

XLV. REVERENCE AND SPIRITUALITY

Compiled from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, Abdu'l

Original English



XLV. REVERENCE AND SPIRITUALITY

A. Reverence

1. Reverence and Respect Toward the Holy Places

"You have asked about visiting holy places and the observance of marked reverence toward these resplendent spots. Holy places are undoubtedly centres of the outpouring of Divine grace, because on entering the illumined sites associated with martyrs and holy souls, and by observing reverence, both physical and spiritual, one's heart is moved with great tenderness...."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Synopsis and Codification of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, p. 61)

1. The Record of Abdu'l-Bahá's Voice Should Be Listened to with the Utmost Reverence

"...the friends to exercise restraint and caution in the use and distribution of the record of the Master's voice. In my view, it should be used only on special occasions and be listened to with the utmost reverence. The dignity of the Cause, I am sure, would suffer from too wide and indiscriminate use of one of the most precious relics of our departed Master."

(From a letter of Shoghi Effendi, November 26, 1923)

1. Viewing the Film of Abdu'l-Bahá

"Regarding the use of the Master's film, the greatest care must be exercised lest we cheapen its value by too frequent and indiscriminate exhibition either amongst the believers or the non-Bahá'ís. Only on special occasions, such as important anniversaries, should the film be shown and its solemn sacred character should be duly emphasized."

(From a letter of Shoghi Effendi, February 28, 1928)

1. Portrayal of Any of the Manifestations of God Forbidden

"Your understanding that the portrayal of the Bab and Bahá'u'lláh in works of art is forbidden, is correct. The Guardian made it clear that this prohibition refers to all the Manifestations of God; photographs, or reproductions of portraits, of the Master may be used in books, but no attempt should be made to portray Him in dramatic or other works where He would be one of the



ORIGINAL

'dramatic personae'. However, there can be no objection to symbolic representation of such Holy Figures, provided it does not become a ritual and that the symbol used is not irreverent."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice, December 3, 1972)

1. Showing Reverence Differs from Culture to Culture

"Problems arise when there are disagreements among the friends as to what is dignified and reverent. The Universal House of Justice is reluctant to specify such matters [pg 541] in detail and urges the believers not to make an issue of them. If a believer is seriously worried about a particular case, he may refer it to his National Spiritual Assembly and should abide by the Assembly's decision."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, March 12, 1980)

1. Photograph of Bahá'u'lláh

"There is no objection that the believers look at the picture of Bahá'u'lláh, but they should do so with the utmost reverence, and should also not allow that it be exposed openly to the public, even in their private homes."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, December 6, 1939)



B. Spirituality

1. Man is at the Beginning of Spirituality

"Man is the highest degree of materiality, and at the beginning of spirituality — that is to say, he is the end of imperfection and the beginning of perfection. He is at the last degree of darkness, and at the beginning of light; that is why it has been said that the condition of man is the end of the night and the beginning of day, meaning that he is the sum of all the degrees of imperfection, and that he possesses the degrees of perfection. He has the animal side as well as the angelic side, and the aim of an educator is to so train human souls that their angelic aspect may overcome their animal side. Then if the divine power in man, which is his essential perfection, overcomes the satanic powers, which is absolute imperfection, he becomes the most excellent among creatures; but if the satanic power overcomes the divine power, he becomes the lowest of the creatures. That is why he is the end of imperfection and the beginning of perfection. Not in any other of the species in the world of existence is there such a difference, contrast, contradiction and opposition as in the species of man. Thus the reflection of the Divine Light was in man, as in Christ, and see how loved and honoured He is!..."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Some Answered Questions, pp. 235-236, Wilmette, 1984 ed.)

1. Requisites for Spiritual Growth

"Bahá'u'lláh has stated quite clearly in His Writings the essential requisites for our spiritual growth, and these are stressed again and again by Abdu'l-Bahá in His Talks and Tablets. One can summarise them briefly in this way:

1. The recital each day of one of the Obligatory Prayers with pure-hearted devotion.
1. The regular reading of the Sacred Scriptures, specifically at least each morning and evening, with reverence, attention and thought.
1. Prayerful meditation on the teachings, so that we may understand them more deeply, fulfil them more faithfully, and convey them more accurately to others.
1. Striving every day to bring our behaviour more into accordance with the high standards that are set forth in the Teachings.
1. Teaching the Cause of God.
1. Selfless service in the work of the Cause and in the carrying on of our trade or profession."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, September 1, 1983) [pg 542]

1. Points Towards the Attainment of True Spirituality — Spiritual Exercises of Prayer and Meditation

"These points, expressed in other words, have already been conveyed to the friends ... by the Counsellors, but the House of Justice wishes to stress them, because they represent the path towards the attainment of true spirituality that has been laid down by the Manifestation of God for this age."

"It is striking how private and personal the most fundamental spiritual exercises of prayer and meditation are in the Faith. Bahá'ís do, of course, have meetings for devotions, as in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar or at Nineteen Day Feasts, but the daily obligatory prayers are ordained to be said in the privacy of one's chamber, and meditation on the Teachings is, likewise, a private individual activity, not a form of group therapy. In His talks Abdu'l-Bahá describes prayer as 'conversation with God', and concerning meditation He says that 'while you meditate you are speaking with your own spirit. In that state of mind you put certain questions to your spirit and the spirit answers: the light breaks forth and the reality is revealed!'"

(Ibid.)

