

# Prayer and Devotional Life

A Compilation of Extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá  
and the Letters of Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice

Prepared by the Research Department  
of the Universal House of Justice  
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## Prayer and Devotional Life

### The Power of Prayer

I beseech Thee ... to make of my prayer a fire that will burn away the veils which have

shut me out from Thy beauty, and a light that will lead me unto the ocean of Thy Presence.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2008), CLXXXIII) [1]

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Every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God is endowed with such potency as can instill new life into every human frame, if ye be of them that comprehend this truth.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), LXXIV) [2]

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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.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXXVI) [3]

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If thou desirest eternal life, inhale the heavenly fragrance; and if thou seekest life everlasting, abide beneath the shelter of the Word of God.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian) [4]

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The Word of God may be likened to the life-giving breezes of the divine springtime. When chanted in spiritual tones, it bestoweth the breath of life and granteth true salvation. It bringeth forth a garden of roses from the pure soil, and wafteth its musk-laden fragrance throughout the world.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian) [5]

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Shouldst thou recite any of the revealed prayers, and seek assistance from God with thy face turned towards Him, and implore Him with devotion and fervour, thy need will be answered.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian) [6]

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... He, Who has entrusted them with such a great mission to the world, is waiting and

patiently waiting for them that labour in His Divine Vineyard to turn their hearts in prayer and supplication to the Almighty and seek that aid and guidance that can alone enable them to carry out His Divine Plan for this world.

(From a letter dated 7 January 1923 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'í community of Pasadena, California)

[7]

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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.

(In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 30 January 1925 written on his behalf to an individual believer)

[8]

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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.

(From a letter dated 13 March 1934 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

[9]

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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.

(From a letter dated 22 November 1941 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

[10]

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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.

(From a letter dated 27 January 1945 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

[11]

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He suggests that you all hold special prayers that God may send to you receptive souls to teach. Prayer unlocks doors that otherwise seem unopenable!

(From a letter dated 28 June 1945 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

[12]

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.

(From a letter dated 30 September 1951 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [13]

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The Twin Luminaries of this resplendent age have taught us this: Prayer is the essential spiritual conversation of the soul with its Maker, direct and without intermediation. It is the spiritual food that sustains the life of the spirit. Like the morning's dew, it brings freshness to the heart and cleanses it, purifying it from attachments of the insistent self. It is a fire that burns away the veils and a light that leads to the ocean of reunion with the Almighty. On its wings does the soul soar in the heavens of God and draw closer to the divine reality. Upon its quality depends the development of the limitless capacities of the soul and the attraction of the bounties of God, but the prolongation of prayer is not desirable.

(The Universal House of Justice, from a letter dated 18 December 2014 to the Bahá'ís in Írán) [14]

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### Communion with God

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, and whoso turneth away from these holy verses in this Day is of those who throughout eternity have turned away from God. Fear ye God, O My servants, one and all. Pride not yourselves on much reading of the verses or on a multitude of pious acts by night and day; for were a man to read a single verse with joy and radiance it would be better for him than to read with lassitude all the Holy Books of God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. Read ye the sacred verses in such measure that ye be not overcome by languor and despondency. Lay not upon your souls that which will weary them and weigh them down, but rather what will lighten and uplift them, so that they may soar on the wings of the Divine verses towards the Dawning-place of His manifest signs; this will draw you nearer to God, did ye but comprehend.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, par. 149) [15]

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Purge Thou mine ear, O my Lord, that I may hearken unto the verses sent down unto Thee, and illuminate my heart with the light of Thy knowledge, and loose my tongue that it may make mention of Thee and sing Thy praise. By Thy might, O my God! My soul is wedded to none beside Thee, and my heart seeketh none except Thine own Self.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh*, LXXXIV) [16]

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.

(Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

[17]

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I render Thee thanks, O Thou Who hast lighted Thy fire within my soul, and cast the beams of Thy light into my heart, that Thou hast taught Thy servants how to make mention of Thee, and revealed unto them the ways whereby they can supplicate Thee, through Thy most holy and exalted tongue, and Thy most august and precious speech. But for Thy leave, who is there that could venture to express Thy might and Thy grandeur; and were it not for Thine instruction, who is the man that could discover the ways of Thy pleasure in the kingdom of Thy creation?

