

XL. PRAYER AND MEDITATION

A. Prayer and Meditation

1479. A prayerful Condition is the Best of Conditions, Especially in Private and at Midnight

"The prayerful condition is the best of all conditions, for man in such a state communeth with God, especially when prayer is offered in private and at times when one's mind is free, such as at midnight. Indeed, prayer imparteth life." ('Abdu'l-Baha, from a recently translated Tablet: Spiritual Foundations: Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude, a compilation of the Universal House of Justice, 1980)

1480. The Reason for Privacy when Communing with God

"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)

1481. The More Detached and Pure the Prayer the More Acceptable to God

"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." (Ibid, pp. 77-78)

1482. The Inspiration Received Through Meditation

"...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." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, January 25, 1943: Spiritual Foundations: Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude, op. cit.)

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1483. With Prayer and Meditation Must Go Action and Example

"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 result of the former. Both are essential." (From a letter written of behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, May 15, 1944: Ibid)

1484. The Importance and Power of Meditation

"Through meditation the doors of deeper knowledge and inspiration may be opened. Naturally, if one meditates as a Baha'i 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 Baha'u'llah 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 written of behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, November 19, 1945: Ibid)

1485. Every Day upon Arising One should Compare Today with Yesterday and Pray...

"...Every day, in the morning when arising you should compare today with yesterday and see in what condition you are. If you see your belief is stronger and your heart more occupied with God and your love increased and your freedom from the world greater then thank God and ask for the increase of these qualities. You must begin to pray and repent for all that you have done which is wrong and you must implore and ask for help and assistance that you may become better than yesterday so that you may continue to make progress. ('Abdu'l-Baha: Star of the West, vol 6, p.68)

1486. How to Pray -- One must Start out with the right Concept of God

"...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 Baha'u'llah for some thing, 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 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, July 24, 1946)

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1487. Wiser to Use Meditations Given by Baha'u'llah -- Not Set Form Recommended by Someone Else

"As to your question about prayer and whether it is necessary to recite the prayers of only the Central Figures of our Faith, we have been asked to quote here the following two excerpts on this subject, from letters written by Shoghi Effendi's secretary on his behalf: "...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. Baha'u'llah 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.' 'He thinks it would be wiser for the Baha'is to use the meditations given by Baha'u'llah, 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.' "As to the reading of prayers or selections from the Sacred Writings of other religions such readings are permissible, and indeed from time to time are included in the devotional programmes of Baha'i Houses of Worship, demonstrating thereby the universality of our Faith." (From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, June 7, 1974)

1488. Turn to Manifestation

"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 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of India, April 27, 1937: Dawn of a New Day, p.67)

1489. Praying to Baha'u'llah

"You have asked whether our prayers go beyond Baha'u'llah: It all depends whether we pray to Him directly and 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, Baha'u'llah. "Under no circumstances, however, we can, while repeating the prayers, insert the name Baha'u'llah where the word 'God' is used. This would be tantamount to a blasphemy." (From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, October 14, 1937)

1490. Praying to Baha'u'llah -- As the door

"We cannot know God directly, but only through His Prophets. We can pray to Him realizing that through His Prophets we know Him, or we can address our prayer in thought to Baha'u'llah, not as God, but as the Door to our knowing God. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer: High Endeavours: Messages to Alaska, p.71)

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1491. We may Turn to the Guardian in Prayer, but Should not Confuse His Station with that of a Prophet

"We pray to God, or to Baha'u'llah, as we please. But if in our thoughts we desire to turn to the Guardian first and then address our prayer, there is no objection, as long as we always bear in mind he is only the Guardian, and do not confuse his station with that of the Prophet or even the Master." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, August 22, 1947)

1492. Turning toward the Shrine of Baha'u'llah in Prayer

"In prayer the believers can turn their consciousness toward the Shrine of Baha'u'llah, provided that in doing so they have a clear and correct understanding of His stations as a Manifestation of God" (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, November 15, 1953)

1493. Through 'Abdu'l-Baha one can Address Baha'u'llah

"If you find you need to visualize someone when you pray, think of the Master. Through Him you can address Baha'u'llah. 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 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, January 31, 1959)

1494. People Who Desire to Meet and Pray

"In some places the Baha'is have held meetings for prayer, for people who desire to meet and pray. As we have such wonderful prayers and meditations in our writings, the reading of these with friends who are interested in and crave for this type of small meeting is often a step towards attracting them to the Faith. Perhaps you can start such an activity in your city." (From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, February 4, 1956: Baha'i Meetings, a compilation of the Universal House of Justice, November 1975)

