


THE
POWER
OF
PRAYER

*Firesides
to accompany the video
“The Power of Prayer”*

*A collaborative project by the National Education
Task Force, the Education and Schools Office,
and the National Teaching Committee*

Overview of the Workshops to Complement “The Power of Prayer” Videotape



These workshops have been developed and distributed by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States to assist the friends in making the greatest possible use of the nation-wide broadcasts of “The Power of Prayer” video. All five workshops are designed for use as fireside gatherings or other gatherings of similar intent. Each is approximately 90 minutes in length, including time to view the “The Power of Prayer.” If the friends gathered have recently seen the video, showing it again is not a requirement. These fireside gatherings are intended to assist seekers to explore the meaning of prayer, and to teach the Bahá'í Faith to others, as part of the National Teaching Plan. The workshops also examine the role prayer plays in our daily lives, and how to communicate more meaningfully with our Creator.

We encourage the fireside host and/or workshop facilitator to read about the different methods of teaching and learning suggested by the Writings in our Faith in the book, *Foundations for a Spiritual Education* available through the Bahá'í Distribution Service. We also suggest that you contact any of the Core Curriculum Trainers to assist with the facilitation of these workshops. Please contact the National Teacher Training Center at Louhelen Bahá'í School if you need help identifying Core Curriculum trainers in your area.

We suggest that the fireside host or workshop facilitator carefully consider how to create an atmosphere to facilitate spiritual learning. While there is much flexibility in how this might be achieved, we have found that advance preparation of the devotional readings and the environment creates a more reverent and relaxed atmosphere for Bahá'ís and seekers alike to receive the Word of God.

Some specific guidelines for facilitating these workshops:

Use the Master as our example. Constantly bringing to mind the life and words of our beloved ‘Abdu’l-Bahá will assist you to respond in a loving manner to these precious friends. Please feel free to personally study and reflect upon some of the writings and prayers of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá before you begin so that you will have His image clearly in mind when delivering the workshops.

Use the Sacred Texts as a basis for your answers. When answering questions, try to refer to the answers that can be found in the Writings.

Be sensitive to varying levels of literacy. If the amount of reading or number of quotations suggested in the workshops becomes a burden to the friends, select 2-3 quotations to study rather than an entire page. If the friends are not comfortable reading in English, either memorize (as a group) one quotation for each activity that can become the basis for that activity, or team readers with non-readers for group activities.

Keep your comments brief. Creating an atmosphere where the participants themselves feel free to share their views and concerns necessitates that the facilitators keep their presentations and answers brief. Allow the participants to have the opportunity to connect their hearts to Bahá’u’lláh through use of the Sacred Texts.

Practice patience and sensitivity. All participants come with something unique to offer and assisting them to realize that their contributions are important is part of making people feel welcome.

Be happy! An uplifting environment will always make learning easier and a cheerful presenter can really make all the difference. You will find your own Faith renewed as you joyfully assist the friends to come to a deeper understanding of the mystery of prayer and meditation.

Allow time for fellowship. Following the structured parts of the fireside gathering, encourage informal conversation to occur so that friends of the Faith can raise additional questions in a less formal setting.

Make liberal use of music. Selections from a diverse array of musical styles may enhance spiritual learning and appeal to people of many different backgrounds. Some sources include: music of the Bahá’í Gospel Choir, music from the Bahá’í World Congress, *Songs of the Ancient Beauty*, parts I and II. Music from these artists: Narges, Red Grammer, El Viento Canta, Kevin Locke, Matthew Levine, Mary Davis, Seaforth and Jenkins, Kiu Haghghi, Paul Parrish (*Hidden Words* put to music), Remembrance Ensemble (a cappella *Hidden Words* renderings), and instrumental jazz pieces as well as classical music are possibilities.

Materials Checklist for Workshop Facilitators

Advance Preparation and Materials Needed for All Workshops:

- photocopy the set of pages for the workshop you are facilitating for each participant or guest.
- TV/VCR and videotape: *The Power of Prayer* (optional if seen recently)
- Prayer book(s)
- copies of small prayer books and/or copies of small booklet, *The Light of Unity: The Power of Prayer* to offer to each participant
- flip chart and markers
- blank paper for recording personal notes and reflections
- pens/pencils

Creating a Spiritual Environment:

- special touches—flowers, candles, a picture of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá—may set the tone and signal that this is going to be special
- extensive use of diverse music to set the tone before the fireside or workshop gets started and at any appropriate time during the program
- refreshments—something very simple such as coffee, tea, cookies—to offer either during a break or following the workshop

Specific Workshop Materials:

2 How Do We Pray?

- small poster boards
- simple arts and crafts supplies, e.g. markers, pieces of different kinds of paper: construction, tissue, etc., glue, glitter glue pens, feathers, scraps of felt, rubber stamps, stickers, etc.

