

# Prayer and Fasting: *Two Wings to Man's Life*

*"Fasting and obligatory prayer are as two wings to man's life."  
~Bahá'u'lláh*

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## **From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh**

#1 We, verily, have set forth all things in Our Book, as a token of grace unto those who have believed in God, the Almighty, the Protector, the Self-Subsisting. And We have ordained obligatory prayer and fasting so that all may by these means draw nigh unto God, the Most Powerful, the Well-Beloved. We have written down these two laws and expounded every irrevocable decree. We have forbidden men from following whatsoever might cause them to stray from the Truth, and have commanded them to observe that which will draw them nearer unto Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Loving. Say: Observe ye the commandments of God for love of His beauty, and be not of those who follow in the ways of the abject and foolish.

#2 All praise be unto God, Who hath revealed the law of obligatory prayer as a reminder to His servants, and enjoined on them the Fast that those possessed of means may become apprised of the woes and sufferings of the destitute.

#3 One who performeth neither good deeds nor acts of worship is like unto a tree which beareth no fruit, and an action which leaveth no trace. Whosoever experienceth the holy ecstasy of worship will refuse to barter such an act or any praise of God for all that existeth in the world. Fasting and obligatory prayer are as two wings to man's life. Blessed be the one who soareth with their aid in the heaven of the love of God, the Lord of all worlds.

#4 Cling firmly to obligatory prayer and fasting. Verily, the religion of God is like unto heaven; fasting is its sun, and obligatory prayer is its moon. In truth, they are the pillars of religion whereby the righteous are distinguished from those who transgress His commandments. We entreat God, exalted and glorified be He, that He may graciously enable

all to observe that which He hath revealed in His Ancient Book.

#5 Know thou that religion is as heaven; and fasting and obligatory prayer are its sun and its moon. We entreat God, exalted and glorified be He, to graciously aid everyone who acteth according to His will and good-pleasure.

#6 Be not neglectful of obligatory prayer and fasting. He who faileth to observe them hath not been nor will ever be acceptable in the sight of God. Follow ye wisdom under all conditions. He, verily, hath bidden all to observe that which hath been and will be of profit to them. He, in truth, is the All-Sufficing, the Most High.

#7 As for obligatory prayer, it hath been sent down by the Pen of the Most High in such wise that it setteth ablaze the hearts and captivateth the souls and minds of men.

#8 Concerning obligatory prayer, it hath been revealed in such wise that whosoever reciteth it, even one time, with a detached heart, will find himself wholly severed from the world.

#9 O My brother! How great, how very great, can the law of obligatory prayer be, when, through His mercy and loving kindness, one is enabled to observe it. When a man commenceth the recitation of the Obligatory Prayer, he should see himself severed from all created things and regard himself as utter nothingness before the will and purpose of God, in such wise that he seeth naught but Him in the world of being. This is the station of God's well-favored ones and those who are wholly devoted to Him. Should one perform the Obligatory Prayer in this manner, he will be accounted by God and the Concourse on high among those who have truly offered the prayer.

**From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá**

#10 Obligatory prayer and fasting are among the most great ordinances of this holy Dispensation.

#11 In the realm of worship, fasting and obligatory prayer constitute the two mightiest pillars of God's holy Law. Neglecting them is in no wise permitted, and falling short in their performance is of a certainty not acceptable. In the Tablet of Visitation He saith: "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." He declareth that observance of the commands of God deriveth from love for the beauty of the Best-Beloved. The seeker, when immersed in the ocean of the love of God, will be moved by intense longing and will arise to carry out the laws of God. Thus, it is impossible that a heart which containeth the fragrance of God's love should yet fail to worship Him, except under conditions when such an action would agitate the enemies and stir up dissension and mischief. Otherwise, a lover of the Abhá Beauty will assuredly and continually demonstrate perseverance in the worship of the Lord.

#12 The laws of God regarding fasting and obligatory prayer are absolutely incumbent upon His servants. Therefore, they must turn their faces to the Point of Adoration of the celestial Concourse, hold fast to the most sublime Station, and pray and supplicate that they may be freed from the doubts of misinterpretation. This is the way of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This is the religion of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This is the path of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Whoever cherisheth the love of Bahá, let him choose this straight path. Whoever abandoneth this path, verily, he is of them who are shut out as by a veil from Him. Shouldst thou observe any soul who is in doubt about this commandment or who misinterpreteth it, but hath no secret motive or defiance in what he doeth, be friendly towards him, and with the utmost cordiality and through kind speech, endeavor to turn him from the path of such interpretation towards the plain meaning of the verses of God.