1495. Prayers Should be Read as Printed

"Regarding your question as to the changing of pronouns in Baha'i prayers: The Guardian does not approve of such changes, either in the specific prayers or in any others. They should be read as printed without changing a single word." (From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, April 13, 1944: Baha'i News, No. 171, November 1944, p. 3)

1496. Strictly Adhere to the Text of the Holy Writings

"In regard to your question as to whether it is permissible to substitute the plural pronoun for the singular, the Guardian would strongly urge your N.S.A. to inform the friends to strictly adhere to the text of the Holy Writings, and not to deviate even a hairbreadth from what has been revealed by the Holy Pen. Besides, it should be noted that congregational prayer has been discouraged by Baha'u'llah, and that it is allowed only in the case of the prayer for the dead." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia and New Zealand, October 17, 1934)

1497. In Quoting Prayers

"In quoting prayers any part may be used, but should be quoted as it is, however short."
(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, November 19, 1945: Baha'i News, No. 210, August 1948, p.3)

1498. Specific Times for the Remembrance of God

"...Moreover the friends must observe the specific times for the remembrance of God, meditation, devotion and prayer, as it is highly unlikely, nay, rather impossible, that any enterprise should prosper and develop short of Divine bestowals and confirmations..."
(From a letter of the Guardian to the Baha'is of the East, December 19, 1923: Living the Life, p. 1)

1499. Dawn Prayer

"Although the words 'at dawn' are used in the Divine Book, nevertheless, such prayer is acceptable to God at dawn and after dawn to sunrise, and further until two hours after the sun has risen." (Baha'u'llah: Questions and Answers)

1500. Morning Prayers

"One of the characteristics of Baha'i society will be the gathering of the believers each day during the hours between dawn and two hours after sunrise to listen to the reading and chanting of the Holy Word. In many communities at the present time, especially in rural ones, such gatherings would fit naturally into the pattern of the friends' daily life, and where this is the case it would do much to foster the unity of the Local community and deepen the friends' knowledge of the Teachings if such gathering could be organized by the Local Spiritual Assembly on a regular basis. Attendance at these gatherings is not to be obligatory, but we hope that the friends will more and more be drawn to take part in them. This is a goal which can be attained gradually." (From the Universal House of Justice to the Baha'is of the World, Naw-Rúz, 1974)

1501. We should not Make a Practice of Saying Grace or of Teaching it to our Children

"He does not feel that the friends should make a practice of saying grace or of teaching it to children. This is not part of the Baha'i Faith, but a Christian practice, and 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. Baha'u'llah 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 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, September 27, 1947)

1502. Congregational Prayer Only for the Dead

"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 things as saying it for yourself..." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, January 31, 1949: Baha'i News, No. 220, June 1949, pp. 2-3)

1503. Prayers May be Recited in Unison

"You have asked whether it is permissible for the friends to chant a prayer collectively. There is a difference between chanting a prayer collectively and congregational prayer. The latter is a formal prayer usually led by an individual using a prescribed ritual. Congregational prayer in this form is forbidden in the Faith except in the case of the Prayer for the Dead. While reciting prayers in unison and spontaneously joining in the recitation of the Words of God is not forbidden, the friends should bear in mind the advice of the beloved Guardian on this subject when he stated that:

'...although the friends are thus left free to follow their own inclination,... they should take the utmost care that any manner they practice 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 in the Teachings.'" (From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer. February 6, 1975)

1504. One Person should Read Funeral Prayer

"We have received your letter of 14th December inquiring which funeral prayer is considered as the desirable one for use in Europe, whether there is any obligatory prayer and what instructions are concerning standing at a Baha'i funeral service. "The only obligatory prayer for use at Baha'i funerals is the prayer No. 167 in 'Prayers and Meditations'. This prayer should be recited by one of those present and all present should stand while it is being read. There is no requirement to face the Qiblah or any other particular direction while this prayer is being read. "The reading of any other prayers or writings at a Baha'i funeral is entirely optional. In general it is desirable to keep the service simple and dignified." (From the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Finland, January 31, 1971)

1505. Recital or Chanting of Prayer--Prayer is Essentially Communion Between God and Man

"..There is no objection to the recital or chanting of prayers in the Oriental language, but there is also no obligation whatever of adoption 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, Baha'u'llah has given us no strict or special rulings in matters of worship whether in the Temple or elsewhere. Prayer is essentially communion between man and God, and as such transcends all ritualistic forms and formulas." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, June 15, 1935: Baha'i News, No. 93, July 1935, p. 1)

1506. Healing Prayer and Prayers for the Fast

"Concerning the Healing Prayer, the Guardian wishes me to inform you that there is no special ruling for its recital. The believer is free to recite it as many times and in the way he wishes. There are also no obligatory prayers for the Fast. But there are some specific ones revealed by Baha'u'llah for that purpose." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia and New Zealand, October 17, 1934)

