

Reason for prayer

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 Baha'u'llah 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 Baha'u'llah, 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)
(Compilations, The Compilation of Compilations vol II, p. 237-238)

Attitude of prayer

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, "Baha'u'llah and the New Era", p. 94)
(Compilations, The Compilation of Compilations vol II, p. 235)

Attitude of prayer

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, "Baha'u'llah and the New Era", p. 95)
(Compilations, The Compilation of Compilations vol II, p. 236)

Importance of prayer

In all the worlds of existence there is nothing more important than prayer. Prayer confers spirituality upon the heart.

Abdu'l-Baha, Star of the West, vol VIII, no. 4 (May 17, 1917), p. 41-44

Sweetness of prayer

There is nothing sweeter in the world of existence than prayer.

Man must live in a state of prayer. The most blessed condition is the condition of prayer and supplication. Prayer is conversation with God. The greatest attainment or the sweetest state is none other than conversation with God. It creates spirituality, creates mindfulness and celestial feelings, begets new attractions of the Kingdom and engenders the susceptibilities of the higher intelligence. The highest attribute given to his holiness Moses is the following verse: "God carried along a conversation with Moses."

Abdu'l-Baha, Star of the West, vol VIII, no. 4 (May 17, 1917), p. 41-44

Effect of prayer

Man becomes like a stone unless he continually supplicates to God. The heart of man is like a mirror which is covered with dust and to cleanse it one must continually pray to God that it may become clean. The act of supplication is the polish which erases all worldly desires. The delight of supplicating and entreating before God cuts one's heart from the world. When the taste of man is nourished by honey he never likes to taste any other sweetmeat. Therefore, prayer is a key by which the doors of the kingdom are opened. There are many subjects which are difficult for man to solve. But during prayer and supplication they are unveiled and there is nothing that man cannot find out.

Abdu'l-Baha, Star of the West, vol VIII, no. 4 (May 17, 1917), p. 41-44

Effect of prayer

Prayer and supplication are so effective that they inspire one's heart for the whole day with high ideals and supreme sanctity and calmness. One's heart must be sensitive to the music of prayer.

Abdu'l-Baha, Star of the West, vol VIII, no. 4 (May 17, 1917), p. 41-44

Effect of prayer

God will answer the prayer of every servant if that prayer is urgent.

(Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 246)

Answering of prayers

The heavens of thy mercy and the oceans of thy bounty are so vast that thou hast never disappointed those who begged of thee nor refused those who willed to come to thee.

Answering of prayers

Verily, he responds unto those who invoke him, is near unto those who pray unto him. And he is thy companion in every loneliness, and befriends every exile.

Abdu'l-Baha, Star of the West, vol VIII, no. 4 (May 17, 1917), p. 41-44

Answering of prayers

O thou who art turning thy face towards God! Close thine eyes to all things else, and open them to the realm of the All-Glorious. Ask whatsoever thou wishest of Him alone; seek whatsoever thou seekest from Him alone. With a look He granteth a hundred thousand hopes, with a glance He healeth a hundred thousand incurable ills, with a nod He layeth balm on every wound, with a glimpse He freeth the hearts from the shackles of grief. He doeth as He doeth, and what recourse have we? He carrieth out His Will, He ordaineth what He pleaseth. Then better for thee to bow down thy head in submission, and put thy trust in the All-Merciful Lord.

(Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 51)

What to ask

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 Abha 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)
(Compilations, The Compilation of Compilations vol II, p. 231)

What to ask

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)
(Compilations, The Compilation of Compilations vol II, p. 230)

Praying in silence

Baha'u'llah 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.

("Paris Talks: Addresses given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in 1911-1912", pp. 174)
(Compilations, The Compilation of Compilations vol II, p. 233)

Prayer in private

Christ said, "Go into thy chamber and shut the door, and pray to thy Father which is in heaven." Why did he say this? It is with the tongue that man expresses his feelings to another man. But with the

language of the heart man prays to God. Though God is within the heart of man, is ever present in every place, yet man lifts up his eyes to heaven and prays as if God were there, seated upon a throne. Surely this is pure superstition! Why should he utter the words “O heavenly Father?” Why should it be necessary for him to repeat prayers aloud and with the tongue? One reason for this is that if the heart alone is speaking the mind can be more easily disturbed. But repeating the words so that the tongue and heart act together enables the mind to become concentrated. Then the whole man is surrounded by the spirit of prayer and the act is more perfect.

Another reason is that by the outward signs of entering into his room and praying the attention of others is attracted and they begin to ask, “Why does he do this?” and are aroused to enquire about the truth.

Abdu'l-Baha, *Star of the West*, vol VIII, no. 4 (May 17, 1917), p. 41-44

Prayer in private

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.