#3 Meditation in the Life of the Soul

- copy the short verses for meditation on special paper for all participants

#4 The Role of Prayer in Our Daily Lives

- carefully cut out magazine pictures—make sure there are at least twice the number of pictures as participants.** Pictures from *National Geographic Magazine*, or any magazine with pictures from nature, pictures depicting the diversity of the human family, animals, or generally interesting photos are appropriate
- copies of the tale, “The Bejeweled Sword” for participants (optional)

#5 The Power of Prayer

- make copies of the brief Compilation on Prayer for each participant
- CD or cassette tape selection of possible background music for the “Music Group”

- ❑ simple arts and crafts supplies, e.g. markers, pieces of different kinds of paper: construction, tissue, etc., glue, glitter glue pens, feathers, scraps of felt, rubber stamps, stickers, etc.

Planning a Devotional Meeting

It may be helpful to view these firesides or workshops as devotional meetings. While we are trying to share the Message of Bahá'u'lláh in each fireside through explaining the Bahá'í perspective on prayer, we need to be sure that the manner in which the meetings are conducted reflect spiritual realities. The importance of preparing the environment before guests arrive cannot be overemphasized. When the devotions are planned effectively, the participants' hearts will be connected to Bahá'u'lláh, and we will set an example of what Bahá'í devotions are.

Please consider these questions:

- Who will be invited to attend the workshop? How will you convey the invitation?
- How can you create the spirit of loving hospitality, joyful fellowship, and reverence?
- Which prayers and passages from the Writings will you include? Who will you ask to read, sing, or chant? Do you wish to offer a prayer or selected passage on a card as a gift to your guests?
- How will you incorporate music or other arts?
- What simple refreshments would enhance the spirit of the occasion?
- How will you assess the success of your gathering?

Guidance from the Writings of our Faith:

It behooveth the friends in whatever land they be, to gather together in meetings, and therein to speak wisely and with eloquence, and to read the verses of God; for it is God's words that kindle love's fire and set it ablaze.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Bahá'í Meetings/The Nineteen Day Feast*, Page 3)

We, verily, have made music as a ladder for your souls, a means whereby they may be lifted up unto the realm on high

(Baha'u'llah: *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, Page: 38)

Every meeting which is organized for the purpose of unity and concord will be conducive to changing strangers into friends, enemies into associates, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá will be present in His heart and soul with that meeting.

('Abdu'l-Bahá: *Consultation*, Page: 99)

Why Should We Pray?

Purpose: To gain a deeper understanding of the Bahá'í beliefs on why one should pray.

Workshop/Fireside/Meeting
90 minutes

Carefully prepare the learning environment to reflect hospitality, beauty, friendliness and love. Lovingly greet the guests as they arrive. You may also wish to have soft, instrumental music playing as the guests come in.

Opening Prayer(s)—when possible include the use of music. You may wish to use the prayer, “Intone, O My servant...” as it explains why we pray. (*Bahá'í Prayers*, introduction)

Introduction

Begin by explaining to the guests that the purpose of the gathering is to explore the Bahá'í perspective on the purpose of prayer--communing with God.

Power of Prayer video

Have the guests watch the video (or telecast), “The Power of Prayer.” (approximately 30 minutes)

Learning Experience

➤ Begin by asking guests *why* they pray—at a very basic level, prayer is the expression of a great longing for life, for a more powerful, purer life.

When one supplicates to his Lord...this supplication brings light to his heart, illumination to his sight, life to his soul and exaltation to his being.
(`Abdu'l-Baha: *Spiritual Foundations: Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude*, #32, P. 11)

➤ Divide the group into small groups of 4-5 people. Ask the guests to read the following quotations and based on the information gleaned from the quotations, try to answer the two focus questions.

➤ Explain to the participants that together they will be looking to answer these questions:

- Why should one pray?
- What are some of the benefits of prayer?

- There are a number of reasons why human beings pray. Ask the participants for examples of why we pray, or reasons for praying. If these reasons are not mentioned, suggest these possibilities: asking for assistance, asking for forgiveness, praying for someone else, expressing gratitude, and so on.
- Bring the small groups together and ask each group to share their answers with the larger group.
- Ask participants to quietly reflect for a few moments on any shift in understanding to the initial question of this workshop, “Why should we pray?”