1507. Effectiveness of Healing Prayers

"The Healing Prayers revealed by Baha'u'llah can be effective even though used by non-believers. But their effectiveness is of course greater in the case of those who fully accept the Revelation." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, March 19, 1939: Baha'i News, No. 134. March 1940. p. 2)

1508. Prayers Answered Through 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." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, August 22, 1957: From a compilation by the Research Department on behalf of the Universal House of Justice on 'Teaching', p. 18)

1509. Pray to be protected from Contamination of Society

"... Love for each other, the deep sense that we are a new organism, the dawn-breakers of a New World Order, must constantly animate our Baha'i lives, and we must pray to be protected from the contamination of society which is so diseased with prejudice." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Spiritual Assembly of Atlanta, Georgia, February 5, 1947: Living the life, p. 13)

1510. Five Steps of Prayer

"Regarding the five steps of prayer outlined by the Guardian, and recorded by Mrs. Moffett in her booklet the 'Call to Prayer': these, he wishes me to explain, are merely personal suggestions and need not, therefore, be adopted strictly and universally by the believers. (From a letter dated June 30, 1938 written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

1511. Reciting Any Prayer Nine Times Not Obligatory

"There is no obligation for a believer to recite always any prayer nine times. Ritualism is certainly to be avoided in all matters affecting Baha'i worship..." (From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, November 26, 1939)

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1512. The Spiritual Man Prays only for Love of God

"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 has come to love Him... The spiritual man finds no delight in anything save in commemoration of God." (Report of 'Abdu'l-Baha words quoted in Baha'u'llah and the New Era, p. 105, Wilmette 1976 ed: The Important of Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude -- a Compilation)

1513. Prayer Beads, Chanting, Congregational Prayer, etc.

"In the matter of the distribution and use of prayer beads, in this and other matter of secondary importance he does not wish that any hard and fast rules to be set up. The believers should not be required to use prayer beads nor should they be prevented from doing so, as the Teachings do not contain any specific instructions on the subject." (From a letter written on behalf of Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, April 4, 1940: Baha'i News, No. 137, July 1940,p.3)

1514. Reading Prayers on the Radio

"You have asked specifically about reading prayers on the radio. Of course this is permissible, but will be cautious concerning the setting of the prayers, i.e. what kind of materials may be presented before and after the prayers, so that they are assured of that dignity and reverence which they deserve. There may also be considerations of timing (the hours of the day best chosen, Sunday as the customary day of religious observance, etc.), in relation to the customs of the station, of the area, or other. Such recorded disc programs as 'Words for the World' include prayers, of course." (From a letter from the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Ecuador, July 8, 1973)

1515. Baha'i Children, Communes and Prayers

"...Every day at first light, ye gather the Baha'i children together and teach them the communes 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." ('Abdu'l-Baha: Baha'i Education, p. 28) "...there is no objection to children who are as yet unable to memorize a whole prayer learning certain sentences only." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, September 27, 1947)

1516. Mothers or others Delegated should Choose Excerpts from the Sacred word for Children to Memorize

"The Guardian feels that it would be better for either the mother or Baha'i children -- or some Committee your Assembly might delegate the task to -- to choose excerpts from the Sacred word 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 Baha'i writings of a devotional nature are easy to grasp, and the revealed Word is endowed with a power of its own." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles, August 8, 1942)

1517. There are no Special Instructions for repeating prayers of the Báb

"Concerning the prayer for difficulty revealed by the Báb; he wishes me to inform you that it is not accompanied by the instructions for its recital.[*]" (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, March 6, 1937)

"Regarding your questions: The Guardian feels it is not necessary to repeat the Báb's prayer so many times."[**] (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, September 30, 1950)

[*] Written in response to a question as to how often this prayer should be repeated to produce the greatest results.

[**] Written in response to a question about the repetition 114 times in the morning for 19 days of the prayer of the Báb's! 'God sufficeth all things above all things'.

1518. Community Prayer Sessions

"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." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, November 20, 1937: *Spiritual Foundations: Prayer, meditation, and the Devotional Attitude*, op. cit.)

1519. Baha'is Should be Taught to Meditate, but also to Guard Against Superstitious Practices

"Through meditation the doors of deeper knowledge and inspiration may be opened. Naturally, if one meditates as a 'Baha'i' 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 Baha'u'llah, 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 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, November 19, 1945)

1520. 'O Subduer of Winds', An Invocation for Moments of Danger

"Regarding the invocation 'Ya Musakin el Ariah'; it literally means 'O Subduer of Winds'. The believers are not required to recite it, but may do so in moments of personal danger." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, December 6, 1939)