelation of the inner reality enshrined in the Point of the Bayán—a Revelation more potent, immeasurably more potent, than the one which hath preceded it.

(“Selections from the Writings of the Báb”, pp. 93–94)

[13]

Worship thou God in such wise that if thy worship lead thee to the fire, no alteration in thine adoration would be produced, and so likewise if thy recompense should be paradise. Thus and thus alone should be the worship which befitteth the one True God. Shouldst thou worship Him because of fear, this would be unseemly in the sanctified Court of His presence, and could not be regarded as an act by thee dedicated to the Oneness of His Being. Or if thy gaze should be on paradise, and thou shouldst worship Him while cherishing such a hope, thou wouldst make God’s creation a partner with Him, notwithstanding the fact that paradise is desired by men.

Fire and paradise both bow down and prostrate themselves before God. That which is worthy of His Essence is to worship Him for His sake, without fear of fire, or hope of paradise.

Although when true worship is offered, the worshipper is delivered from the fire, and entereth the paradise of God's good-pleasure, yet such should not be the motive of his act. However, God's favour and grace ever flow in accordance with the exigencies of His inscrutable wisdom.

The most acceptable prayer is the one offered with the utmost spirituality and radiance; its prolongation hath not been and is not beloved by God. The more detached and the purer the prayer, the more acceptable is it in the presence of God.

("Selections from the Writings of the Báb", pp. 77–78) [14]

Extracts from the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

O thou who hast bowed thyself down in prayer before the Kingdom of God! Blessed art thou, for the beauty of the divine Countenance hath enraptured thy heart, and the light of inner wisdom hath filled it full, and within it shineth the brightness of the Kingdom. Know thou that God is with thee under all conditions, and that He guardeth thee from the changes and chances of this world and hath made thee a handmaid in His mighty vineyard...

("Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá" [rev. ed.], (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), sec. 91, p. 122) [15]

Praise be to God, thy heart is engaged in the commemoration of God, thy soul is gladdened by the glad tidings of God and thou art absorbed in prayer. The state of prayer is the best of conditions, for man is then associating with God. Prayer verily bestoweth life, particularly when offered in private and at times, such as midnight, when freed from daily cares.

("Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá", sec. 172, p. 202) [16]

Thou hast asked about places of worship and the underlying reason therefore. The wisdom in raising up such buildings is that at a given hour, the people should know it is time to meet, and all should gather together, and, harmoniously attuned one to another, engage in prayer; with the result that out of this coming together, unity and affection shall grow and flourish in the human heart.

("Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá", sec. 58, pp. 94–95) [17]

Praised be God, ye two have demonstrated the truth of your words by your deeds, and have won the confirmations of the Lord God. Every day at first light, ye gather the Bahá'í children together and teach them the communions and prayers. This is a most praiseworthy act, and bringeth joy to the children's hearts: that they should, at every morn, turn their faces toward the Kingdom and make mention of the Lord and praise His Name, and in the sweetest of voices, chant and recite.

These children are even as young plants, and teaching them the prayers is as letting the rain pour down upon them, that they may wax tender and fresh, and the soft breezes of the love of God may blow over them, making them to tremble with joy.

("Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá", sec. 115, p. 139) [18]

O handmaid of God! Prayers are granted through the universal Manifestations of God. Nevertheless, where the wish is to obtain material things, even where the heedless are concerned, if they supplicate, humbly imploring God's help—even their prayer hath an effect.

...

O handmaid of God! The prayers which were revealed to ask for healing apply both to physical and spiritual healing. Recite them, then, to heal both the soul and the body. If healing is

right for the patient, it will certainly be granted; but for some ailing persons, healing would only be the cause of other ills, and therefore wisdom doth not permit an affirmative answer to the prayer.

O handmaid of God! The power of the Holy Spirit healeth both physical and spiritual ailments.

(“Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá”, sec. 139, pp. 161–62) [19]

Beseech thou from God’s infinite grace whatsoever thou desirest. But wert thou to heed my advice thou wouldst desire naught save entrance into the Abhá Kingdom, and seek naught save the bounties of the Beauty of the All-Glorious, may my life be sacrificed for His loved ones. This is my exhortation to thee.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian and Arabic) [20]

Thou hast asked about material means and prayer. Prayer is like the spirit and material means are like the human hand. The spirit operateth through the instrumentality of the hand. Although the one true God is the All-Provider, it is the earth which is the means to supply sustenance. “The heaven hath sustenance for you”¹ but when sustenance is decreed it becometh available, whatever the means may be. When man refuseth to use material means, he is like a thirsty one who seeketh to quench his thirst through means other than water or other liquids. The Almighty Lord is the provider of water, and its maker, and hath decreed that it be used to quench man’s thirst, but its use is dependent upon His Will. If it should not be in conformity with His Will, man is afflicted with a thirst which the oceans cannot quench.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian) [21]

