

THE ETERNAL EXAMPLE

# *Devotion*

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QUOTATIONS

*M*ake firm our steps, O Lord, in Thy path and strengthen Thou our hearts in Thine obedience. Turn our faces toward the beauty of Thy oneness, and gladden our bosoms with the signs of Thy divine unity. Adorn our bodies with the robe of Thy bounty, and remove from our eyes the veil of sinfulness, and give us the chalice of Thy grace; that the essence of all beings may sing Thy praise before the vision of Thy grandeur. Reveal then Thyself, O Lord, by Thy merciful utterance and the mystery of Thy divine being, that the holy ecstasy of prayer may fill our souls—a prayer that shall rise above words and letters and transcend the murmur of syllables and sounds—that all things may be merged into nothingness before the revelation of Thy splendor.

*Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'i Prayers*

*P* rayer and supplication are two wings whereby man soars toward the heavenly mansion of the True One. However, verbal repetition of prayer does not suffice. One must live in a continual attitude of prayer. When man is spiritually free his mind becomes the altar of prayer and his heart the sanctuary of prayer.

*Words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: From the Diary of Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, September 8, 1914.*

*T*his is worship: to serve mankind and to minister to the needs of the people. Service is prayer. A physician ministering to the sick, gently, tenderly, free from prejudice and believing in the solidarity of the human race, he is giving praise.

*'Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks*

... *A*rts, sciences and all crafts are (counted as) worship. The man who makes a piece of notepaper to the best of his ability, conscientiously, concentrating all his forces on perfecting it, is giving praise to God. 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.

*'Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks*

*I* rejoice to hear that thou takest pains with thine art, for in this wonderful new age, art is worship. The more thou strivest to perfect it, the closer wilt thou come to God. What bestowal could be greater than this, that one's art should be even as the act of worshipping the Lord? That is to say, when thy fingers grasp the paintbrush, it is as if thou wert at prayer in the Temple.

*Extract from a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*

**B**ahá'u'lláh has even said that occupation and labor are devotion. All humanity must obtain a livelihood by sweat of the brow and bodily exertion, at the same time seeking to lift the burden of others, striving to be the source of comfort to souls and facilitating the means of living. This in itself is devotion to God. Bahá'u'lláh has thereby encouraged action and stimulated service. But the energies of the heart must not be attached to these things; the soul must not be completely occupied with them. Though the mind is busy, the heart must be attracted toward the Kingdom of God in order that the virtues of humanity may be attained from every direction and source.

*'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace*



*A*utomatic, formalistic prayers which do not touch the core of the heart are of no avail. How sweet, how delicious, how satisfying, how spiritual is prayer in the middle of the night! While all the eyes are closed the eyes of the worshipper are wide open. While all the ears are stopped the ears of the suppliant are attuned to the subtle music of God. While the majority of the people are fast asleep the adorer of the Ideal Beloved is wakeful. All around him there is a rare and delicate silence, deep, airy, ethereal silence, calm, magical and subtle—and there is the worshipper, communing with nature and the author of nature.

*Words of Abdul-Baha: From the Diary of Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, September 8, 1914.*

*I*t is with the tongue that man expresses his feelings to another man. But with the language of the heart man prays to God. Though God is within the heart of man, is ever present in every place, yet man lifts up his eyes to heaven and prays as if God were there, seated upon a throne. Surely this is pure superstition! Why should he utter the words, “O heavenly Father?” Why should it be necessary for him to repeat prayers aloud and with the tongue? One reason for this is that if the heart alone is speaking the mind can be more easily disturbed. But repeating the words so that the tongue and heart act together enables the mind to become concentrated. Then the whole man is surrounded by the spirit of prayer and the act is more perfect.

Another reason is that by the outward signs of entering into his room and praying the attention of others is attracted and they begin to ask, “Why does he do this?” and are aroused to enquire about the truth.