Closing

If the friends do not already have a copy of *The Light of Unity: The Power of Prayer* booklet, a small Baha'i prayer book, or other printed materials, please offer them to the participants and invite them to investigate the Bahá'í Faith.

Close the session with prayer, either spoken, chanted, or sung.

Why Should We Pray?

Focus Questions:

- Why should one pray?
- What are some of the benefits of prayer?



As to thy question, "Why pray? What is the wisdom thereof, for God has established everything and executes all affairs after the best order and he ordains everything according to a becoming measure and puts things in their places with the greatest propriety and perfection—therefore what is the wisdom in beseeching and supplicating and in stating one's wants and seeking help?" Know thou, verily, it is becoming of a weak one to supplicate to the strong One and it behoveth 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 is by itself a light to his heart, an illumination to his sight, a life to his soul and an exaltation to his being.

Therefore during thy supplications to God and thy reciting, "Thy name is my healing," consider how thy 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 widened the water increaseth 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.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Divine Art of Living*, p. 26)

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. He answers prayers potentially.... Did we not pray potentially for these needed blessings before we were created? When we came into this world, did we not find our prayers answered? Did we not find mother, father, food, light, home and every other necessity and blessing, although we did not actually ask for them? Therefore, it is natural that God will give to us when we ask Him. His mercy is all-encircling.

But we ask for things which the divine wisdom does not desire for us, and there is no answer to our prayer. His wisdom does not sanction what we wish. We pray, "O God! Make me wealthy!" If this prayer were universally answered, human affairs would be at a standstill. There would be none left to work in the streets, none to till the soil, none to build, none to run the trains. Therefore, it is evident that it would not be well for us if all prayers were answered. The affairs of the world would be interfered with, energies crippled and progress hindered. But whatever we ask for which is in accord with divine wisdom, God will answer. Assuredly!

For instance, a very feeble patient may ask the doctor to give him food which would be positively dangerous to his life and condition. He may beg for roast meat. The doctor is kind and wise. He knows it would be dangerous to his patient so he refuses to allow it. The doctor is merciful; the patient, ignorant. Through the doctor's kindness the patient recovers; his life is saved. Yet the patient may cry out that the doctor is unkind, not good, because he refuses to answer his pleading.

God is merciful. In His mercy He answers the prayers of all His servants when according to His supreme wisdom it is necessary.

(`Abdu'l-Baha: *Promulgation of Universal Peace**, Pages: 246-247)

The wisdom of prayer is this: That it causeth a connection between the servant and the True One, because in that state (i.e., prayer) man with all heart and soul turneth his face towards His Highness the Almighty, seeking His association and desiring His love and compassion. The greatest happiness for a lover is to converse with his beloved, and the greatest gift for a seeker is to become familiar with the object of his longing; that is why with every soul who is attracted to the Kingdom of God, his greatest hope is to find an opportunity to entreat and supplicate before his Beloved, appeal for His mercy and grace and be immersed in the ocean of His utterance, goodness and generosity.

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 683-684)

It behooveth 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: *Spiritual Foundations: Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude*, #25, P. 9)

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 Abdul'-Baha's words, quoted in *Baha'u'llah and the New Era*, p. 105, U.S. 1976 edition)



How Do We Pray?

Purpose: To gain a deeper understanding of the Bahá'í beliefs on how one should pray.

Workshop/Fireside/Meeting
90 minutes

Carefully prepare the learning environment to reflect hospitality, beauty, friendliness and love. Lovingly greet the guests as they arrive. You may also wish to have soft, instrumental music playing as the guests come in.

Opening Prayer(s)—when possible include the use of music. You may wish to use the prayer, “Praised be Thou, O Lord my God!” (*Bahá'í Prayers*, p. 124-125), or “Create in me a pure heart” (*Bahá'í Prayers*, p. 142-143).

Introduction

Begin by explaining to the guests that the purpose of the gathering is to explore the Bahá'í perspective on how to pray.

Power of Prayer video

Have the guests watch the video (or telecast), “The Power of Prayer.” (approximately 30 minutes)

Learning Experience

- Explain to the participants that together they will be looking to answer these questions:
 - How do we pray?
 - Is one method of praying preferable to another?
 - With what attitude should we approach prayer?

- Divide the group into three small groups, each taking one of the above questions. Have each group read the quotations with their question in mind, underlining pertinent ideas.

- Ask the groups to record, either by listing or in a more artistic way, their findings on small poster board. (see Materials Checklist for more details)

- Present the poster to the larger group.