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh*, CLXXVI)

[18]

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Make my prayer, O my Lord, a fountain of living waters whereby I may live as long as Thy sovereignty endureth, and may make mention of Thee in every world of Thy worlds.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh*, CLXXXIII)

[19]

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O Son of Light! Forget all save Me and commune with My spirit. This is of the essence of My command, therefore turn unto it.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, no. 16)

[20]

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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.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, no. 8)

[21]

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Glory be unto Thee, Thou art exalted above the description of anyone save Thyself, since it is beyond human conception to befittingly magnify Thy virtues or to comprehend the inmost reality of Thine Essence. Far be it from Thy glory that Thy creatures should describe Thee or that anyone besides Thyself should ever know Thee. I have known Thee, O my God, by reason of Thy making Thyself known unto me, for hadst Thou not revealed Thyself unto me, I would not have known Thee. I worship Thee by virtue of Thy summoning me unto Thee, for had it not been for Thy summons I would not have worshiped Thee.

(The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), p. 203)

[22]

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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.”<sup>1</sup> Strive thou, then, to praise and glorify God by night and by day, that thou mayest attain infinite freshness and beauty.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

[23]

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<sup>1</sup> Qur’án 22:5

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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.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Arabic)

[24]

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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.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2009), no.

172)

[25]

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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*, 5th rev. ed.

(Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980), p. 89)

[26]

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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.

(Report of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words as quoted in J. E. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, p. 93) [27]

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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*, pp. 94-95) [28]

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When we turn to God with our whole heart and invoke His Name, a spiritual connection is established through which we become a channel of divine influence.

(From a letter dated 19 October 1925 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [29]

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### **The Spirit and Form of Prayer**

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.

(The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 78) [30]

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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.

(The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, pp. 93–94)

[31]

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As for devotions other than obligatory prayer, if these be chanted jointly and with a pleasant and affecting melody, this would be most acceptable.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

[32]

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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)

[33]

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‘Abdu’l-Bahá once said: “The worshipper must pray with a detached spirit, unconditional surrender of the will, concentrated attention and spiritual fervour.... Automatic, formal prayers which do not touch the core of the heart are of no avail.”

(From a letter dated 19 October 1925 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

[34]

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As regards the chanting of Tablets in the Temple, Shoghi Effendi wishes in this connection to urge the friends to avoid all forms of rigidity and uniformity in matters of worship. There is no objection to the recital or chanting of prayers in the Oriental language, but there is also no obligation whatever of adopting such a form of prayer at any devotional service in the auditorium of the Temple. It should neither be required nor prohibited. The important thing that should always be borne in mind is that with the exception of certain specific obligatory prayers Bahá’u’lláh has given us no strict or special rulings in matters of worship whether in the Temple or elsewhere. Prayer is essentially a communion between man and God, and as such transcends all ritualistic forms and formulae.

(From a letter dated 15 June 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

[35]

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Daily prayers—with the exception of the specific obligatory prayers such as the “Namáz”<sup>2</sup>—can be recited in any fashion or manner which the believer chooses. Uniformity in the case of such prayers should under no circumstances be imposed upon the friends. The worshipper should be left entirely free to pray as he wishes.

(From a letter dated 6 July 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

[36]

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<sup>2</sup>The Persian word Namáz denotes the daily Obligatory Prayers.



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.

(From a letter dated 6 December 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [37]

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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.

(From a letter dated 26 October 1938 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [38]

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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.

(From a letter dated 16 March 1946 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [39]

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The daily prayers are to be said each one for himself, aloud or silent makes no difference. There is no congregational prayer except that for the dead. We read healing and other prayers in our meetings, but the daily prayer is a personal obligation, so someone else reading it is not quite the same thing as saying it for yourself.

(From a letter dated 31 January 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [40]

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The powers latent in prayer are manifested when it is motivated by the love of God, beyond any fear or favour, and free from ostentation and superstition. It is to be expressed with a sincere and pure heart conducive to contemplation and meditation so that the rational faculty can be illumined by its effects. Such prayer will transcend the limitation of words and go well beyond mere sounds. The sweetness of its melodies must gladden and uplift the heart and reinforce the penetrating power of the Word, transmuting earthly inclinations into heavenly attributes and inspiring selfless service to humankind.

