

Prayer and Fasting: *A Ladder of Ascent*

*“Obligatory prayer is a ladder of ascent for the believer.”
~Bahá’u’lláh*

From the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh

#1 One of the deeds in obedience to the law is obligatory prayer. He Who is the Bearer of divine mysteries hath called it the ladder of ascent. He saith: “Obligatory prayer is a ladder of ascent for the believer.” Within it are hidden and concealed a myriad effects and benefits. Indeed, they are beyond computation. How great would be a man’s indolence and his injustice to himself if he were to abandon this ladder of ascent and attach himself to earthly treasures. It is our hope that we may be assisted to perform pure and acceptable deeds. We beseech God, exalted and glorified be He, to confirm us in that which He desireth and pleaseth and in that which will draw us nigh unto Him. Verily, He is the Almighty, the All-Powerful, He Who is wont to answer the prayers of all men.

#2 Of the new Obligatory Prayers that were later revealed, the long Obligatory Prayer should be said at those times when one feeleth himself in a prayerful mood. In truth, it hath been revealed in such wise that if it be recited to a rock, that rock would stir and speak forth; and if it be recited to a mountain, that mountain would move and flow. Well is it with the one who reciteth it and fulfilleth God’s precepts. Whichever prayer is read will suffice.

#3 We beseech God to assist His people that they may observe the most great and exalted Fast, which is to protect one’s eye from beholding whatever is forbidden and to withhold one’s self from food, drink and whatever is not of Him. We pray God to confirm His loved ones that they may succeed in accomplishing that which they have been commanded in this Day.

#4 Praise be unto Him Who hath revealed laws in accordance with His good-pleasure. Verily, He is sovereign over whatsoever He wisheth. O My friends! Act ye in accordance with what ye have been commanded in the

Book. Fasting hath been decreed for you in the month of ‘Alá. Fast ye for the sake of your Lord, the Mighty, the Most High. Restrain yourselves from sunrise to sunset. Thus doth the Beloved of mankind instruct you as bidden by God, the All-Powerful, the Unconstrained. It is not for anyone to exceed the limits laid down by God and His law, nor should anyone follow his own idle imaginings. Well is it with the one who fulfilleth My decrees for the love of My Beauty, and woe to the one who neglecteth the Dayspring of Command in the days of his Lord, the Almighty, the Omnipotent.

#5 This is one of the nights of the Fast, and during it the Tongue of Grandeur and Glory proclaimed: There is no God beside Me, the Omnipotent Protector, the Self-Subsisting. We, verily, have commanded all to observe the Fast in these days as a bounty on Our part, but the people remain unaware, except for those who have attained unto the purpose of God as revealed in His laws and have comprehended His wisdom that pervadeth all things visible and invisible. Say: By God! His Law is a fortress unto you, could ye but understand. Verily, He hath no purpose therein save to benefit the souls of His servants, but, alas, the generality of mankind remain heedless thereof. Cling ye to the cord of God’s laws, and follow not those who have turned away from the Book, for verily they have opposed God, the Mighty, the Beloved.

#6 These are the days of the Fast. Blessed is the one who through the heat generated by the Fast increaseth his love, and who, with joy and radiance, ariseth to perform worthy deeds. Verily, He guideth whomsoever He willeth to the straight path.

From the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

#7 The Obligatory Prayers have been set down by the Pen of the Most High and have been mentioned in the Persian “Questions and Answers”, which supplementeth the Kitáb-i-

Aqdas. They are clearly binding, and without a doubt everyone must perform one of these three prayers....

Through worship man becometh spiritual, his heart is attracted, and his soul and inner being attain such tenderness and exhilaration that the Obligatory Prayer instilleth new life in him. This is why in the Tablet of Visitation it hath been revealed: "I beseech God, by Thee and by them whose faces have been illumined with the splendors of the light of Thy countenance, and who, for love of Thee, have observed all whereunto they were bidden." It is clear then that love of the beauty of the All-Merciful impelleth one to the worship of Almighty God.

#8 O thou servant of God! Each morn God's infinite grace confirmeth the ardent and tearful invocations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Accordingly, let every awakened soul obtain, to the extent of its capacity, a portion of this spiritual grace. This can be achieved by fervently offering unto God prayers and supplications at every dawn and observing the law of obligatory prayer. Thus may his nostrils delight in the sweet savors wafting from the garden of the bounty of God, his soul attain new life, and his reality mirror forth the effulgences of the All-Merciful.

#9 Obligatory prayer causeth the heart to become attentive to the Divine kingdom. One is alone with God, converseth with Him, and acquireth bounties. Likewise, if one performeth the Obligatory Prayer with his heart in a state of utmost purity, he will obtain the confirmations of the Holy Spirit, and this will entirely obliterate love of self. I hope that thou wilt persevere in the recitation of the Obligatory Prayer, and thus will come to witness the power of entreaty and supplication.