*Words of Abdul-Baha: from notes of Mrs. L. A. C. Dreyfus-Barney*

*M*an may say, “I can pray to God whenever I wish, when the feelings of my heart are drawn to God; when I am in the wilderness, when I am in the city, or wherever may be. Why should I go where others are gathered upon a special day, at a certain hour, to unite my prayers with theirs when I may not be in a frame of mind for praying?” To think in this way is useless imagination for where many are gathered together their force is greater. Separate soldiers fighting alone and individually have not the force of a united army. If all the soldiers in this spiritual war gather together then their united spiritual feelings help each other and their prayers become more acceptable.

*Words of Abdul-Baha: from notes of Mrs. L. A. C. Dreyfus-Barney*

**O**bligatory 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.

*From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*

*F*or 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.

*From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*

*H*e is the Compassionate, the All-Bountiful! O God, my God!  
Thou seest me, Thou knowest me; Thou art my Haven and my Refuge.  
None have I sought nor any will I seek save Thee; no path have I  
trodden nor any will I tread but the path of Thy love. In the darksome  
night of despair, my eye turneth expectant and full of hope to the  
morn of Thy boundless favor and at the hour of dawn my drooping  
soul is refreshed and strengthened in remembrance of Thy beauty and  
perfection. He whom the grace of Thy mercy aideth, though he be but  
a drop, shall become the boundless ocean, and the merest atom which  
the outpouring of Thy loving-kindness assisteth, shall shine even as the  
radiant star.

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Shelter under Thy protection, O Thou Spirit of purity, Thou Who art the All-Bountiful Provider, this enthralled, enkindled servant of Thine. Aid him in this world of being to remain steadfast and firm in Thy love and grant that this broken-winged bird attain a refuge and shelter in Thy divine nest that abideth upon the celestial tree.

*Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í Prayers*

**O** thou who art turning thy face towards God! Close thine eyes to all things else, and open them to the realm of the All-Glorious. Ask whatsoever thou wishest of Him alone; seek whatsoever thou seekest from Him alone. With a look He granteth a hundred thousand hopes, with a glance He healeth a hundred thousand incurable ills, with a nod He layeth balm on every wound, with a glimpse He freeth the hearts from the shackles of grief. He doeth as He doeth, and what recourse have we? He carrieth out His Will, He ordaineth what He pleaseth. Then better for thee to bow down thy head in submission, and put thy trust in the All-Merciful Lord.

*Selections From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*



*M*ake firm our steps, O Lord, in Thy path and strengthen Thou our hearts in Thine obedience. Turn our faces toward the beauty of Thy oneness, and gladden our bosoms with the signs of Thy divine unity. Adorn our bodies with the robe of Thy bounty, and remove from our eyes the veil of sinfulness, and give us the chalice of Thy grace; that the essence of all beings may sing Thy praise before the vision of Thy grandeur. Reveal then Thyself, O Lord, by Thy merciful utterance and the mystery of Thy divine being, that the holy ecstasy of prayer may fill our souls—a prayer that shall rise above words and letters and transcend the murmur of syllables and sounds—that all things may be merged into nothingness before the revelation of Thy splendor.

*Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'i Prayers*

The image features a dark, textured background with a grid pattern. A yellow rectangular frame is centered on the page. The word "STORIES" is written in white, uppercase letters in the center of the frame.

STORIES

**W**hen ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was in New York, He called to him an ardent Bahá’í 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.

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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 lighted by a new peace. 'Abdu'l-Bahá had taught him to pray!

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The “Master of Akka” 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!”

*Annamarie Honnold, Vignettes from the Life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, no. 27*



REFLECTIONS

*Why is devotion to God important to us? What is different about work, art, and service when offered in a spirit of worship?*

*Do you pray? When was the last time you really felt your prayers? What was it that made it a spiritual experience, rather than merely a routine practice?*



*How is collective worship different from individual worship? When have you felt the power of collective prayer? What made it so powerful for you? What practical steps are there to make this happen more often?*

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