(The Universal House of Justice, from a letter dated 18 December 2014 to the Bahá'ís in Írán) [41]

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## **The Role of Meditation**

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.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, LXXIX)

[42]

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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.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks: Addresses given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Paris in 1911–1912* (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 2011), no. 54)

[43]

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... of course the Bahá’ís can and should meditate upon the significances of the writings, and endeavour to grasp their meaning to the uttermost. There can be no possible objection to this. However, certain things are, by their very nature, a mystery to us, at least in our present stage of development.

(From a letter dated 14 January 1942 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

[44]

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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.

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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.

(From a letter dated 25 January 1943 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to individual believers)

[45]

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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.

(From a letter dated 19 November 1945 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

[46]

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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.

(From a letter dated 27 January 1952 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

[47]

Therefore strive that your actions day by day may be beautiful prayers. Turn towards God, and seek always to do that which is right and noble. Enrich the poor, raise the fallen, comfort the sorrowful, bring healing to the sick, reassure the fearful, rescue the oppressed, bring hope to the hopeless, shelter the destitute!

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, no. 26)

[48]

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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.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Bahá’í Publishing Society, 1909), p. 85) [49]

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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.

(From a letter dated 15 May 1944 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [50]

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The Master said guidance was when the doors opened after we tried. We can pray, ask to do God’s will only, try hard, and then if we find our plan is not working out, assume it is not the right one, at least for the moment.

(From a letter dated 29 October 1952 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [51]

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When a person becomes a Bahá’í, actually what takes place is that the seed of the spirit starts to grow in the human soul. This seed must be watered by the outpourings of the Holy Spirit. These gifts of the spirit are received through prayer, meditation, study of the Holy Utterances and service to the Cause of God. The fact of the matter is that service in the Cause is like the plough which ploughs the physical soil when seeds are sown. It is necessary that the soil be ploughed up, so that it can be enriched, and thus cause a stronger growth of the seed. In exactly the same way the evolution of the spirit takes place through ploughing up the soil of the heart so that it is a constant reflection of the Holy Spirit. In this way the human spirit grows and develops by leaps and bounds.

(From a letter dated 6 October 1954 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [52]

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The friends ... should turn to God for guidance in prayer and meditation, should study the Teachings of the Faith and then arise and act. Prayer and meditation, and study, without action, are of no value, and action must be reinforced by these other things, which strengthen the soul and nourish the mind.

(From a letter dated 30 May 1956 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Hands of the Cause in Asia) [53]

The beloved Guardian has stressed over and over again, that to effectively teach the Faith, the individual must study deeply the Divine Word, imbibe its life-giving waters, and feast upon its glorious teachings. He should then meditate on the import of the Word, and finding its spiritual depths, pray for guidance and assistance. But most important, after prayer is action. After one has prayed and meditated, he must arise, relying fully on the guidance and confirmation of Bahá'u'lláh, to teach His Faith. Perseverance in action is essential, just as wisdom and audacity are necessary for effective teaching. The individual must sacrifice all things to this great goal, and then the victories will be won.

(From a letter dated 30 May 1956 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Hands of the Cause in the United States)

[54]

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Teaching is the source of Divine Confirmation. It is not sufficient to pray diligently for guidance, but this prayer must be followed by meditation as to the best methods of action and then action itself. Even if the action should not immediately produce results, or perhaps not be entirely correct, that does not make so much difference, because prayers can only be answered through action and if someone's action is wrong, God can use that method of showing the pathway which is right. Therefore you and the other members of the ... Assembly must arise and diligently teach the Cause. You will find that you will be guided and confirmed in this work.

(From a letter dated 22 August 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

[55]

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## Obligatory Prayers

As for thy mention of the Obligatory Prayer: in truth, anyone who readeth this with absolute sincerity will attract all created things, and confer new life upon the world of being. This servant beseecheth his Lord to assist His loved ones in that which will deliver them from this world's vicissitudes, its preoccupations, its frustrations, and its darkness, and will adorn them with that which shall under all conditions draw them nigh unto Him. He, verily, is the All-Possessing, the Most High.<sup>3</sup>

(Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet—translated from the Arabic and the Persian)

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<sup>3</sup> This Tablet was revealed in the voice of Bahá'u'lláh's amanuensis, Mírzá Áqá Ján, surnamed *Khádímulláh* (Servant of God). Out of respect, the Bahá'ís, rather than addressing Bahá'u'lláh directly, would write to Mírzá Áqá Ján. The reply would be in the form of a letter from Mírzá Áqá Ján quoting words of Bahá'u'lláh, but would, in fact, be dictated in its entirety by Bahá'u'lláh. All parts of such Tablets, even those which ostensibly are the words of Mírzá Áqá Ján himself, are Sacred Scripture revealed by Bahá'u'lláh.