1. Bahá'u'lláh Specified No Procedure to be Followed in Meditation and No Method Should Be Taught in Summer Schools

"There are, of course, other things that one can do to increase one's spirituality. For example, Bahá'u'lláh has specified no procedures to be followed in meditation, and individual believers are free to do as they wish in this area, provided that they remain in harmony with the teachings,

but such activities are purely personal and should under no circumstances be confused with those actions which Bahá'u'lláh Himself considered to be of fundamental importance for our spiritual growth. Some believers may find that it is beneficial to them to follow a particular method of meditation, and they may certainly do so, but such methods should not be taught at Bahá'í Summer Schools or be carried out during a session of the School because, while they may appeal to some people, they may repel others. They have nothing to do with the Faith and should be kept quite separate so that enquirers will not be confused."

(Ibid.)

1. For Private Meditation, Believer May Desire to Use the Greatest Name

"It would seem that there are ... many believers who draw particular benefit from meditation. The House of Justice suggests that for their private meditations they may wish to use the repetition of the Greatest Name, Allah-u-Abha, ninety-five times a day which, although not yet applied in the West, is among the Laws, Ordinances and Exhortations of the Kitab-i-Aqdas." (See p. 46 of the 'Synopsis and Codification of the Kitab-i-Aqdas'.)

"The House of Justice is confident that if the believers ... will conscientiously strive to increase their spirituality in the six ways outlined above, and become aware in their inmost beings that in all their services they are but vehicles for the confirming power of God, they will attract the hearts of their fellow citizens and penetrate the miasma of materialism that veils the sight of so many of their countrymen. Effort, activity, [pg 543] unity and constant reliance on the power of Bahá'u'lláh will assuredly overcome all obstacles."

(Ibid.)

1. Cleanliness Contributes to Spirituality

"...in every aspect of life, purity and holiness, cleanliness and refinement, exalt the human condition and further the development of man's inner reality. Even in the physical realm, cleanliness will conduce to spirituality, as the Holy Writings clearly state. And although bodily cleanliness is a physical thing, it hath nevertheless, a powerful influence on the life of the spirit...."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 146-147)

1. The Obligatory Prayers and Reading Sacred Scriptures Every Morning and Evening Nourish Growth of Spirituality

"The law of the Obligatory Prayers is, of course, binding on the friends in Europe, and regular, whole-hearted obedience to this law will in itself nourish the growth of spirituality. Nor should the friends neglect Bahá'u'lláh's exhortation to read the Sacred Scriptures every morning and evening."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, March 31, 1983)

1. The Foundation of Spirituality is Steadfastness in the Covenant

"The thing the ... believers must do is to deepen themselves in the Covenants of Bahá'u'lláh and Abdu'l-Bahá. Mere intellectual understanding of the Teachings is not enough. Deep spirituality is essential, and the foundation of true spirituality is steadfastness in the Covenant."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, March 31, 1949)

1. People Are So Markedly Lacking in Spirituality These Days

"People are so markedly lacking in spirituality these days that the Bahá'ís should consciously guard themselves against being caught in what one might call the undertow of materialism and atheism, sweeping the world these days. Skepticism, cynicism, disbelief, immorality and hard-heartedness are rife, and as the friends are those who stand for the antithesis of all these things they should beware lest the atmosphere of the present world affects them without their being conscious of it."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, November 19, 1945)

1. There is a Need for a True Spiritual Awareness

"The need is very great, everywhere in the world, in and outside the Faith, for a true spiritual awareness to pervade and motivate peoples' lives. No amount of administrative procedure or adherence to rules can take the place of this soul-characteristic, this spirituality which is the essence of Man. He is very glad to see you are stressing this and aiding the friends to realize its supreme importance."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, April 25, 1945) [pg 544]

1. Spiritual Education and Progress Depend on Recognition of the Infallibility of the Manifestation of God

"Regarding your Bahá'í friend who does not fully understand the infallibility of the Manifestation of God: You should influence that person to study the matter more deeply, and to realize that the whole theory of Divine Revelation rests on the infallibility of the Prophet, be He Christ, Muhammad, Bahá'u'lláh, or one of the Others. If They are not infallible, then They are not divine, and thus lose that essential link with God which, we believe, is the bond that educates men and causes all human progress."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, January 11, 1942)

1. Prayer Absolutely Indispensable — To Attain Spirituality

"...How to attain spirituality is indeed a question to which every young man and woman must sooner or later try to find a satisfactory answer. It is precisely because no such satisfactory answer has been given or found, that the modern youth finds itself bewildered, and is being consequently carried away by the materialistic forces that are so powerfully undermining the foundations of man's moral and spiritual life... It is this condition, so sadly morbid, into which society has fallen, that religion seeks to improve and transform."

"For the core of religious faith is that mystic feeling which unites man with God. This state of spiritual communion can be brought about and maintained by means of meditation and prayer. And this is the reason why Bahá'u'lláh has so much stressed the importance of worship."

"It is not sufficient for a believer merely to accept and observe the teachings. He should, in addition, cultivate the sense of spirituality which he can acquire chiefly by means of prayer..."

"The believers, particularly the young ones, should therefore fully realize the necessity of praying. For prayer is absolutely indispensable to their inner spiritual development, and this, as already stated, is the very foundation and purpose of the religion of God."

(From a letter of the Guardian to an individual believer, December 8, 1935: Bahá'í Youth, p. 10) [pg 545]