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 his heart, and attaineth spiritual stations.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian) [22]

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. “And thou hast seen the earth dried up and barren: but when We send down the rain upon it, it stirreth and swelleth, and groweth every kind of luxuriant herb.”² Strive thou, then, to praise and glorify God by night and by day, that thou mayest attain infinite freshness and beauty.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian) [23]

It behoveth the servant to pray to and seek assistance from God, and to supplicate and implore His aid. Such becometh the rank of servitude, and the Lord will decree whatsoever He desireth, in accordance with His consummate wisdom.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Arabic) [24]

O Lord! In this Most Great Dispensation Thou dost accept the intercession of children in behalf of their parents. This is one of the special infinite bestowals of this Dispensation. Therefore, O Thou kind Lord, accept the request of this Thy servant at the threshold of Thy singleness and submerge his father in the ocean of Thy grace, because this son hath arisen to render Thee service and is exerting effort at all times in the pathway of Thy love. Verily, Thou art the Giver, the Forgiver and the Kind!

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian) [25]

Know thou that in every word and movement of the obligatory prayer there are allusions, mysteries and a wisdom that man is unable to comprehend, and letters and scrolls cannot contain.
(From a Tablet—translated from the Arabic) [26]

O maid-servant of God! Chant the Words of God and, pondering over their meaning, transform them into actions! I ask God to cause thee to attain a high station in the Kingdom of Life forever and ever.
("Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas", vol. 1 (Chicago: Bahá'í Publishing Society, 1909), p. 85) [27]

Therefore, know thou that the True One possesseth invisible worlds which human meditation is unable to comprehend and the intellect of man hath no power to imagine. When thou wilt purify and clarify thy spiritual nostrils from every worldly moisture, then thou wilt inhale the holy fragrances diffusing from the merciful gardens of these worlds.
("Bahá'í World Faith: Selected Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá", rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), p. 393) [28]

When man allows the spirit, through his soul, to enlighten his understanding, then does he contain all Creation...

But on the other hand, when man does not open his mind and heart to the blessing of the spirit, but turns his soul towards the material side, towards the bodily part of his nature, then is he fallen from his high place and he becomes inferior to the inhabitants of the lower animal kingdom...
("Paris Talks: Addresses given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in 1911–1912", 10th ed. (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979), pp. 96–97) [29]

Bahá'u'lláh says there is a sign (from God) in every phenomenon: the sign of the intellect is contemplation and the sign of contemplation is silence, because it is impossible for a man to do two things at one time—he cannot both speak and meditate.

It is an axiomatic fact that while you meditate you are speaking with your own spirit. In that state of mind you put certain questions to your spirit and the spirit answers: the light breaks forth and the reality is revealed.

You cannot apply the name 'man' to any being void of this faculty of meditation; without it he would be a mere animal, lower than the beasts.

Through the faculty of meditation man attains to eternal life; through it he receives the breath of the Holy Spirit—the bestowal of the Spirit is given in reflection and meditation.

The spirit of man is itself informed and strengthened during meditation; through it affairs of which man knew nothing are unfolded before his view. Through it he receives Divine inspiration, through it he receives heavenly food.

Meditation is the key for opening the doors of mysteries. In that state man abstracts himself: in that state man withdraws himself from all outside objects; in that subjective mood he is immersed in the ocean of spiritual life and can unfold the secrets of things-in-themselves. To illustrate this, think of man as endowed with two kinds of sight; when the power of insight is being used the outward power of vision does not see.

This faculty of meditation frees man from the animal nature, discerns the reality of things, puts man in touch with God.

This faculty brings forth from the invisible plane the sciences and arts. Through the meditative faculty inventions are made possible, colossal undertakings are carried out; through it governments can run smoothly. Through this faculty man enters into the very Kingdom of God.

Nevertheless some thoughts are useless to man; they are like waves moving in the sea without result. But if the faculty of meditation is bathed in the inner light and characterized with divine attributes, the results will be confirmed.

The meditative faculty is akin to the mirror; if you put it before earthly objects it will reflect them. Therefore if the spirit of man is contemplating earthly subjects he will be informed of these.

But if you turn the mirror of your spirits heavenwards, the heavenly constellations and the rays of the Sun of Reality will be reflected in your hearts, and the virtues of the Kingdom will be obtained.