- End by reading a short story of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá regarding how we should pray and discussing how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá taught someone to pray. Practice reading the story several times so that you can read it smoothly and with feeling, pausing in appropriate places.
- Ask participants to reflect again on their answers to the focus questions to consider how this story assists them to come to a deeper understanding of these concepts, and if they personally need to make adjustments in how they pray.

Closing

If the friends do not already have a copy of *The Light of Unity: The Power of Prayer* booklet, a small Baha’i prayer book, or other printed materials, please offer them to the participants and invite them to investigate the Bahá’í Faith.

Close the session with prayer, either spoken, chanted, or sung.

How Do We Pray?

Answer your assigned Focus Question:

- How do we pray?
- Is one method of praying preferable to another?
- With what attitude should we approach prayer?



...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.... Read ye the sacred verses in such measure that ye be not overcome by languor and despondency.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 73-74)

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.

(Shoghi Effendi: *Dawn of a New Day*, page 67)

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.

(Shoghi Effendi: *Spiritual Foundations: Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude*, #45, P. 15)

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 anyone 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.

(Shoghi Effendi: *Spiritual Foundations: Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude*, #55, P.18)

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.

(Shoghi Effendi: *Directives of the Guardian*, page 59)

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.

(The Bab: *Selections from the Bab*, Pages: 93-94)

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 Bab: *Selections from the Bab*, Page: 78)

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....

(Shoghi Effendi: *Unfolding Destiny*, Page: 154)



Story of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá was in New York, He called to Him an ardent Baha'i and said, "If you will come to Me at dawn tomorrow, I will teach you to pray."

Delighted, Mr. M. arose at four and crossed the city, arriving for his lesson at six. With what exultant expectation he must have greeted this opportunity! He found 'Abdu'l-Bahá already at prayer, kneeling by the side of the bed. Mr. M. followed suit, taking care to place himself directly across.

Seeing that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was quite lost in His Own reverie, Mr. M. began to pray silently for his friends, his family and finally for the crowned heads of Europe. No word was uttered by the quiet Man before him. He went over all the prayers he knew then, and repeated them twice, three times--still no sound broke the expectant hush.

Mr. M. surreptitiously rubbed one knee and wondered vaguely about his back. He began again, hearing as he did so, the birds heralding the dawn outside the window. An hour passed, and finally two. Mr. M. was quite numb now. His eyes, roving along the wall, caught sight of a large crack. He dallied with a touch of indignation but let his gaze pass again to the still figure across the bed.

The ecstasy that he saw arrested him and he drank deeply of the sight. Suddenly he wanted to pray like that. Selfish desires were forgotten. Sorrow, conflict, and even his immediate surroundings were as if they had never been. He was conscious of only one thing, a passionate desire to draw near to God.

Closing his eyes again he set the world firmly aside and amazingly his heart teemed with prayer, eager, joyous, tumultuous prayer. He felt cleansed by humility and lifted by a new peace. 'Abdu'l-Bahá had taught him to pray!

The "Master of Akká" immediately arose and came to him. His eyes rested smilingly upon the newly humbled Mr. M. "When you pray," He said, "you must not think of your aching body, nor of the birds outside the window, nor of the cracks in the wall!"

He became very serious then, and added, "When you wish to pray you must first know that you are standing in the presence of the Almighty!"

(Vignettes from the Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 131-132)

Fireside #3

Meditation and Prayer in One's Spiritual Life

Purpose: To explore the Bahá'í perspective on the role of meditation and prayer

Workshop/Fireside/Meeting
90 minutes

Carefully prepare the learning environment to reflect hospitality, beauty, friendliness and love. Lovingly greet the guests as they arrive. You may also wish to have soft, instrumental music playing as the guests come in.

Opening Prayer(s)—when possible include the use of music. You may wish to use the prayer, “From the sweet-scented streams of Thine eternity” (*Bahá'í Prayers*, p. 141-142).

Introduction

Begin by explaining to the guests that the purpose of the gathering is to look at the relationship between prayer and meditation.

Power of Prayer video

Have the guests watch the video (or telecast), “The Power of Prayer.” (approximately 30 minutes)

Learning Experience

- Explain to the participants that together they will be looking to answer these questions:
 - What is meant by meditation in the Bahá'í Faith?
 - What are the conditions necessary for meditation?
 - What is the connection between prayer and meditation?
 - What could be the results of meditation?

- Begin by asking the question, “What is meditation?” and “Why do people meditate?” Request participants to turn to someone near them and share their thoughts. Ask guests to form groups of three or four if there are a large number of people present.