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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.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

[57]

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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.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Arabic)

[58]

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In regard to the question which you have been asked by the London Assembly to submit to the Guardian concerning the recital of “Munájáts”:<sup>4</sup> He wishes me first to draw your attention to the fact that there is a fundamental difference between “Namáz” and “Munáját”. While the former, being specifically ordained by Bahá’u’lláh, is obligatory and must, in accordance with His definite instructions given in the Aqdas, be recited privately, the latter is neither compulsory nor is there any prescribed way for its recital. But although the friends are thus left free to follow their own inclination when reading the “Munáját” they should take the utmost care that any manner they practise should not acquire too rigid a character, and thus develop into an institution.

This is a point which the friends should always bear in mind, lest they deviate from the clear path indicated by the Teachings.

(From a letter dated 25 October 1934 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

[59]

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<sup>4</sup>The Persian word Munáját denotes prayer.

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... 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.

(From a letter dated 4 January 1936 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

[60]

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The instructions that accompany these prayers, such as the washing of hands and face, of bowing down and of raising one's hands, have been definitely ordained by Bahá’u’lláh, and as such should be entirely and confidently carried out by the believers, and particularly by the Bahá’í youth, on whose shoulders has been laid the chief responsibility of vindicating the truth and preserving the integrity of the laws and ordinances of the Faith.

The daily obligatory prayers are three in number. The shortest one consists of a single verse which has to be recited once every twenty-four hours and at midday. The medium,

which begins with the words, “The Lord is witness that there is none other God but He,” has to be recited three times a day, in the morning, at noon and in the evening. This prayer is accompanied by certain physical acts and gestures. The long prayer, which is the most elaborate of the three, has to be recited only once in every twenty-four hours, and at any time one feels inclined to do so.

The believer is entirely free to choose any one of these three prayers, but is under the obligation of reciting one of them, and in accordance with any specific directions with which it may be accompanied.

(From a letter dated 10 January 1936 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada) [61]

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You had asked about performing obligatory prayers in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. He told me to write: “Obligatory prayer is not forbidden in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, but the friends have not been and are not required to perform it in the Temple. Congregational prayer is prohibited, save in the Prayer for the Dead. Designating the place and determining the conditions for the recital of obligatory prayers in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár are secondary matters to be referred to the Spiritual Assembly of that city.”

(From a letter dated 30 January 1937 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [62]

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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.

(From a letter dated 23 February 1939 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to individual believers) [63]

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With reference to your question regarding the three daily obligatory prayers: the Bahá'í worshipper is not required to recite them all each day, but has to choose one, and should also strictly conform to any instructions revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in connection with its recital, such as the raising of hands, various genuflections, etc. Those who for some reason or other, especially when physically unable to observe these regulations owing to illness or some bodily defect, cannot conform to these instructions should preferably choose the short prayer, which is exceedingly simple.

(From a letter dated 7 December 1939 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [64]

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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.

(From a letter dated 24 June 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [65]

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As regards the questions about the proper use of the Long Obligatory Prayer: All the writings of the Faith may be read and should be read for the instruction and inspiration of the friends. This includes the specific prayers. If a believer is physically incapable of performing the genuflexions accompanying one of the prayers, and yet he longs to say it as an obligatory prayer, then he may do so. By physically incapable is meant a real physical incapacity which a physician would attest as genuine.

(From a letter dated 17 February 1955 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Local Spiritual Assembly of Los Angeles, California) [66]

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We have determined, therefore, that it is imperative for all the believers to deepen their awareness of the blessings conferred by the laws which directly foster the devotional life of the individual and, thus, of the community. The essentials of these laws are known to all Bahá’ís, but acquiring greater insight into their significance must include carrying out all the divinely revealed aspects of their observance. These are the laws which pertain to obligatory prayer, fasting and recitation of the Greatest Name ninety-five times a day.