Therefore let us keep this faculty rightly directed—turning it to the heavenly Sun and not to earthly objects—so that we may discover the secrets of the Kingdom, and comprehend the allegories of the Bible and the mysteries of the spirit.

May we indeed become mirrors reflecting the heavenly realities, and may we become so pure as to reflect the stars of heaven.

(“Paris Talks: Addresses given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Paris in 1911–1912”, pp. 174–76) [30]

Know thou, verily, it is becoming in a weak one to supplicate to the Strong One, and it behooveth a seeker of bounty to beseech the Glorious Bountiful One. When one supplicates to his Lord, turns to Him and seeks bounty from His Ocean, this supplication brings light to his heart, illumination to his sight, life to his soul and exaltation to his being.

During thy supplications to God and thy reciting, “Thy Name is my healing,” consider how thine heart is cheered, thy soul delighted by the spirit of the love of God, and thy mind attracted to the Kingdom of God! By these attractions one’s ability and capacity increase. When the vessel is enlarged the water increases, and when the thirst grows the bounty of the cloud becomes agreeable to the taste of man. This is the mystery of supplication and the wisdom of stating one’s wants.

(J. E. Esslemont, “Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era”, 5th rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1987), p. 93) [31]

We must strive to attain to that condition by being separated from all things and from the people of the world and by turning to God alone. It will take some effort on the part of man to attain to that condition, but he must work for it, strive for it. We can attain to it by thinking and caring less for material things and more for the spiritual. The further we go from the one, the nearer we are to the other. The choice is ours.

Our spiritual perception, our inward sight must be opened, so that we can see the signs and traces of God’s spirit in everything. Everything can reflect to us the light of the Spirit.

(Report of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words as quoted in J. E. Esslemont, “Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era”, p. 89) [32]

If one friend feels love for another, he will wish to say so. Though he knows that the friend is aware that he loves him, he will still wish to say so.... God knows the wishes of all hearts. But the

impulse to prayer is a natural one, springing from man's love to God.

Prayer need not be in words, but rather in thought and attitude. But if this love and this desire are lacking, it is useless to try to force them. Words without love mean nothing. If a person talks to you as an unpleasant duty, with no love or pleasure in his meeting with you, do you wish to converse with him?

(Report of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words as quoted in J. E. Esslemont, "Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era", p. 94) [33]

In the highest prayer, men pray only for the love of God, not because they fear Him or hell, or hope for bounty or heaven.... When a man falls in love with a human being, it is impossible for him to keep from mentioning the name of his beloved. How much more difficult is it to keep from mentioning the Name of God when one has come to love Him.... The spiritual man finds no delight in anything save in commemoration of God.

(Report of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words as quoted in J.E. Esslemont, "Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era", p. 95) [34]

Extracts from the Writings of Shoghi Effendi

The simplicity characterizing the offering of Bahá'í prayers, whether obligatory or otherwise, should be maintained. Rigidity and rituals should be strictly avoided.

(In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 30 October 1936 written on his behalf to an individual believer) [35]

Extracts from Letters Written on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi

The Guardian wishes you, therefore, to pray, and to supplicate the Almighty that He may give you a fuller measure of His grace; that through it your spiritual energies may be quickened and that you may become more imbued with that spirit which must needs animate, sustain and strengthen every sincere and true follower of the Faith.

(13 March 1934 to an individual believer) [36]

Concerning the directions given by Bahá'u'lláh for the recital of certain prayers, Shoghi Effendi wishes me to inform you that these regulations—which by the way are very few and simple—are of a great spiritual help to the individual believer, in that they help him to fully concentrate when praying and meditating. Their significance is thus purely spiritual.

(5 November 1934 to an individual believer) [37]

In prayer the believers can turn their consciousness toward the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, provided that in doing so they have a clear and correct understanding of His station as a Manifestation of God.

(15 November 1935 to two believers) [38]

With regard to your spiritual experiences, the Guardian has been very interested to share them. He would, however, urge you to always use and read, during your hours of meditation and prayer, the words revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and the Master.

(6 December 1935 to an individual believer) [39]

The problem with which you are faced is one which concerns and seriously puzzles many of our present-day youth. How to attain spirituality is, indeed, a question to which every young man

and woman must sooner or later try to find a satisfactory answer. It is precisely because no such satisfactory reply has been given or found, that modern youth finds itself bewildered, and is being consequently carried away by the materialistic forces that are so powerfully undermining the foundation of man's moral and spiritual life.

