

words denoting two different religious activities, salat, which is obligatory prayer, and du`a' or munajat, which is devotional prayer. Many of the regulations and teachings relating to prayer apply only to the former. Such distinctions are not always clear in translations.

1. Teachings about prayer

The Bahá'í writings teach that the impulse to pray is natural and that prayer is essential to the development of spirituality. However, it is not the physical act of praying but the spiritual state induced by prayer that is important. Thus, Bahá'u'lláh stresses that brief and joyful prayer is superior to long but wearying prayer. Though prayer may be efficacious in obtaining specific material ends, it is more important to pray for conformity to the Will of God. The highest prayer is offered only out of love for God, without any other hope or fear. Nevertheless, prayer must be linked with practical measures to attain the goals sought. Prayer is essential to any undertaking and attracts the confirmations of God. Bahá'í prayer may be addressed to Bahá'u'lláh, which Shoghi Effendi recommends, to other Manifestations of God, to `Abdu'l-Baha, or to God Himself.

2. Obligatory prayer

(Arab. salat, Pers. namaz) The most important kind of Bahá'í prayer is the daily obligatory prayer. Its purpose is to cultivate humility and devotion. The obligatory prayers and fasting are the most important ritual obligations of Bahá'ís, and the Bahá'í writings warn strongly against neglecting them or minimizing their importance. Unlike almost all other forms of Bahá'í prayer, specific regulations govern the performance of the obligatory prayers. Obligatory prayer is a personal spiritual obligation, meaning that no communal or administrative sanctions can be brought through failure to perform it. The only penalty for failure to observe this law is a spiritual one.

a. History

The original Bahá'í obligatory prayer, mentioned in the Kitab-i-Aqdas, which involved nine cycles of movement starting with a bow (rak`ah) and was to be said morning, noon, and afternoon--probably three rak`ahs at each time. Bahá'u'lláh revealed the text but did not release it in order to avoid provoking conflict with Muslims. This prayer was one of the documents in the strongbox taken by `Abdu'l-Bahá's brothers shortly after the death of Bahá'u'lláh. Some time later--after the writing of the Kitab-i-Aqdas but before that of its supplement Questions and Answers--Bahá'u'lláh wrote a second set of obligatory prayers, which are in use today. Three alternative forms were provided: a very short prayer to be said between noon and sunset; a somewhat longer prayer to be said in the morning, the afternoon, and the evening; and a long prayer to be said once during twenty-four hours.

b. Exemptions

Obligatory prayer is binding on all Bahá'ís between the ages of fifteen and seventy with the exception of the sick, though partial exemptions apply to travelers and menstruating women. For each prayer missed by travelers and others who are prevented from praying by some condition of "insecurity", they are to prostrate themselves, upon completing their journey or reaching a suitable place, and say "Glorified be God, the Lord of Might and Majesty, of Grace and Bounty." After completing the required number of prostrations, they are to sit cross-legged and repeat eighteen times "Glorified be God, the Lord of the kingdoms of earth and heaven." Menstruating women are exempt provided that between noon of one day the next they perform ablutions and say ninety-five times "Glorified be God, the Lord of Splendor and Beauty."

c. Prohibition of congregational prayer

Bahá'u'lláh confirmed the Bab's prohibition of congregational obligatory prayer (i.e. the collective performance of the prayers, such as is practiced in Islam). The prohibition only applies to the daily obligatory prayers, not to any other Bahá'í prayers. The obligatory prayer does not necessarily have to be said in private, however.

d. Ablutions

Ablutions must be performed before each obligatory prayer. (For details see "Cleanliness, purity and refinement.3") The prayer must be said in a clean place, though Bahá'u'lláh abolishes all the specific Islamic and Babi regulations governing this. Unlike Islamic obligatory prayer, Bahá'í obligatory prayers are not invalidated by the worshipper's contact with bone, fur, and other such things.

e. Qiblih (point of adoration, i.e., the direction to face in prayer)

The Bab had specified that in prayer believers should face He Whom God shall make manifest. Thus during his lifetime Bahá'ís prayed facing the person of Bahá'u'lláh. `Abdu'l-Bahá later explained that after Bahá'u'lláh's death, the qiblih was Bahá'u'lláh's shrine and that a tablet explaining this existed but had been stolen by Covenant-breakers. Facing the qiblih is obligatory for all three obligatory prayers.