#13 The laws of God, such as fasting, obligatory prayer and the like, as well as His

counsels regarding virtues, good deeds and proper conduct, must be carried out everywhere to the extent possible, unless some insurmountable obstacle or some great danger presents itself or it runneth counter to the dictates of wisdom. For indolence and laxity hinder the outpourings of love from the clouds of divine mercy, and people will thus remain deprived.

#14 O ye loved ones of God! Out of gratitude for firmness in the eternal Covenant arise to serve the threshold of the omnipotent Lord, observe obligatory prayer and fasting, and spend your time in diffusing the sweet savors of God and in spreading the Divine verses. Tear asunder the veils, remove the obstacles, proffer the life-giving waters, and point out the path of salvation. This is what 'Abdu'l-Bahá admonisheth you every morn and eve.

#15 O thou daughter of the Kingdom! The Obligatory Prayers are binding inasmuch as they are conducive to humility and submissiveness, to setting one's face towards God and expressing devotion to Him. Through such prayer man holdeth communion with God, seeketh to draw near unto Him, converseth with the true Beloved of his heart, and attaineth spiritual stations.

#16 O thou spiritual friend! Thou hast asked about the wisdom of obligatory prayer. Know thou that such prayer is mandatory and binding. Man under no pretext whatsoever is excused from observing the prayer unless he is incapable of performing it or some great obstacle interveneth. The wisdom of obligatory prayer is this: That it causeth a connection between the servant and the True One, because at that time man with all his heart and soul turneth his face towards the Almighty, seeking His association and desiring His love and companionship. For a lover, there is no greater pleasure than to converse with his beloved, and for a seeker, there is no greater bounty than intimacy with the object of his desire. It is the greatest longing of every soul who is attracted to the Kingdom of God to find time to turn with entire devotion to his Beloved, so as to seek His bounty and blessing and immerse himself in the ocean of communion, entreaty and supplication. Moreover, obligatory prayer and fasting produce awareness and awakening in

man, and are conducive to his protection and preservation from tests.

#17 Strengthen thou the foundation of the Faith of God, and worship the Almighty. Be constant in offering obligatory prayer, and be mindful of fasting. Day and night devote thyself to prayer, supplication and entreaty, especially at the prescribed times.

### Prayers by Bahá'u'lláh for the Fast

#18 This is, O my God, the first of the days on which Thou hast bidden Thy loved ones to observe the Fast. I ask of Thee by Thy Self and by him who hath fasted out of love for Thee and for Thy good-pleasure—and not out of self and desire, nor out of fear of Thy wrath—and by Thy most excellent names and august attributes, to purify Thy servants from the love of aught except Thee and to draw them nigh unto the Dawning-Place of the lights of Thy countenance and the Seat of the throne of Thy oneness. Illumine their hearts, O my God, with the light of Thy knowledge and brighten their faces with the rays of the Daystar that shineth from the horizon of Thy Will. Potent art Thou to do what pleaseth Thee. No God is there but Thee, the All-Glorious, Whose help is implored by all men.

Assist them, O my God, to render Thee victorious and to exalt Thy Word. Suffer them, then, to become as hands of Thy Cause amongst Thy servants, and make them to be revealers of Thy religion and Thy signs amongst mankind, in such wise that the whole world may be filled with Thy remembrance and praise and with Thy proofs and evidences. Thou art, verily, the All-Bounteous, the Most Exalted, the Powerful, the Mighty, and the Merciful.

#19 In the Name of Him Who hath been promised in the Books of God, the All-Knowing, the All-Informed! The days of fasting have arrived wherein those servants who circle round Thy throne and have attained Thy presence have fasted. Say: O God of names and creator of heaven and earth! I beg of Thee by Thy Name, the All-Glorious, to accept the fast of those who have fasted for love of Thee and for the sake of Thy good-pleasure and have carried out what Thou hast bidden them in Thy Books and Tablets. I beseech Thee by them to assist

me in the promotion of Thy Cause and to make me steadfast in Thy love, that my footsteps may not slip on account of the clamor of Thy creatures. Verily, Thou art powerful over whatsoever Thou willest. No God is there but Thee, the Quickener, the All-Powerful, the Most Bountiful, the Ancient of Days.

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### Your personal prayers

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### Reflection on the Text

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*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*

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### 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
- Readjust our inner life
- Refresh and reinvigorate our souls