

But how can we know God? Is not God far away? Infinite? Unknowable? Of course, God, Who fashioned the universe with its galaxies, in which the whole earth is but a speck of dust, and yet Who created all the intricate living organisms upon the face of the earth, Who created the thinking and feeling being we call man. God cannot be comprehended. He cannot be encompassed by the human mind.

One of the prayers of Bahá'u'lláh, in referring to God, declares:

"Whomsoever Thou wiliest Thou causest to draw nigh unto the Most Great Ocean, and on whomsoever Thou desirest Thou conferest the honor of recognizing Thy Most Ancient Name. Of all who are in heaven and on earth, none can withstand the operation of Thy sovereign Will." [5] That portion of the prayer acknowledges God to be beyond human comprehension, but Bahá'u'lláh goes on to pray for the measure of knowledge which man can have of God: "illumine, O Lord, the faces of Thy servants, that they may behold Thee; and cleanse their hearts that they may turn unto the court of Thy heavenly favors and recognize Him Who is the Manifestation of Thy Self and the Dayspring of Thine Essence." [6]

How may we know God? By becoming illumined. By cleansing our hearts and turning to God's Mediator. By recognizing His heavenly Messengers. This is a subject that needs careful study, meditation, and prayer. God manifests Himself in certain Men Who reflect His attributes as mirrors reflect the sun. Jesus declared, "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father"[7] Bahá'u'lláh taught, in speaking of all the Manifestations: "These sanctified Mirrors are, one and all, the Exponents on earth of Him Who is the central Orb of the universe, its Essence and ultimate Purpose." [8] Whatever our thoughts of God, they are our own imagination, except as they are guided by God's Spokesmen. It assists us to approach God if we center our thoughts on Those Who have manifested Him, Who mirror God for mankind.

THE NEARNESS OF GOD

Bahá'u'lláh further taught that although God is beyond the comprehension of any man, yet He is near to every one of us.

"O Son of Being! Love Me, that I may love thee. If thou lovest Me not, My love can in no wise reach thee. Know this, O servant." [9] It is as if the light of the love of God were within us all of the time; but unless we turn the switch, we can never be illumined by His love. We are surrounded by God's love; but unless we are aware of it, we are not made happy by it.

Another prayer of Bahá'u'lláh teaches the readiness of God to hear our prayers:

Thou art, in truth, He Whose mercy hath encompassed all the worlds, and Whose grace hath embraced all that dwell on earth and in heaven. Who is there that hath cried after Thee, and whose prayer hath remained unanswered? Where is he to be found who hath reached forth towards Thee, and whom Thou hast failed to approach? Who is he that can claim to have fixed his gaze upon Thee, and toward whom the eve of Thy loving-kindness hath not been directed? I bear witness that

Thou hadst turned toward Thy servants ere they had turned toward Thee, and hadst remembered them ere they had remembered Thee. All grace is Thine, O Thou in Whose hand is the Kingdom of Divine gifts and the source of every irrevocable decree. [10]

THE POWER OF REVEALED PRAYERS

Because the Messenger of God speaks not of Himself, but for God, He teaches us the kind of prayers that are acceptable to God. It was never intended that we should not pray out of our own needs or our own full hearts, but the volumes of revealed prayers give us an education as to the nature of God. They give us courage to pray for things for which we might hesitate to pray were it not for the assurance, "Thy might, verily, is equal to all things." [11]

One of Bahá'u'lláh's prayers begins by expressing this idea of God's infinite mercy and His absolute power: "Thou art He, O my God, through Whose names the sick are healed and the ailing are restored, and the thirsty are given drink, and the sore-vexed are tranquilized, and the wayward are guided, and the abased are exalted, and the poor are enriched, and the ignorant are enlightened, and the gloomy are illumined, and the sorrowful are cheered, and the chilled are warmed, and the downtrodden are raised up." [12]

THE HEALING POWER

Most people, in thinking of the power of prayer, want to know whether prayer will heal the sick and answer the needs of their lives. In prayer we are given the bounty of being able to ask for whatever our heart desires, whether it is for healing for our selves or another, for the material necessities of life, or for the spiritual awakening of ourselves or our loved ones. The power of God is ready to be channeled through our prayers.

Healing is both physical and spiritual. If our illness has a physical cause, the healing is accomplished by God through the medicine or surgery our physician recommends, through diet or change of climate, and through prayer. If, however, our illness has a spiritual cause, prayer is the most important factor in effecting a cure. In one of the short healing prayers of Bahá'u'lláh, healing is shown as coming only when we turn our faces away from the contemplation of our own finite selves and fix our eyes upon the Everlasting Radiance:

Thy Name is my healing, O my God, and remembrance of Thee is my remedy
Nearness to Thee is my hope, and love for Thee is my companion.
Thy mercy to me is my healing and my succor in both this world and the world to come.
Thou, verily, art the All-Bountiful, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. [13]

This prayer teaches that the love which sustains us in this life also sustains us after death, and that healing may be either in this world or the next. Nearness to God is more important than anything else.