(“Selections from the Writings of the Báb, pp. 93-94)
(Compilations, *The Compilation of Compilations* vol II, p. 228)

Prayer at midnight

Automatic, formalistic prayers which do not touch the core of the heart are of no avail. How sweet, how delicious, how satisfying, how spiritual is prayer in the middle of the night! While all the eyes are closed the eyes of the worshipper are wide open. While all the ears are stopped the ears of the suppliant are attuned to the subtle music of God. While the majority of the people are fast asleep the adorer of the Ideal Beloved is wakeful. All around him there is a rare and delicate silence, deep, airy, ethereal silence, calm, magical and subtle – and there is the worshipper, communing with nature and the author of nature.

Abdu'l-Baha, *Star of the West*, vol VIII, no. 4 (May 17, 1917), p. 41-44

Prayer at midnight

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)
(Compilations, *The Compilation of Compilations* vol II, p. 230)

Prayer at midnight, morn and eve

Neglect not praying and communing in the gloomy midnights and morn and eve and offer glory unto thy Lord, the Supreme.

Abdu'l-Baha, *Star of the West*, vol VIII, no. 4 (May 17, 1917), p. 41-44

Prayer in the morning

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 'Ali! 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)
(Compilations, *The Compilation of Compilations* vol II, p. 227)

Prayer in the morning

When a soul rises in the morning from sleep before everything else he must commemorate the name of God in order that he may obtain spirituality and illumination.

Abdu'l-Baha, Star of the West, vol VIII, no. 4 (May 17, 1917), p. 41-44

Condition of prayer

Regarding the condition of prayer, the Master said that the best time for prayer is at dawn and dusk. The power of will draws one to the condition of prayer. When one is not in a receptive mood and is rather immersed in one's worldly affairs, he can pull himself into the condition of prayer by an act of will:

By a force of will and an effort of mind, man turns his attention to God, to His knowledge, His wonderful creation, His wisdom and His Omnipotence, and then by thinking frequently and deeply of Him, attains the state of Love, of desire for prayer, of supreme ecstasy. But sometimes one finds that Divine power and not human effort transports man into that condition.

Riaz Khadem, Shoghi Effendi in Oxford, p. 50

Prayer and action

O maid-servant of God! Chant the Words of God and, pondering over their meaning, transform them into actions!

("Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá 'Abbas", vol. I (Chicago: Bahá'í Publishing Society, 1909), p. 85)
(Compilations, The Compilation of Compilations vol II, p. 232)

Prayer and action

"... 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."

(Compilations, Lights of Guidance, p. 461)

Prayer and action

The Master's answer... was that man cannot stimulate and awaken others if he is speechless and inactive. His prayer can only bring a change through divine power. However, as soon as the person puts his thoughts into action his hearers can be inspired.

Riaz Khadem, Shoghi Effendi in Oxford, p. 50

Prayer in a gathering

Man may say, "I can pray to God whenever I wish, when the feelings of my heart are drawn to God; when I am in the wilderness, when I am in the city, or wherever I may be. Why should I go where others are gathered upon a special day, at a certain hour, to unite my prayers with theirs when I may not be in a frame of mind for praying?" To think in this way is useless imagination for where many are gathered together their force is greater. Separate soldiers fighting alone and individually have not the force of a united army. If all the soldiers in this spiritual war gather together then their united spiritual feelings help each other and their prayers become more acceptable.

Abdu'l-Baha, Star of the West, vol VIII, no. 4 (May 17, 1917), p. 41-44

Praying through others

In answer to the question, “Why should one pray through Christ as the Christians do, or through another manifestation of God and why should we not pray to God direct?” Abdu’l-Baha said:

“If we wish to pray we must have some object upon which to concentrate. If we turn to God we must direct our hearts to a certain center. If man worships God otherwise than through his Manifestation he must first form a conception of God and that conception is created by his own mind. As the finite cannot comprehend the Infinite so God is not to be comprehended in this fashion. That which man conceives with his own mind he comprehends. That which he can comprehend is not God. That conception of God which a man has is but a phantasm, an image, an imagination, an illusion. There is no connection between such a conception and the Supreme Being.

“If a man wishes to know God he must find him in the perfect mirror, Christ or Baha’o’llah. In either of these mirrors he will see reflected the Sun of Divinity.

Abdu’l-Baha, *Star of the West*, vol VIII, no. 4 (May 17, 1917), p. 41-44

Praying through others

Some present asked how it was that in prayer and meditation the heart often turns with instinctive appeal to some friend who has passed into the next life.

Abdu’l-Baha answered: “It is a law of God’s creation that the weak should lean upon the strong. Those to whom you turn may be mediators of God’s power to you, even as when on earth. But it is the one Holy Spirit which strengthens all men.

Abdu’l-Baha, *Star of the West*, vol VIII, no. 4 (May 17, 1917), p. 41-44