

Prayer and Fasting: *Produce Awareness and Awakening in Man*

“...obligatory prayer and fasting produce awareness and awakening in man, and are conducive to his protection and preservation from tests.”
~'Abdu'l-Bahá

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

#1 Even though outwardly the Fast is difficult and toilsome, yet inwardly it is bounty and tranquillity. Purification and training are conditioned and dependent only on such rigorous exercises as are in accord with the Book of God and sanctioned by Divine law, not those which the deluded have inflicted upon the people. Whatsoever God hath revealed is beloved of the soul. We beseech Him that He may graciously assist us to do that which is pleasing and acceptable unto Him.

#2 Verily, I say, fasting is the supreme remedy and the most great healing for the disease of self and passion.

#3 All praise be to the one true God Who hath assisted His loved ones to observe the Fast and hath aided them to fulfill that which hath been decreed in the Book. In truth, ceaseless praise and gratitude are due unto Him for having graciously confirmed His loved ones to perform that which is the cause of the exaltation of His Word. If a man possessed ten thousand lives and offered them all to establish the truth of God's laws and commandments, he would still be beholden unto Him, since whatsoever proceedeth from His irresistible decree serveth solely to benefit His friends and loved ones.

#4 There are various stages and stations for the Fast and innumerable effects and benefits are concealed therein. Well is it with those who have attained unto them.

#5 In clear cases of weakness, illness, or injury the law of the Fast is not binding. This injunction is in conformity with the precepts of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future. Well is it with them who act accordingly.

#6 The law of the Fast is ordained for those who are sound and healthy; as to those who are ill or debilitated, this law hath never been nor is now applicable.

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

#7 O thou servant of the True Lord! Obligatory prayer and other supplications are essential to servitude unto Him Who is the All-Sufficing... When the Obligatory Prayers and other prayers are joined together and follow each other, worship attaineth its perfection. It can be seen that these two are spiritual companions and are like one soul in two bodies. May God assist you all to thrive in love and fellowship.

#8 When saying the Obligatory Prayer, one must turn towards the Holy Reality of Bahá'u'lláh, that Reality which encompasseth all things.

#9 As to the Obligatory Prayer, it hath a Qiblih that is fixed, specified, holy and blessed. I ask God that He may open the gate of the knowledge of this station to thine heart so that thou mayest apprehend whatever is necessary and proper, garner spiritual bounties from the heaven of the All-Merciful, obtain the effulgences of knowledge from the Sun of Reality, and become a manifestation of inspiration from the Unseen and a source of glad-tidings from the All-Merciful.

#10 With regard to the Obligatory Prayer, this should be said individually, but it is not dependent on a private spot.

#11 O servant of the holy threshold! Thou hast asked about those prayers that are beyond what is prescribed, those that are recommended, invocations, and devotions honored by tradition. In this Dispensation that which hath been expressly prescribed is

obligatory. But individual worship, invocations, supererogatory prayers, and specially recommended prayers are not binding. Nonetheless, the saying of any prayer individually after the Obligatory Prayers is well-pleasing and acceptable, but no particular ones have been singled out.

#12 Ordinances which are obligatory and decrees that are binding are those that have issued forth from the Supreme Pen or are issued by a decision of the Universal House of Justice. For we are the commanded, not the commander. We are the ones upon whom duties are imposed, not the ones who impose duties. This is the reality of the law of God and the foundation of the religion of God. As for devotions and invocations, whoever wisheth may, after the Obligatory Prayers, recite other supplications of the Blessed Perfection.

#13 Thou hast written about the Fast. This is a most weighty matter and thou shouldst exert thine utmost in its observance. It is a fundamental of the Divine law, and one of the pillars of the religion of God.

#14 Well is it with you, as you have followed the Law of God and arisen to observe the Fast during these blessed days, for this physical fast is a symbol of the spiritual fast. This Fast leadeth to the cleansing of the soul from all selfish desires, the acquisition of spiritual attributes, attraction to the breezes of the All-Merciful, and enkindlement with the fire of divine love.

#15 Fasting is the cause of the elevation of one's spiritual station.