Bahá’u’lláh asserts: “One who performeth neither good deeds nor acts of worship is like unto a tree which beareth no fruit, and an action which leaveth no trace. Whosoever experienceth the holy ecstasy of worship will refuse to barter such an act or any praise of God for all that existeth in the world. Fasting and obligatory prayer are as two wings to man’s life. Blessed be the one who soareth with their aid in the heaven of the love of God, the Lord of all worlds.”

(The Universal House of Justice, from a letter dated 28 December 1999 to the Bahá’ís of the World) [67]

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## **The Devotional Character of the Community**

Gather ye together with the utmost joy and fellowship and 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, from a Tablet—translated from the Arabic)

[68]

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Thou hast asked about places of worship and the underlying reason therefor. 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.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, no. 58)

[69]

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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.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, no. 115)

[70]

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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.

(From a letter dated 8 December 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [71]

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... the flourishing of the community, especially at the local level, demands a significant enhancement in patterns of behavior.... It involves the practice of collective worship of God. Hence, it is essential to the spiritual life of the community that the friends hold regular devotional meetings in local Bahá'í centres, where available, or elsewhere, including the homes of believers.

(The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1996 message to the Bahá'ís of the World) [72]

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The spiritual growth generated by individual devotions is reinforced by loving association among the friends in every locality, by worship as a community and by service to the Faith and to one's fellow human beings. These communal aspects of the godly life relate to the law of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* which appears in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*.... [T]he holding of regular meetings for worship open to all and the involvement of Bahá'í communities in projects of humanitarian service are expressions of this element of Bahá'í life and a further step in the implementation of the Law of God.

(The Universal House of Justice, from a letter dated 28 December 1999 to the Bahá'ís of the World) [73]

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Thousands upon thousands, embracing the diversity of the entire human family, are engaged in systematic study of the Creative Word in an environment that is at once serious and uplifting. As they strive to apply through a process of action, reflection and consultation the insights thus gained, they see their capacity to serve the Cause rise to new levels. Responding to the inmost longing of every heart to commune with its Maker, they carry out acts of collective worship in diverse settings, uniting with others in prayer, awakening spiritual susceptibilities, and shaping a pattern of life distinguished for its devotional character.

(The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2008 message to the Bahá'ís of the World) [74]

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We have called upon the Bahá'ís to see in their endeavours of community building the

creation of a new pattern of how society can be... Essential to that pattern is the devotional meeting—a communal aspect of the godly life and a dimension of the concept of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*—which represents a marvellous opportunity for your community not only to worship the Almighty and seek His benedictions in your own lives, but to extend to your fellow citizens the spiritual energies of prayer, to restore for them the purity of worship, to kindle in their hearts faith in the confirmations of God, and to strengthen in them, no less than in yourselves, eagerness to serve the nation and humanity and to show constructive resilience in the path of justice.

Beloved friends: Gatherings dedicated to prayer throughout your blessed land, in every neighbourhood, town, village, and hamlet, and the increasing access that your compatriots are gaining to Bahá'í prayers are enabling your community to shine the light of unity in the assemblage of humanity, lending a share to the endeavours of your fellow believers throughout the world. Plant, then, the seeds of future *Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs* for the benefit of all, and ignite countless beacons of light against the gloom of hatred and inequity.

(The Universal House of Justice, from a letter dated 18 December 2014 to the Bahá'ís in Írán)

[75]

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The systematic pursuit of the Plan in all its dimensions gives rise to a pattern of collective endeavour distinguished not only for its commitment to service, but also for its attraction to worship. The intensification of activity which the next five years requires will further enrich the devotional life shared by those who serve side by side in clusters around the world. This process of enrichment is already much advanced: witness, for instance, how gatherings for worship have been integrated into the core of community life. Devotional meetings are occasions where any soul may enter, inhale the heavenly fragrances, experience the sweetness of prayer, meditate upon the Creative Word, be transported on the wings of the spirit, and commune with the one Beloved. Feelings of fellowship and common cause are generated, particularly in the spiritually heightened conversations that naturally occur at such times and through which the “city of the human heart” may be opened. By convening a gathering for worship at which adults and children of any background are welcome, the spirit of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* is evoked in any locality. The enhancement of the devotional character of a community also has an effect on the Nineteen Day Feast and can be felt at other times when the friends come together.