- Share that the Bahá'í Faith suggests that one goal of meditation is to achieve that “...mystic feeling which unites Man with God. This state of spiritual communion can be brought about and maintained by means of meditation and prayer.” (Shoghi Effendi: *Directives of the Guardian*, Page: 86)

- Divide the group into small groups or pairs. After reading the quotations, respond to the focus questions.

- In the large group, invite each group to share their answers to the focus questions.
- Read a short story of Shoghi Effendi about prayer and meditation. Practice reading the story several times so that you can read it smoothly and with feeling, pausing in appropriate places.
- Have participants reflect on how to incorporate prayer and meditation into their regular spiritual practices.

Closing

Select some or all of the short verses for meditation from the Bahá'í Writings to use as a closing devotional program. Read the verses slowly and clearly, playing soft music between them to allow guests to quietly meditate on each verse.

Offer each guest a copy of the list of short verses for meditation on special paper for them to take home and use.

Meditation and Prayer in One's Spiritual Life

Focus Questions:

- What is meant by meditation in the Bahá'í Faith?
- What are the conditions necessary for meditation?
- What is the connection between prayer and meditation?
- What could be the results 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.

(Baha'u'llah: *Gleanings*, Page: 153)

...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... 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 this faculty man enters into the very Kingdom of God.

(Abdu'l-Baha: *Paris Talks**, Pages: 174-175)

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

(Abdu'l-Baha: *The Importance of Deepening our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith*, #51, Page 14)

...the core of religious faith is that mystic feeling which unites Man with God. This state of spiritual communion can be brought about and maintained by means of meditation and prayer....The Baha'i 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 which has first to be fed. And this spiritual nourishment prayer can best provide.

(Shoghi Effendi: *Directives of the Guardian*, Pages: 86-87)

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."

(Shoghi Effendi: *Directives of the Guardian*, Page: 35)

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.

(Shoghi Effendi: *Spiritual Foundations: Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude*, #51, P. 17)



Story of Shoghi Effendi

One day the Guardian said to a prominent pilgrim in Haifa, “Do you pray?” “Of course, beloved Guardian, I pray every morning.” “Do you meditate?” The man paused a bit and said slowly, “No, I guess I do not.” The Guardian replied that prayer is of no use without meditation and that meditation must be centered on the Writings. He continued very earnestly that meditation is of no use unless it is followed by action. He thus made clear another step to this most important process in the life of the soul.

The Guardian then explained further that meditation is not just sitting down, closing your eyes, keeping silent in a silent atmosphere, and being blank. That is not meditation. We must concentrate on the teachings, concentrate on their implications and how they can be used. Prayer is of no consequence if it remains the murmur of syllables and sounds—of what use is that? God knows already. We are not saying the prayers for God, we are saying them for our own selves. If the words do not strengthen us, if we do not reflect upon the Writings we read, if we do not make the Writings part of our daily action, we are wasting our time.

Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written on his behalf, makes clear that 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.”¹ In another letter written on his behalf, the Guardian emphasizes that “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.”²

(Ruth Moffett, *Du'á: On Wings of Prayer*, p. 29)

¹ Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, 25 January 1943, cited in *Spiritual Foundations*, p. 17

² *ibid.*, 15 May 1944, p. 17

Short Verses for Meditation from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- ✠ In the garden of thy heart plant naught but the rose of love...
(Baha'u'llah: *Persian Hidden Words*, Page: 3)
- ✠ Until love takes possession of the heart, no other divine bounty can be revealed in it.
('Abdu'l-Baha: *Promulgation of Universal Peace**, Page: 15)
- ✠ In the world of existence there is indeed no greater power than the power of love.
('Abdu'l-Baha: *Paris Talks**, Page: 179)
- ✠ Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other.
(Baha'u'llah: *Arabic Hidden Words*, Page: 68)
- ✠ The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.
(Baha'u'llah: *Aqdas: Other Sections*, Page: 11)
- ✠ Through you the countenance of the world hath been wreathed in smiles, and the brightness of His light shone forth.
(Baha'u'llah: quoted in Shoghi Effendi: *The Advent of Divine Justice*, Page: 76)
- ✠ The purpose of God in creating man hath been, and will ever be, to enable him to know his Creator and to attain His Presence.
(Baha'u'llah: *Gleanings*, Page: 70)
- ✠ Verily God hath made adversity as a morning dew upon His green pasture, and a wick for His lamp which lighteth earth and heaven.
(Baha'u'llah: *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, Page: 17)
- ✠ Man is, in reality, a spiritual being, and only when he lives in the spirit is he truly happy.
('Abdu'l-Baha: *Paris Talks**, Page: 72)
- ✠ If we are not happy and joyous at this season, for what other season shall we wait and for what other time shall we look?
('Abdu'l-Baha: *Baha'i World Faith**, Page: 351)

The Role of Prayer in Our Daily Lives

Purpose: To examine the conditions of prayer, how prayer is answered, and the role of prayer in our daily lives.