Extracts from a Prayer by Bahá'u'lláh for the Fast

#16 Exalted art Thou, O Lord my God! I beseech Thee by those whom Thou hast bidden to observe the Fast for the sake of Thy love and good-pleasure, who have demonstrated their allegiance to Thy law and followed Thy verses and precepts, and who have broken their fast while enjoying near access to Thee and beholding Thy countenance. By Thy glory! Since they are turning to the court of Thy good-pleasure, all their days are days of fasting. Were

the mouth of Thy will to address them saying: "Observe, for My beauty's sake, the fast, O people, and set no limit to its duration," I swear by the majesty of Thy glory, that every one of them will faithfully observe it, will abstain from whatsoever will violate Thy law, and will continue to do so until they yield up their souls unto Thee, for they have tasted the sweetness of Thy call, and become inebriated with Thy remembrance and praise and with the words proceeding from the lips of Thy command.

#17 All glory be to Thee, O my God, for Thou hast graciously enabled me to fast during this month which Thou hast related to Thy Name, the Most Exalted, and called 'Alá (Loftiness). Thou hast commanded that Thy servants and Thy people should fast therein and seek thereby to draw nearer unto Thee. The days and months of the year have culminated with the Fast, even as the first month began with Thy Name, Bahá, that all might testify that Thou art the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden, and be well assured that the glory of all names is conferred only through the glory of Thy Cause and the word expounded by Thy will and revealed through Thy purpose. Thou hast ordained that this month be a remembrance and honor from Thee, and a sign of Thy presence amongst them, that they may not forget Thy grandeur and Thy majesty, Thy sovereignty and Thy glory, and may be well assured that from time immemorial Thou hast ever been and wilt ever be Ruler over the entire creation. Nothing created in the heavens or on the earth can hinder Thee in Thy governance, nor can anyone in the realms of Revelation and creation prevent Thee from fulfilling Thy purpose.

#18 I implore Thee, O my God, by Thy name whereby all the kindreds of the earth have wailed, except such as Thou hast safeguarded with Thine unerring protection and sheltered beneath the shadow of Thy transcendent mercy, to make us so firm in Thy Cause and steadfast in Thy love that were Thy servants to rise up against Thee and Thy people turn away from Thee, and no one would remain on earth to invoke Thy name or set his face toward the sanctuary of communion with Thee and the Kaaba of Thy sanctity, I would still arise singly and alone to render Thy Cause victorious, to exalt Thy word, to proclaim Thy sovereignty,

and to celebrate the praise of Thine august Self. And this, O Lord, even though each time I venture to extol Thee by any name, I am filled with perplexity, for I am fully aware that all of Thine exalted attributes and all of the most excellent names which I associate with Thee and by which in Thy holy presence I supplicate Thee, reflect naught but the measure of mine own understanding, inasmuch as whenever I have regarded a name to be laudable, I have associated it with Thyself.

#19 Immeasurably exalted is Thy true state above the description or knowledge of anyone besides Thee, and sanctified art Thou from the glorification of Thy creatures and the praise of Thy servants in their attempts to ascend unto Thee. Whatsoever appeareth from Thy servants is limited by the limitations of their own selves and is created by their own idle fancies and imaginings.

#20 Thou knowest all that is in me, O Lord, but I know not what is in Thee. Have mercy then upon me through Thy loving providence and inspire me with that which shall give peace to my heart during Thy days and tranquillity to my soul through the revelations of Thy sacred presence. All created things have been illumined with the splendors of the lights of Thy countenance, O Lord, and the dwellers of earth and heaven are shining resplendently on account of the manifestations of Thine incomparable majesty, in such wise that I behold nothing without first beholding within it the revelation of Thyself, a revelation which is hidden from the sight of those among Thy servants who lie fast asleep.

Note: All sections are from a compilation prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice titled "The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting" dated May 2000.

Discussion:

Shoghi Effendi explains that the fast is "...essentially a period of meditation and prayer, of spiritual recuperation, during which the believer must strive to make the necessary readjustments in his inner life, and to refresh and reinvigorate the spiritual forces in his soul."

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Notes: Note 25

If one is exempt or unable to carry out the physical aspects of the fast, in what ways can we derive the benefits of:

- Spiritual recuperation
- Readjustments to our inner life
- Refreshing and reinvigorating our souls

Your personal prayers

Reflection on the Text