f. Details of the three prayers

Unlike most other Bahá'í prayers, the obligatory prayers include specific rules for postures and gestures during the prayers. These motions are part of the obligatory prayer and are themselves obligatory, except in the case where an individual is physically incapable of performing them. Shoghi Effendi states that the motions and postures are symbolic and are aids to concentration in the prayers. The short obligatory prayer is a brief affirmation of the supreme power of God

and the servitude of the worshipper. It is should be said while standing in an attitude of humility before God. It is to be said between noon and sunset and is thus commonly called "the noon prayer." The medium obligatory prayer, which is said three times daily (between the first light of dawn and the astronomical noon, between noon and sunset, and between sunset and two hours after sunset), consists of four paragraphs. The first is said standing facing the qiblah, the second bowed with hands on the knees, the third standing with the palms facing upward, and the fourth sitting-- preferably on the floor rather than on a chair. Shorter, alternative forms are supplied for the first and fourth paragraphs. The text of the prayer stresses the loftiness and power of God and His grace shown through revelation. The long obligatory prayer, which is said once in twenty-four hours, consists of fifteen parts of various lengths, each of which is to be said in a particular posture. These postures are the same as in the medium prayer with the addition of prostration. The prayer also calls for the Greatest Names in the form "Allah-u-Abha" to be said at several points. One instruction calls for the worshiper to "raise his hands thrice and say: Greater is God than every great one!" Shoghi Effendi explained that the phrase is to be repeated each time the hands are raised. In high latitudes, where days can be very long or short, prayer times may be fixed by the clock rather than determined by sunrise and sunset. The obligatory prayers may be said aloud or silently. The worshiper is free to read in addition any other prayers and selections from Bahá'í scripture that he or she may wish.

3. Devotional Prayer

Most Bahá'í prayers are of the type called du`a' (literally, invocation or supplication [addressed to God]) or munajat (literally, a private and confidential talk [with God]). They are thus prayers for private devotions. Bahá'u'lláh, the Bab, `Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi wrote thousands of prayers, many originally included in letters to individuals. These prayers are in Arabic and Persian (`Abdu'l-Bahá wrote a few in Turkish). Many of these prayers, except those of Shoghi Effendi, have been translated into English.

a. Description and contents

There is considerable variation in form and content of Bahá'í prayers. A typical prayer begins with the invocation of several attributes of God. There is then a statement of praise, a request for something, such as divine guidance or spiritual protection. The prayer concludes with a list of God's attributes. Each element can be elaborated, repeated, or omitted. The imagery is often striking, drawing on the imagery of Islamic religious literature and Persian poetry. The prayers are thus much more diverse than this simple formula would indicate. Most prayers are rather general statements of praise and desire for spiritual qualities, but many are for specific purposes. Most Bahá'í prayers are in a classical Arabic style reminiscent of the Qur'an and the Shi`i prayers, generally in

a less complicated style than the prayers of the Bab. The tone is austere and lofty.

b. Regulations and Bahá'í practice

There are few specific rules about the use of these prayers, other than the general instructions to maintain dignity and avoid developing ritual. They may be chanted, sung, or repeated. The text should not be changed, even to the extent of changing the number or gender of pronouns. It is permissible to use them as the basis of songs. It is not necessary to face the qiblah. In practice, Bahá'í prayers, when not said in private devotions, are most often recited by one individual while others listen silently. If being recited in the original languages, they are normally chanted. A few prayers have been set to music in English and other languages. Because Bahá'ís believe that the prayers of Bahá'u'lláh, the Bab, and `Abdu'l-Bahá are the word of God, they are thought to have special spiritual power. Thus most Bahá'í private prayer and almost all public prayer consists of their recitation. Prayer using one's own words is permissible, however.

4. Other required prayers and observances

There are a few other required prayers and related observances.

a. Prayer for the dead

This is also an obligatory prayer (salat). Unlike the daily obligatory prayers, it is to be said in congregation; one person recites it while the congregation stand. (See "Funeral Laws.")

b. Repetition of Allah-u-Abha

The last remnant of the many daily invocations ordained by the Bab is the requirement to perform ablutions then sit facing the qiblah and repeat "Allah-u-Abha" ("God is Most Glorious") ninety-five times every day. This is usually done after the obligatory prayer, without any need for renewed ablutions.

c. Recitation of verses

Bahá'ís are obliged to recite the sacred text in the morning and evening. Any of the Bahá'í scriptures may be used: i.e., any of the writings of the Bab, Bahá'u'lláh, and `Abdu'l-Bahá of any form. Bahá'u'lláh strongly stresses this obligation in the Kitab-i-Aqdas, saying that whoever does not fulfill it is not faithful to the covenant of God. Elsewhere, Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá state that such recitation should not be so lengthy as to be wearying and dull: it is better to recite a short passage with joy than to wearily repeat whole books. Moreover, the purpose is to understand the texts, not uncomprehending recitation.