Indeed, the chief reason for the evils now rampant in society is a lack of spirituality. The materialistic civilization of our age has so much absorbed the energy and interest of mankind, that people in general no longer feel the necessity of raising themselves above the forces and conditions of their daily material existence. There is not sufficient demand for things that we should call spiritual to differentiate them from the needs and requirements of our physical existence. The universal crisis affecting mankind is, therefore, essentially spiritual in its causes. The spirit of the age, taken on the whole, is irreligious. Man's outlook upon life is too crude and materialistic to enable him to elevate himself into the higher realms of the spirit.

It is this condition, so sadly morbid, into which society has fallen, that religion seeks to improve and transform. For the core of religious faith is that mystic feeling that 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 to merely accept and observe the teachings. He should, in addition, cultivate the sense of spirituality, which he can acquire chiefly by the 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 that has first to be fed. And this spiritual nourishment prayer can best provide. Laws and institutions, as viewed by Bahá'u'lláh, can become really effective only when our inner spiritual life has been perfected and transformed. Otherwise religion will degenerate into a mere organization, and become a dead thing.

The believers, particularly the young ones, should therefore fully realize the necessity of praying. For prayer is absolutely indispensable to their inner spiritual development, and this, already stated, is the very foundation and purpose of the Religion of God.

(8 December 1935 to an individual believer, published in "Bahá'í News" 102 (August 1936), p. 3) [40]

...the obligatory prayers are by their very nature of greater effectiveness and are endowed with a greater power than the non-obligatory ones, and as such are essential.

(4 January 1936 to an individual believer) [41]

While praying it would be better to turn one's thoughts to the Manifestation as He continues, in the other world, to be our means of contact with the Almighty. We can, however, pray directly to God Himself.

(27 April 1937 to the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma) [42]

You have asked whether our prayers go beyond Bahá'u'lláh: it all depends whether we pray to Him directly or through Him to God. We may do both, and also can pray directly to God, but our prayers would certainly be more effective and illuminating if they are addressed to Him through His Manifestation, Bahá'u'lláh.

(14 October 1937 to an individual believer) [43]

The Guardian wishes me to assure you that he sees no objection to the friends coming together for meditation and prayer. Such a communion helps in fostering fellowship among the believers, and as such is highly commendable.

(20 November 1937 to an individual believer)

[44]

[...] was a matter of deepest [...] to the Guardian to hear of the news of the formation in Honolulu of a Morning Class of prayer and meditation conducted by dear Mrs. ... in her home, inasmuch as he feels the absolute necessity for the friends to make now a special effort to cultivate the devotional side of their Bahá'í life in preparation for a more intensified and successful service, particularly in the teaching field.

(1 May 1938 to an individual believer and a Local Spiritual Assembly)

[45]

Although you seem to feel that your prayers have not so far been answered, and do no longer have any hope that your material conditions will ameliorate, the Guardian wishes you nevertheless not to allow such disappointments to undermine your faith in the power of prayer, but rather to continue entreating the Almighty to enable you to discover the great wisdom which may be hidden behind all these sufferings. For are not our sufferings often blessings in disguise, through which God wishes to test the sincerity and depth of our faith, and thereby make us firmer in His Cause?

...

The true worshipper, while praying, should endeavour not so much to ask God to fulfil his wishes and desires, but rather to adjust these and make them conform to the Divine Will. Only through such an attitude can one derive that feeling of inner peace and contentment which the power of prayer alone can confer.

(26 October 1938 to an individual believer)

[46]

You should rest assured that your strict adherence to the laws and observances enjoined by Bahá'u'lláh is the one power that can effectively guide and enable you to overcome the tests and trials of your life, and help you to continually grow and develop spiritually.

The Guardian particularly appreciates the fact that you have been faithfully observing Bahá'u'lláh's injunction regarding the recital of the daily obligatory prayers, and have thereby set such a high example before your Bahá'í fellow-youth. These daily prayers have been endowed with a special potency which only those who regularly recite them can adequately appreciate. The friends should therefore endeavour to make daily use of these prayers, whatever the peculiar circumstances and conditions of their life.

(23 February 1939 to two believers)

[47]

He wishes again to assure you he will pray for your spiritual advancement in the Holy Shrines. The power of God can entirely transmute our characters and make of us beings entirely unlike our previous selves. Through prayer and supplication, obedience to the divine laws Bahá'u'lláh has revealed, and ever-increasing service to His Faith, we can change ourselves.

(22 November 1941 to an individual believer)

[48]

There are no set forms of meditation prescribed in the teachings, no plan, as such, for inner development. The friends are urged—nay enjoined—to pray, and they also should meditate, but the manner of doing the latter is left entirely to the individual.

...

The inspiration received through meditation is of a nature that one cannot measure or determine. God can inspire into our minds things that we had no previous knowledge of, if He desires to do so.