(The Universal House of Justice, from a letter dated 29 December 2015 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors)

[76]

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## Further Considerations

### *Prayers and Healing*

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.

(Report of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words as quoted in J. E. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, p. 93) [77]

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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.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, no. 139) [78]

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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. He answers the prayer of this plant. The plant prays potentially, "O God! Send me rain!" God answers the prayer, and the plant grows. God will answer anyone.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2007), p. 345) [79]

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Ultimately it is God's will destined for us that will be established, but we are assured that prayer for the sick is efficacious and is often answered. It may take time, but we should have faith.

(From a letter dated 8 November 1931 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [80]

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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.

(From a letter dated 23 November 1947 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [81]

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The Guardian is happy to learn that the prayers of the friends had such a beneficial effect on the healing of Mr. .... Prayer is a ladder on which the soul ascends into Heaven. It is the link with the spiritual realms, and if used with true dedication, brings the spiritual forces to the aid and assistance of the believers in this world.

(From a letter dated 28 March 1953 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to individual believers) [82]

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### *The Importance of Memorization*

We should memorize the Hidden Words, follow the exhortations of the Incomparable Lord, and conduct ourselves in a manner which befitteth our servitude at the threshold of the one true God.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian) [83]

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When your hearts are wholly attracted to the one true God you will acquire divine knowledge, will become attentive to the proofs and testimonies and will commit to memory the glad-tidings concerning the Manifestation of the Beauty of the All-Merciful, as mentioned in the heavenly Scriptures. Then ye shall behold how wondrous are His confirmations and how gracious is His assistance.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian) [84]

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The Guardian was truly pleased to note that you have already started reading some Bahá'í books, and would specially advise you to endeavour to commit to memory certain passages from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, and in particular, some of His prayers. This training would undoubtedly be of tremendous help to you in your future studies of the Cause, and would also serve to considerably deepen and enrich your own spiritual life at present.

(From a letter dated 10 April 1939 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [85]

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### *The Object of Our Devotion*

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.

(From a letter dated 27 April 1937 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma) [86]

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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.

Under no circumstances, however, can we, while repeating the prayers, insert the name Bahá'u'lláh where the word "God" is used. This would be tantamount to a blasphemy.

(From a letter dated 14 October 1937 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [87]

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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.

(From a letter dated 24 July 1946 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [88]

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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.

(From a letter dated 31 January 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [89]

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... the Spirit of God reaches us through the Souls of the Manifestations. We must learn to commune with Their Souls and this is what the martyrs seemed to have done, and what brought them such ecstasy of joy that life became nothing. This is the true mysticism, and the secret, inner meaning of life, which humanity has at present drifted so far from.

(From a letter dated 28 July 1950 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Local Spiritual Assembly of Manchester, England) [90]

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As regards your question: Bahá'u'lláh is, of course, not God and not the Creator; but through Him we can know God, and because of this position of Divine Intermediary, in a sense, He is all (or the other Prophets) we can ever know of that Infinite Essence which is God. Therefore, we address ourselves in prayer and thought to Him, or through Him to that Infinite Essence behind and beyond Him.

(From a letter dated 4 June 1951 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to individual believers)

[91]

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We must not pray to the Guardian as to God; whoever we turn to when we pray, we must have the correct concept of the station of that person: Bahá'u'lláh as the Supreme Manifestation of God, the Master as the Perfect Man, the Centre of the Covenant, the Guardian as his functions are defined in the Master's Will. The friends need only read the Writings; the answers are all in them; we have no priests in this Faith to interpret or answer for us.

(From a letter dated 23 April 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

[92]

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### **Additional Passages**

Number him, then, O my God, with such as have allowed nothing whatever to deter them from beholding Thy beauty, or from meditating on the wondrous evidences of Thine everlasting handiwork, that he may have fellowship with none except Thee, and turn to naught save Thyself, and discover in whatever hath been created by Thee in the kingdoms of earth and heaven nothing but Thy wondrous Beauty and the revelation of the splendors of Thy face, and be so immersed beneath the billowing oceans of Thine overruling providence and the surging seas of Thy holy unity, that he will forget every mention except the mention of Thy transcendent oneness, and banish from his soul the traces of all evil suggestions, O Thou in Whose hands are the kingdoms of all names and attributes!