5. Optional and popular observances

There are a number of popular Bahá'í devotional practices, some of them lacking strict scriptural authority.

a. Remover of difficulties

This short prayer of the Bab, beginning "Is there any remover of difficulties save God. . ." is frequently recited by Bahá'ís in times of need. Popular practices include the recitation of this prayer in turn by all those present and its recitation nine, nineteen, ninety-five, or five hundred times.

b. Tablet of Ahmad

This tablet, a letter to one Ahmad-i-Yazdi, is stated by Bahá'u'lláh to have special power, especially when recited in times of trouble. (See "Ahmad, Tablet of")

c. Invocations

The several invocations based on the word Baha-- "Allah-u-Abha" and "Ya Baha'u'l-Abha"--and some other invocations such as "Ya'llahu'l-Mustaghat" ("O God on Whom we call for help") and "Ya `Aliyu'l-A`la" ("O Most Exalted One," referring to the Bab) are used, especially in times of difficulty. (See "Name, Greatest")

d. Prayers for specific occasions

A number of prayers (munajat) are for particular circumstances or occasions. These are not obligatory and are of varying importance. These include prayers for the fast and specific holy days, which have an importance nearly equal to the obligatory prayers, and prayers for purposes such as healing, intercession for the dead, safety, removal of difficulties and for particular occasions such as morning, night, leaving the house, and going to bed.

e. Prayer of the Signs

In Islam a special form of obligatory prayer (salat) was to be said when frightening natural events occurred such as earthquakes and eclipses. Bahá'u'lláh abolished this, providing instead the verse "Dominion is God's, the Lord of the seen and the unseen, the Lord of Creation." It is not obligatory, however.

f. Other related observances

Muslims customarily add blessing after mentioning the names of prophets and saints: "May God bless Him and give Him peace" after the name of Muhammad and "May God have mercy on him," after the name of someone deceased, for example. In Persian, Bahá'í formulae such as "May the Glory (baha') of God rest upon him" are used. This is rarely done in Western languages except in translations of the sacred writings.

6. Collective worship

In contemporary practice, there is a wide variability in the stress placed upon collective worship in the Bahá'í Faith. A strict prohibition on the development of ritual not endorsed in the sacred writings prevents the development of liturgy, while the Faith's strong emphasis on social affairs directs attention to other things. Moreover, in the Bahá'í community, collective worship does not serve an essential religious purpose comparable to the sacraments of Christianity or congregational salat in Islam. Consequently, although several occasions for collective worship are ordained in the Bahá'í writings and a number of texts stress its importance, it often remains a somewhat neglected area of Bahá'í life.

a. Morning prayer (mashriqu'l-adhkar)

The one occasion of collective worship specified in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* itself is morning prayer. The believers are encouraged to gather to listen to prayers and scripture in the early morning. This worship service is the main purpose of Bahá'í houses of worship, which are also called *mashriqu'l-adhkar* (literally, dawning-place of the mention of God). Community morning prayers are not common in the contemporary Bahá'í community, although the Universal House of Justice encourages them. (See "*Mashriqu'l-adhkar*.")

b. Nineteen Day Feast

In the contemporary Bahá'í community the main occasion for collective worship is the "devotional portion" of the nineteen day feast. Though based on a law of the Bab, this institution was developed by `Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, who treated it as a way of meeting the spiritual, administrative, and social needs of local Bahá'í communities. The worship service is the first part of the feast and usually consists of prayers and readings from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá. (See "*Feast, Nineteen Day*.")

c. Holy days

Local Bahá'í communities usually have worship services to commemorate the Bahá'í holy days. These are usually much like the worship at nineteen-day feasts, though there is in fact more latitude for variation at holy day observances. There are special prayers for the individual holy days.

d. Other collective worship

Bahá'í communities sometimes have community worship on other occasions. Early in the twentieth century many Bahá'í communities in the West held Sunday morning worship services, but in the U.S.A., this practice had largely died out by the early 1940s. Bahá'í conferences and summer schools usually feature "devotions"--the reading of prayers and scripture, and sometimes songs. Bahá'í meetings of even the most prosaic character invariably begin with one or more prayers. Communities

will sometimes have special prayer meetings, usually in connection with a major project or a crisis. Memorial meetings are sometimes held for prominent believers who have recently died. Such meetings will be held worldwide on the occasion of the death of a major figure such as a Hand of the Cause (q.v.). Families sometimes have devotions, often undertaken as part of the spiritual education of the children.