Workshop/Fireside/Meeting
90 minutes

Carefully prepare the learning environment to reflect hospitality, beauty, friendliness and love. Lovingly greet the guests as they arrive. You may also wish to have soft, instrumental music playing as the guests come in.

Opening Prayer(s)—when possible include the use of music. You may wish to use the prayer, “He is the prayer-hearing, prayer-answering God!” (*Bahá’í Prayers*, p. 147-149), or “O Thou Whose tests are a healing medicine” (*Bahá’í Prayers*, p. 191).

Introduction

Begin by explaining to the guests that the purpose of the gathering is to look at the role of prayer in our individual, daily lives.

Power of Prayer video

Have the guests watch the video (or telecast), “The Power of Prayer.” (approximately 30 minutes)

Learning Experience

- Begin by asking participants to find a picture, from carefully chosen magazine pictures available, that illustrates the role of prayer in their own lives. Share the picture and the role prayer plays with a partner. (See Materials Checklist for more details)
- Ask participants to brainstorm answers to these questions: What is prayer? What is not prayer?
- Many people do not have a lot of confidence in the power of prayer because they feel their prayers are not answered. Read the folk tale, “The Bejeweled Sword” and, time permitting, discuss the implications of the story.
- Explain that this workshop will try to look at what prayer really is, and the way prayers are answered.

- In small groups, read the following quotations, keeping these focus questions in mind:
 - How can we best prepare ourselves to pray?
 - What should we pray for?
 - How does God answer our prayers?

- After everyone has had a chance to read and discuss the quotations, bring the small groups together. Ask each participant to choose a new picture to illustrate how their views or perceptions have changed regarding the role of prayer in their personal lives.

- Share the two pictures along with an explanation of the change of perception with the rest of the group (optional). Some guests may prefer to keep their insights private.

- Spend a few moments in quiet reflection on how one can effectively use prayer in one's daily life.

Closing

Give each participant a copy of the small *The Light of Unity: The Power of Prayer* booklet or a small Baha'i prayer book, and invite them to investigate the Bahá'í Faith.

Close the session with prayer, either spoken, chanted, or sung.

The Bejeweled Sword

There was once a little child in Persia during the days of Persia's ancient glory. It was a custom in those days that whenever there was an important feast the people would share gifts with their friends and loved ones. So this little child prayed very hard and loudly for a bejeweled sword to be his gift.

At the time of the feast, this little boy was waiting eagerly to receive the sword he had prayed so hard for. However, the time passed and the feast was almost over and yet the child did not receive any sword as a gift. He was quite sad and disappointed.

His father, who never believed in God or in any kind of prayers, saw his son's disappointment and said, "My son, can't you see, your prayers were not answered?"

The son looked at his father and replied, "Oh yes father, my prayers were answered."

"How can that be?" asked the father in surprise. "You did not receive the bejeweled sword that you desired so much."

"But father, don't you understand?" said the child. "The answer is 'no.' God said 'no.'"

(A Persian Folk Tale, taken from *Thoughts—Education for Peace and One World*, compiled by Irene Taafaki, p. 212-213)

The Role of Prayer in Our Daily Lives

Focus Questions:

- How can we best prepare ourselves to pray?
- What should we pray for?
- How does God answer our prayers?



"In the Bahá'í Cause arts, sciences and all crafts are (counted as) worship.... Briefly, all effort and exertion put forth by man from the fullness of his heart is worship, if it is prompted by the highest motives and the will to do service to humanity. This is worship: to serve mankind and to minister to the needs of the people. Service is prayer...."

(Abdu'l-Baha: *Paris Talks*, pp. 176-177)

So long as the thoughts of an individual are scattered he will achieve no results, but if his thinking be concentrated on a single point wonderful will be the fruits thereof.

One cannot obtain the full force of the sunlight when it is cast on a flat mirror, but once the sun shineth upon a concave mirror, or on a lens that is convex, all its heat will be concentrated on a single point, and that one point will burn the hottest. Thus is it necessary to focus one's thinking on a single point so that it will become an effective force.