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh*, CLXXXIV)

[93]

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Teach ye your children so that they may peruse the divine verses every morn and eve. God hath prescribed unto every father to educate his children, both boys and girls, in the sciences and in morals, and in crafts and professions.

(Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet—translated from the Arabic)

[94]

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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.

(The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, pp. 77–78)

[95]

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.

(The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 94)

[96]

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!

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Bahá’í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 2002) p. 63)

[97]

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"<sup>5</sup> 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.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

[98]

<sup>5</sup> Qur’án 51:22

With regard to your question as to the value of intuition as a source of guidance for the individual: implicit faith in our intuitive powers is unwise, but through daily prayer and



sustained effort one can discover, though not always and fully, God's will intuitively. Under no circumstances, however, can a person be absolutely certain that he is recognizing God's will, through the exercise of his intuition. It often happens that the latter results in completely misrepresenting the truth, and thus becomes a source of error rather than of guidance.

(From a letter dated 29 October 1938 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [99]

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... the Guardian feels that it would be better for either the mothers of Bahá'í children, or some Committee your Assembly might delegate the task to, to choose excerpts from the Sacred Words to be used by the child rather than just something made up. Of course prayer can be purely spontaneous, but many of the sentences and thoughts combined in Bahá'í writings of a devotional nature are easy to grasp, and the revealed Word is endowed with a power of its own.

(From a letter dated 8 August 1942 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles) [100]

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The need is very great, everywhere in the world, in and outside the Faith, for a true spiritual awareness to pervade and motivate people's lives. No amount of administrative procedure or adherence to rules can take the place of this soul-characteristic, this spirituality which is the essence of man.

(From a letter dated 25 April 1945 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [101]

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... as the Cause embraces members of all races and religions we should be careful not to introduce into it the customs of our previous beliefs. Bahá'u'lláh has given us the obligatory prayers, also prayers before sleeping, for travellers, etc. We should not introduce a new set of prayers He has not specified, when He has given us already so many, for so many occasions.

(From a letter dated 27 September 1947 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [102]

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He suggests that, in addition to your usual teaching work there, you make a special point of praying ardently not only for success in general, but that God may send to you the souls that are ready. There are such souls in every city, but to find them and make the right contact is not easy.

(From a letter dated 18 March 1950 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Local Spiritual Assembly of Punta Arenas, Chile) [103]

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Regarding your question about prayer and the fact that some of our problems are not

solved through prayer, we must always realize that life brings to us many situations, some of which are tests sent from God to train our characters, some of which are accidental because we live in the world of nature and are subject to the accidents of death, disease, etc., and some of which we bring on ourselves by folly, selfishness or some other weak human trait.

It is not correct to say that because a loved one dies, or is not cured of a disease, or a problem is not solved, that God did not answer our prayer, or that we did not pray to Him in a way to receive a favourable answer. Maybe what we prayed for was not the Will of God or was the result of an accident and it produced an irrevocable conclusion like death or disease or bankruptcy etc.

As you say, sometimes the Bahá'ís believe that they are carrying out the Will of God and yet we see that the results are very bad; we must therefore assume that they were deluding themselves into believing that their decision and course of action was according to His Will. What it all amounts to is this, that we should supplicate God, but always with the reservation that we prefer His Will to ours. We should also live up to the Laws of His Teachings, for the more we do this, the more we are exemplary believers, the more sure we will be of receiving a greater degree of His guidance.

(From a letter dated 18 March 1951 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [104]

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The Guardian will pray for the quickening of your souls, the unfolding of the divine mysteries, and the blessings of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that gives new life, and this can today be found in rich abundance, in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. His Words and Teachings are the Water of Life, and the sustenance of spiritual growth. Therefore you should study the Word carefully, meditate on its import and, having been touched by its spirit, associate your mind and heart with Its atmosphere, then the way will become clear, and the doors be opened.

(From a letter dated 11 June 1956 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a Bahá'í Study Group in Columbus, Ohio) [105]