e. Regulations and customs for collective worship

Bahá'í law, especially as it developed under Shoghi Effendi, strongly discourages the development of ritual. Even practices that are acceptable in themselves--the collective recitation of prayers, for example-- are avoided if they are likely to turn into traditions or rituals. The actual rules limiting Bahá'í worship are not restrictive: the predominant element should be the sacred writings, particularly the writings of the Bab, Bahá'u'lláh, and `Abdu'l-Baha; dignity and simplicity should always be maintained. Prayers and scripture may be chanted or sung. Hymns and poems based on Bahá'í scripture may be used. When the sacred texts and prayers are read, those listening should sit still and silent. (GHA 189) No practice not ordained in the sacred text should be allowed to become a fixed ritual. Current practice is, however, somewhat more limited. In the East, worship consists mainly of chanted prayers. In the West it is usually prayers read by individuals. In the early twentieth century the singing of Bahá'í hymns was common and was encouraged by `Abdu'l-Bahá, but the practice died out around 1940. (Armstrong-Ingram)

7. Publication, translation, and distribution of prayers

Collections of the Bab's and Bahá'u'lláh's prayers certainly circulated in manuscript in their own lifetimes. A collection of important prayers and tablets, *Ad'iyiy-i-Hadrat-i-Mahbub*, still in use, was first published in Egypt in 1911. The American Bahá'ís published a prayer book as early as 1900. The most important collections of Bahá'í prayers in Arabic, Persian, and English are cited in the bibliography. Bahá'í doctrine encourages translations of the sacred writings. Prayers are usually among the first pieces of Bahá'í scripture translated into a language. Beginning with vol. 14 the successive volumes of *Bahá'í World* (q.v.) have included the short obligatory prayer in many languages. It has been translated into at least XXX languages and dialects.

8. Babi prayer

Bahá'í prayer and the laws and customs relating to it develop out of Islamic and Babi prayer. Babi ritual life is saturated in prayer. The Bab's legal works specify dozens of rituals involving prayer. Only a few can be mentioned here.

a. Concept and theology of prayer

The most striking characteristic of prayer in the ritual life ordained by the Bab is its all-pervasive character. In one way or another, the believer is to be in a state of nearly constant remembrance of God: praying, repeating the names of God, reading the writings of the Bab. However, the Bab stresses that prayer and other ritual obligations should not be burdensome and tiring. Prayers should not be of wearisome length. The person who prays should be fervent and attentive. The Bab stresses that prayer should be motivated neither by hope or fear. Prayer should be performed in private so that the worshiper will be able to give it full attention. Finally, like every other aspect of the Bab's religious thought, the efficacy of prayer is conditioned on the approval of Him Whom God shall make manifest (q.v.).

b. Obligatory Prayer (salat)

Distinctive rules for Babi obligatory prayer date from the period of the production of the Bayan after the abrogation of Islamic law. The Bab's obligatory prayer consisted of one prayer of nineteen actions of bowing (rak`ahs) performed between noon and sunset. It is not to be performed in congregation. The Bab appears not to have specified a text, but he does specify that during the first three rak`ahs the worshiper is to testify to the unity of God's essence, in the next four to the unity of His attributes, in the next six to the unity of His actions, and in the last six to the unity of His worship. A shortened form of the obligatory prayer is available for those who are traveling. Although there is only one Babi obligatory prayer, the prayer-call is still to be sounded five times a day, though the text is different from the Muslim prayer-call. There are a variety of specific regulations for obligatory prayer, but nothing like the very detailed regulations found in Islam.

c. Daily rituals

The earliest writings of the Bab contained many prayers intended for specific times, days, months, and festivals. These were extra observances to be added to the strict observance of Islamic law. Later, after the abrogation of Islamic law, the Bab ordained many daily observances; for example: * Each day the believer should recite one name of God ninety-five times. The first day of the month he should say, "God is most glorious (Allahu Abha);" the second day, "God is most mighty (Allahu A`zam);" and the nineteenth day, "God is most ancient (Allahu Aqdam)." Other names such as "God is most great (Allahu Akbar);" "God is most bright (Allahu Anvar);" or "God is most manifest (Allahu Azhar)" may be said on other days, apparently at the believers option. * The believer is to recite at least nineteen verses of the Bayan each day--or seven hundred, according to another passage. * Every Friday the believer is to face the sun and recite a prayer to it. There is a similar monthly prayer to the moon. This is a striking contrast to Islam, which forbids prayer at the moments of sunrise, noon, and sunset in order to avoid any taint of sun-worship.