(25 January 1943 to two believers)

[49]

Prayer and meditation are very important factors in deepening the spiritual life of the individual, but with them must go also action and example, as these are the tangible results of the former. Both are essential.

(15 May 1944 to an individual believer)

[50]

The believers, as we all know, should endeavour to set such an example in their personal lives and conduct that others will feel impelled to embrace a Faith which reforms human character. However, unfortunately, not everyone achieves easily and rapidly the victory over self. What every believer, new or old, should realize is that the Cause *has* the spiritual power to re-create us if we make the effort to let that power influence us, and the greatest help in this respect is prayer. We must supplicate Bahá'u'lláh to assist us to overcome the failings in our own characters, and also exert our own will-power in mastering ourselves.

(27 January 1945 to an individual believer)

[51]

Through meditation the doors of deeper knowledge and inspiration may be opened. Naturally, if one meditates as a Bahá'í he is connected with the Source; if a man believing in God meditates he is tuning in to the power and mercy of God; but we cannot say that any inspiration which a person, not knowing Bahá'u'lláh, or not believing in God, receives is merely from his own ego. Meditation is very important, and the Guardian sees no reason why the friends should not be taught to meditate, but they should guard against superstitious or foolish ideas creeping into it.

(19 November 1945 to an individual believer)

[52]

He feels more emphasis should be laid on the importance and power of prayer, including the use of The Greatest Name, but not over-emphasizing it. It is the spirit behind the words which is really important.

(16 March 1946 to an individual believer)

[53]

In regard to your question: we must not be rigid about praying; there is not a set of rules governing it; the main thing is we must start out with the right concept of God, the Manifestation, the Master, the Guardian—we can turn, in thought, to any one of them when we pray. For instance you can ask Bahá'u'lláh for something, or, thinking of Him, ask God for it. The same is true of the Master or the Guardian. You can turn in thought to either of them and then ask their intercession, or pray direct to God. As long as you don't confuse their stations, and make them all equal, it does not matter much how you orient your thoughts.

(24 July 1946 to an individual believer)

[54]

He is delighted to hear you are now fully recovered and again active in your important work for the Cause. However, you should not neglect your health, but consider it the means which enables you to serve. It—the body—is like a horse which carries the personality and spirit, and as such should be well cared for so it can do its work! You should certainly safeguard your nerves, and force yourself to take time, and not only for prayer and meditation, but for real rest and relaxation. We don't have to pray and meditate for hours in order to be spiritual.

(23 November 1947 to an individual believer)

[55]

I might add that he does not believe any radiations of thought or healing, from any group, are going to bring peace. Prayer, no doubt, will help the world, but what it needs is to accept Bahá'u'lláh's system so as to build up the World Order on a new foundation, a divine foundation!

(8 June 1948 to an individual believer)

[56]

If you find you need to visualize someone when you pray, think of the Master. Through Him you can address Bahá'u'lláh. Gradually try to think of the qualities of the Manifestation, and in that way a mental form will fade out, for after all the body is not the thing, His Spirit is there and is the essential, everlasting element.

(31 January 1949 to an individual believer)

[57]

He would advise you to only use the short midday Obligatory Prayer. This has no genuflections and only requires that when saying it the believer turn his face towards 'Akká where Bahá'u'lláh is buried. This is a physical symbol of an inner reality, just as the plant stretches out to the sunlight—from which it receives life and growth—so we turn our hearts to the Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh, when we pray; and we turn our faces, during this short prayer, to where His dust lies on this earth as a symbol of the inner act.

...

Bahá'u'lláh has reduced all ritual and form to an absolute minimum in His Faith. The few forms that there are—like those associated with the two longer obligatory daily prayers—are only symbols of the inner attitude. There is a wisdom in them, and a great blessing, but we cannot force ourselves to understand or feel these things, that is why He gave us also the very short and simple prayer, for those who did not feel the desire to perform the acts associated with the other two.

(24 June 1949 to an individual believer)

[58]

He suggests that you daily pray to Bahá'u'lláh to let you meet a soul receptive to His Message. The power of prayer is very great, and attracts the Divine confirmations. He, also, will pray for your teaching work there.

(30 September 1951 to an individual believer)

[59]

He thinks it would be wiser for the Bahá'ís to use the Meditations given by Bahá'u'lláh, and not any set form of meditation recommended by someone else; but the believers must be left free in these details and allowed to have personal latitude in finding their own level of communion with God.

(27 January 1952 to an individual believer)

[60]

Notes

- 1 Qur'án 51:22 ↵
- 2 Qur'án 107:5 ↵

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