(Abdu'l-Baha: *Selections ... 'Abdu'l-Baha*, Pages: 110-111)

He, verily, shall increase the reward of them that endure with patience...Blessed are the steadfastly enduring, they that are patient under ills and hardships, who lament not over anything that befalleth them, and who tread the path of resignation....

(Baha'u'llah: *Gleanings*, Page: 129)

It is the spirit behind the words which is really important.

(16 March 1946 to an individual believer, Shoghi Effendi: *Spiritual Foundations: Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude*, #54, Page 18)

Verily the Will of God acts sometimes in a way for which mankind is unable to find out the reason. The causes and reasons shall appear. Trust in God and confide in Him, and resign thyself to the Will of God.

(Esslemont, 'Abdu'l-Bahá quoted in *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, p. 110)

My calamity is My providence, outwardly it is fire and vengeance, but inwardly it is light and mercy.

(Baha'u'llah: *Arabic Hidden Words*, Page: 51)

Ask not of Me that which We desire not for thee, then be content with what We have ordained for thy sake, for this is that which profiteth thee, if therewith thou dost content thyself.

(Baha'u'llah: *Arabic Hidden Words*, Page: 18)

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 dated 22 August 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *Guidelines for Teaching*, Page: 325)

But we ask for things which the divine wisdom does not desire for us, and there is no answer to our prayer. His wisdom does not sanction what we wish. We pray, "O God! Make me wealthy!" If this prayer were universally answered, human affairs would be at a standstill. There would be none left to work in the streets, none to till the soil, none to build, none to run the trains. Therefore, it is evident that it would not be well for us if all prayers were answered. The affairs of the world would be interfered with, energies crippled and progress hindered. But whatever we ask for which is in accord with divine wisdom, God will answer. Assuredly!

(Abdu'l-Baha: *Promulgation of Universal Peace**, Pages: 246-247)

...O thou who hast surrendered thy will to God! By self-surrender and perpetual union with God is meant that men should merge their will wholly in the Will of God, and regard their desires as utter nothingness beside His Purpose. Whatsoever the Creator commandeth His creatures to observe, the same must they diligently, and with the utmost joy and eagerness, arise and fulfil. They should in no wise allow their fancy to obscure their judgment, neither should they regard their own imaginings as the voice of the Eternal.

(Baha'u'llah: *Gleanings*, Page: 337)



The Power of Prayer

Purpose: To provide an intergenerational experience (for all ages) that illustrates the power of prayer.

Workshop/Fireside/Meeting
90 minutes

Carefully prepare the learning environment to reflect hospitality, beauty, friendliness and love. Lovingly greet the guests as they arrive. You may also wish to have soft, instrumental music playing as the guests come in.

Opening Prayer(s)—when possible include the use of music. You may wish to use the prayer, “O God! Refresh and gladden my spirit” (*Bahá’í Prayers*, p. 152), or “O my God! O my God! Unite the hearts of Thy servants” (*Bahá’í Prayers*, p. 204)

Introduction

Begin by explaining to the guests that the purpose of the gathering is to experience the Bahá’í perspective on prayer—communing with God.

Power of Prayer video

Have the guests watch the video (or telecast), “The Power of Prayer.” (approximately 30 minutes)

Learning Experience

- Explain to the participants that this workshop is designed for **all members of the human family: children, youth, and adults**. Together they will experience the joy of praying together.
- Distribute copies of the brief compilation on prayer and read together in the large group, pausing after each quotation, so that everyone can have the same general understanding of what Bahá’í prayer is and can keep these quotations in mind while working on their assignment.

Compilation on Prayer



Spirit has influence: prayer has spiritual effect.
(Abdu'l-Baha, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*., page 246)

God is merciful. In His mercy He answers the prayers of all His servants when according to His supreme wisdom it is necessary.
(Abdu'l-Baha, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*., page 247)

It behooveth the servant to pray to and seek assistance from God, and to supplicate and implore His aid.
(Abdu'l-Baha: *Spiritual Foundations: Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude*, #25, Page 9)

The Guardian ...sees no objection to the friends coming together for meditation and prayer. Such a communion helps in fostering fellowship among the believers...
(Shoghi Effendi: *Spiritual Foundations: Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude*, #45, Page 15)

...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...
(Shoghi Effendi: *Spiritual Foundations: Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude*, #55, Page 18)

The most acceptable prayers is the one offered with the utmost spirituality and radiance.
(The Bab: *Selections from the Bab*, page 78)



- Divide the group into three groups: the music group, the eloquent speech group, and the art group.
- Ask each group to read aloud the quotation on their specific handout page.
- Each group will be responsible for the following instructions:

Music--Select one or both prayers to perform musically or select background music while the prayer(s) are being read, or select a prayer to be sung that can be taught to others in the group.