d. Special prayers

The Bab provided special prayers for particular occasions, notably the obligatory prayers (salat) for the newborn and the dead, both very similar to the Bahá'í prayer for the dead. The prayer for the newborn is based on the number five and the prayer for the dead on six. These numbers correspond to the letters ha and vav respectively, which together form the word huva, "He"-- that is, God--symbolizing that we come from God and return to Him.

e. Devotional Prayer (munajat)

The Bab stated that the Bayan--meaning the whole corpus of his writings--was in five modes, of which the second was prayers, munajat. The Bab wrote hundreds of Arabic prayers. They are in a lofty and intense style and are characterized by a vivid and personal awareness of the might and sublimity of God.

f. Tablets of visitation (see "Visitation, Tablets of.")

g. Collective worship

The Bab prohibited obligatory prayer in congregation and the public recitation of the names of God (dhikr). Nevertheless, the Bab still encouraged the Babis to pray in mosques and shrines and to gather there to hear sermons on Fridays. The prayer for the dead, however, was to be said in congregation.

h. Rhapsodies on Divine Names

There are several works of the Bab, notably the Kitabu'l-Asma' ("Book of Names") and the Panj Sha'n ("Five Styles") that consist largely of extended meditations on particular attributes of God, each of which is repeated in innumerable variations, many of them grammatically innovative. These works, which were very popular among the Babis, are perhaps to be understood as ecstatic rhapsodies, mystical prayers whose recitation creates a mood of spiritual exhilaration.

i. Babi practice

In the short and turbulent history of the Babi religion, there was little time to put into practice the laws of the Bab or even to investigate what they were. It is likely that few of the Bab's prayers or his laws regarding prayer were put into regular use. Most of the Babis clearly continued to perform the Islamic salat, perhaps with the addition of some Babi prayers. There are only scattered references to distinctively Babi practices. Shortly before the Bab's return to Shiraz, one of his followers used the distinctive Babi form of the prayer-call. The Zanjan Babis are said to have publicly recited the works of the Bab. During the battle they chanted what was evidently a variant of the prayer-call given in the Arabic Bayan. It is not clear to what extent the later Azali Babi community practiced these rituals.

See also: "Feast, Nineteen-Day" "Mashriqu'l-Adhkar," "Visitation, Tablets of," "Work, Bahá'í attitude towards." Prayers relating to particular occasions, subjects, persons, and places are discussed under appropriate headings.

Bibliography

Bahá'í prayer:

There are thousands of Bahá'í prayers books in hundreds of languages, as well as prayers scattered throughout Bahá'í scripture. The most important original collections in Arabic and Persian are A. Ishraq-Khavari, *Tasbih va-Tahlil* containing the obligatory prayers and prayers for particular occasions and purposes; *Ad'iyiy-i-Mahbub*, a compact prayer book for daily use; *Nafahatu'r-Rahman*, a collection of devotional prayers reproduced from a MSS of Zaynu'l-Muqarrabin (q.v.); and *Majmu`ih-i-Munajat*, several small volumes of prayers of `Abdu'l-Bahá, the Bab, and Shoghi Effendi.

The most important source for the prayers of Bahá'u'lláh in English is *Prayers and Meditation* (trans. Shoghi Effendi). *Bahá'í Prayers*, an American compilation of prayers for daily use, derived from PM and from other sources. Most prayers in other languages are translated from these two sources.

Babi prayer:

The only systematic study of Babi prayer (and Babi ritual in general) is Denis MacEoin, *Ritual and Semi-Ritual Observances in Babism and Bahá'ism*, Cambridge, 1991. Otherwise, information must be sought in the Bab's own works, for the early period "*Sahifiy-i-Bayna'l-Haramayn*" and "*Sahifiy-i-Makhzunih*" and for the later period the Persian and Arabic *Bayans*. A selection of the prayers of the Bab is found in *SWB*, ch. 7.

On the theology and spiritual value of prayer, see *Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude*, a compilation by the Universal House of Justice, in *CoC XXXX*. Laws and regulations about prayer are found throughout *SCKA*; *GHA*; *AVK* 3:21-153; *LoG* 1479-1539:455-468; *PBA* 7-8.

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