Those who doubt the power of God to heal may say, "God created the universe according to certain natural laws. He would not break His own laws to answer

our prayers." They speak only a partial truth. We know only a few of the laws by which God governs the universe. And we know that certain of those laws give way to the operation of higher laws. We know that the law of gravity is one of the fundamental natural laws. But we have learned to use other laws which overcome the force of gravity and allow us to fly large planes. How can we, with our small knowledge, set a limit upon what God can do with His infinite resources, wisdom, and power?

PRAYERS ARE ANSWERED

We can pray with absolute faith and assurance. 'Abdu'l-Bahá declares: "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." [14] Jesus explained that God's answers to our prayers are based upon His love and compassion. Some times the answer which God gives to our prayers is not what we expect. Sometimes the answer is "no." This is not because God does not love us but because we are not always wise in what we ask. "But whatever we ask for, which is in accord with divine wisdom, God will answer. Assuredly!" [15] 'Abdu'l-Bahá said.

"To grow through prayer, we must pray regularly and often. Ideally our thoughts, our words, and our work will be prayer-directed. Until that time when we live, move, and have our being in God, we must at least observe daily prayer. Bahá'u'lláh taught: "Chant (or recite) the words of God every morning and evening. The one who neglects this has not been faithful to the Covenant of God and His agreement, and he who turns away from it today is of those who have turned away from God." [16]

But the manner of our prayer and reading is all-important, for Bahá'u'lláh goes on to say: "To chant but one verse with joy and gladness is better for you than reading all the Revelations of the omnipotent God with carelessness." [17]

Here is an opportunity for us to do some independent investigation. Here we may conduct an experiment by reading some of the Bahá'í prayers over and over until we are familiar with their meaning, then pray them. Let us see if we can thus share the experience of the many others who have felt their souls reach beyond themselves. Let us wait humbly for the power of God to touch our spirits.

A prayer of the Báb is: "Is there any Remover of difficulties save God? Say: Praised be God! He is God! All are His servants, and all abide by His bidding!" [18]

Does this not mean that others may be the instrument by which God answers our prayers? Does it not also follow that we may, if we truly pray, be the means by which God will answer the prayers of others? If prayer is "conversation with God," as 'Abdu'l-Bahá taught, we must listen as well as speak. We should not give orders to God when we pray.

We can be part of the power through which God heals the sick, restores the ailing, gives drink to the thirsty, tranquilizes the sore-vexed, guides the

wayward, exalts the abased, enriches the poor, enlightens the ignorant, illumines the gloomy, cheers the sorrowful, warms the chilled, and raises up the downtrodden.

Shakespeare made a profound observation when he wrote in *The Merchant of Venice*, "We do pray for mercy, [And that same prayer doth teach us all to render / The deeds of mercy." [19] By prayer we become sensitive to opportunities to fulfill our own prayers and the prayers of others.

The most satisfying prayer is the one in which we surrender ourselves completely to God. This surrendering to God means our fulfillment. It is like the plant surrendering to sunshine and rain, like the child surrendering to education, like the patient surrendering to the physician, like the part surrendering to the whole. It is our spiritual perfecting. It is the path to happiness.

Notes

1. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, rev. ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1952), p. 215.
2. J. E. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era. An Introduction to the Bahá'í Faith*, 3d rev. ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970), p. 88.
3. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, pp. 294-95.
4. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in 1911-1912*, 11th ed. (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969), p. 166.
5. Bahá'u'lláh, in *Bahá'u'lláh, The Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í Prayers: A Selection of the Prayers Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, The Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, rev. ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970), p. 57.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.
7. John 14:9.
8. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 47.
9. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, rev. ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1954), p. 5.
10. Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1938), p. 254.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 236.
13. Bahá'u'lláh, in *Bahá'í Prayers*, p. 36.
14. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Discourses by*

‘Abdu’l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States in 1912, [rev. ed.] in
1 vol. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Committee, 1943), p. 241.

15. Ibid., p. 242.

16. Bahá’u’lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, in Esslemont, Bahá’u’lláh and the
New Era, p. 92.

17. Ibid.

18. The Báb, in Bahá’í Prayers, p. 106.

19. The Merchant of Venice, act 4, Sc. 1, lines 200-02.

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