Art--Select one or both prayers that can be artistically represented. This group may want to make small, individual renderings for everyone present, or one large poster.

Eloquent Speech--Select one or both prayers (or any others) that each person can practice reading or reciting eloquently.

- These prayers will be presented for the closing devotions using the specific form assigned to their group. Allow each group time (about 20-30 minutes) to develop their portion of the closing devotions.
- The facilitator will sequence the order of the presentations, the content of which forms the closing devotions. Remind the participants of the importance of instilling prayer in one's family life.

Closing

Each group will participate in the closing devotions which should be reverent, dignified, and diverse in content.

Give each participant a copy of the small *The Light of Unity: The Power of Prayer* booklet or a small prayer book, and invite them to investigate the Bahá'í Faith.

Quotation for the Music Group

We, verily, have made music as a ladder for your souls, a means whereby they may be lifted up unto the realm on high...

(Baha'u'llah: The Kitab-i-Aqdas, Page: 38)

Assignment: Select one or both of the prayers to put to music, or select background music to listen to while the prayer(s) are being read.

O Thou kind Lord! Make these children excellent plants. Let them grow and develop in the Garden of Thy Covenant, and bestow freshness and beauty through the outpourings of the clouds of the Abhá Kingdom.

O Thou kind Lord! I am a little child, exalt me by admitting me to the kingdom. I am earthly, make me heavenly; I am of the world below, let me belong to the realm above; gloomy, suffer me to become radiant; material, make me spiritual, and grant that I may manifest Thine infinite bounties.

Thou art the Powerful, the All-loving.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Prayers*, p. 36-37)



O God! Refresh and gladden my spirit. Purify my heart. Illumine my powers. I lay all my affairs in Thy hand. Thou art my Guide and my Refuge. I will no longer be sorrowful and grieved; I will be a happy and joyful being. O God! I will no longer be full of anxiety, nor will I let trouble harass me. I will not dwell on the unpleasant things of life.

O God! Thou art more friend to me than I am to myself. I dedicate myself to Thee, O Lord.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Prayers*, p. 152)



Quotation for the Eloquent Speech Group

Teach your children the verses revealed from the heaven of majesty and power, so that, in most melodious tones, they may recite the Tablets of the All-Merciful...

(Baha'u'llah, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, page 150)

Assignment: Select one or both of the prayers to be recited eloquently:

O Thou kind Lord! These lovely children are the handiwork of the fingers of Thy might and the wondrous signs of Thy greatness. O God! Protect these children, gracious assist them to be educated and enable them to render service to the world of humanity. O God! These children are pearls, cause them to be nurtured within the shell of Thy loving-kindness.

Thou art the Bountiful, the All-Loving.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Prayers*, p. 36)



O my God! O my God! This, Thy servant, hath advanced towards Thee, is passionately wandering in the desert of Thy love, walking in the path of Thy service, anticipating Thy favors, hoping for Thy bounty, relying upon Thy kingdom, and intoxicated by the wine of Thy gift. O my God! Increase the fervor of his affection for Thee, the constancy of his praise of Thee, and the ardor of his love for Thee.

Verily, Thou art the Most Generous, the Lord of grace abounding. There is no other God but Thee, the Forgiving, the Merciful.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Prayers*, p. 153-154)



Quotation for the Art Group

Art can better awaken such noble sentiments than cold rationalizing, especially among the mass of the people.

(Shoghi Effendi: *The Arts*, Page: 7 in *Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 1)

Assignment: Select one or both of the prayers and use art to represent the prayer(s):

O Lord! Make this youth radiant, and confer Thy bounty upon this poor creature. Bestow upon him knowledge, grant him added strength at the break of every morn and guard him within the shelter of Thy protection so that he may be freed from error, may devote himself to the service of Thy Cause, may guide the wayward, lead the hapless, free the captives and awaken the heedless, that all may be blessed with Thy remembrance and praise. Thou art the Mighty and the Powerful.

(‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Bahá’í Prayers*, p. 38-39)



O my Lord! O my Lord! This is a lamp lighted by the fire of Thy love and ablaze with the flame which is ignited in the tree of Thy mercy. O my Lord! Increase his enkindlement, heat and flame, with the fire which is kindled in the Sinai of Thy Manifestation. Verily, Thou art the Confirmer, the Assister, the Powerful, the Generous, the Loving.

(‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Bahá’í Prayers*, p. 153)