#10 Thou hast written concerning obligatory prayer. Such prayer is binding and mandatory for everyone. Most certainly guide all to its observance, because it is like unto a ladder for the souls, a lamp unto the hearts of the righteous, and the water of life from the garden of paradise. It is a clear duty prescribed by the All-Merciful, in the observance of which it is in no wise permissible to be dilatory or neglectful.

#11 Obligatory prayer and supplication cause man to reach the kingdom of mystery, and the worship of the Supreme One. They bestow nearness unto His threshold. There is a pleasure in offering prayers that transcendeth all other pleasures, and there is a sweetness in chanting and singing the verses of God which is the greatest desire of all the believers, men and women alike. While reciting the Obligatory Prayer, one converseth intimately and shareth secrets with the true Beloved. No pleasure is greater than this, if one proceedeth with a detached soul, with tears overflowing, with a trusting heart and an eager spirit. Every joy is earthly save this one, the sweetness of which is divine.

#12 Obligatory prayer is the very foundation of the Cause of God. Through it joy and vitality infuse the heart. Even if every grief should surround Me, as soon as I engage in conversing with God in obligatory prayer, all My sorrows disappear and I attain joy and gladness. A condition descendeth upon Me which I am unable to describe or express. Whenever, with full awareness and humility, we undertake to perform the Obligatory Prayer before God, and recite it with heartfelt tenderness, we shall taste such sweetness as to endow all existence with eternal life.

#13 Observe the Obligatory Prayer which is available to thee so that the gate of bounty may be opened and utmost spirituality attained; great signs will be witnessed and the spiritual ascent will be realized.

#14 Persevere in the use of the Obligatory Prayer and early morning supplications, so that day by day thine awareness may increase, and, through the power of the knowledge of God, thou mayest rend asunder the veil of error of the people of doubt and lead them to His unfailing guidance. In every assembly, like unto a candle, thou shouldst give forth the light of Divine knowledge.

#15 Recite the Obligatory Prayer and supplications as much as thou art able, so that day by day thou mayest attain to increased firmness and steadfastness and find greater joy and gladness. Thus the circle of divine knowledge will grow wider, and the fire of the love of God will burn brighter within thee.

#16 Obligatory prayers and supplications are the very water of life. They are the cause of existence, of the refinement of souls, and of their attainment to the utmost joy. Exercise the greatest care in this regard, and encourage others to recite the Obligatory Prayers and supplications.

Prayers by Bahá'u'lláh for the Fast

#17 Praise be unto Thee, O Lord my God! We have observed the Fast in conformity with Thy bidding and break it now through Thy love and Thy good-pleasure. Deign to accept, O my God, the deeds that we have performed in Thy path wholly for the sake of Thy beauty with our faces set towards Thy Cause, free from aught else but Thee. Bestow, then, Thy forgiveness upon us, upon our forefathers, and upon all such as have believed in Thee and in Thy mighty signs in this most great, this most glorious Revelation. Potent art Thou to do what Thou chooseth. Thou art, verily, the Most Exalted, the Almighty, the Unconstrained.

#18 O my God and my Master! Thou seest me among Thy creatures who have rebelled and transgressed against Thee. Every time I invite them unto the ocean of Thy knowledge, their repudiation of Thy Cause increaseth and their rejection of the Dawning-Place of Thy Will waxeth greater. I beg of Thee, O my God, by those who have fasted for love of Thee and have quaffed the living waters of submission from the hands of Thy bounty, to ordain for Thy loved ones, who under the blaze of the orb of Thy trials have clung to the cord of patience, all the good Thou hast reckoned in Thy Books and Thy Tablets. Write down, then, for such as have been afflicted with adversities for Thy sake, the reward of those who have suffered martyrdom in the path of Thy good-pleasure. Send down, moreover, upon them, O Lord, that which will rejoice their hearts, solace their eyes, and exhilarate their souls. Thou art, verily, the Most Powerful, the Most Exalted, the Help in Peril, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

#19 Praised be Thou, O God, my God! These are the days whereon Thou hast enjoined Thy chosen ones, Thy loved ones and Thy servants to observe the Fast, which Thou hast made a light unto the people of Thy kingdom, even as

Thou didst make obligatory prayer a ladder of ascent unto those who acknowledge Thy unity. I beg of Thee, O my God, by these two mighty pillars, which Thou hast ordained as a glory and honor for all mankind, to keep Thy religion safe from the mischief of the ungodly and the plotting of every wicked doer. O Lord, conceal not the light which Thou hast revealed through Thy strength and Thine omnipotence. Assist, then, those who truly believe in Thee with the hosts of the seen and the unseen by Thy command and Thy sovereignty. No God is there but Thee, the Almighty, the Most Powerful.

Your personal prayers

Reflection on the Text

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:

Share reflections on the following words of our National Spiritual Assembly sent in their message of 29 February 2024, for the Feast of 'Alá:

At sunrise tomorrow we begin the season of self-restraint and reflection. Our prayers and meditations focused on the remembrance of God and the daily challenge of making sacred our habits of thought, the orientation of our hearts, and the nobility of our behavior. ...