

needs the emphasis of the love of God, but some cast about for a lifetime, failing to find this Holy Grail of spiritual health and joy. Just as bodies are sometimes lacking in the food elements that produce health, the soul sometimes stands in need of a divine physician who can prescribe the missing elements for spiritual success. The few thoughts given here are chosen from the unlimited mine of wisdom and explanation offered in the Bahá'í Writings. Space permits mention of only a few.

Power through prayer

Faculties long allowed to rust must be called into activity. Man becomes like a stone unless he continually supplicates to God. Prayer is the great quickener. There is no human being who is not in need of prayer. 'Abdu'l-Bahá said, "O thou spiritual friend! Thou hast asked the wisdom of prayer. Know thou that prayer is indispensable and obligatory, and man under no pretext whatsoever is excused from performing the prayer unless he be mentally unsound, or an insurmountable obstacle prevent him." The sincere seeker, however, often asks, "Why pray, since God knows our needs?" In response, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá mention many of the benefits of prayer:

1. Connection with God

"The wisdom of prayer is this: That it causeth a connection between the servant and the True One, because in that state man with all heart and soul turneth his face towards His Highness the Almighty, seeking His association and desiring His love and compassion."

2. Divine Companionship

"Verily He responds unto those who invoke Him, is near unto those who pray unto Him. And He is thy Companion in every loneliness, and befriends every exile."

3. Joy

"Know thou that supplication and prayer is the Water of Life. It is the cause of the vivification of existence and brings glad tidings and joy to the soul."

"Know that in every home where God is praised and prayed to, and His Kingdom proclaimed, that home is a garden of God and a paradise of His happiness."

4. Healing

"There are two ways of healing sickness, material means and spiritual means. The first is by the use of remedies, of medicines; the second consists in praying to God and in turning to Him. Both means should be used and practiced ... Moreover, they are not contradictory, and thou shouldst accept the physical remedies as coming from the mercy and favor of God..."

"O thou pure and spiritual one! Turn thou toward God with thy heart beating with His love, devoted to His praise, gazing toward His Kingdom and seeking help from His Holy Spirit in a state of ecstasy, rapture, love, yearning, joy and fragrance. God will assist thee, through a Spirit from His Presence, to heal sickness and disease."

"Continue in healing hearts and bodies and seek healing for sick persons by turning unto the Supreme Kingdom and by setting the heart upon Obtaining healing through the power of the Greatest Name and by the spirit of the love of God."

5. Protection

"Besides all this, prayer and fasting is the cause of awakening and mindfulness and conducive to protection and preservation from tests."

6. Removal of Difficulties

"Is there any remover of difficulties save God! Say, Praise be to God! He is God! All are His servants and all abide by His bidding."

"Say, God sufficeth all things above all things, and nothing in the heavens or in the earth but God sufficeth. Verily, He is in Himself, the Knower, the Sustainer, the Omnipotent."

7. Increased capacity

"By these attractions one's ability and capacity increase. When the vessel is widened the water increaseth and when the thirst grows, the bounty of the cloud becomes agreeable to the taste of man. This is the mystery of supplication and the wisdom of stating one's wants."

8. Effect upon the World

"Intone, O My servant, the verses of God that have been received by thee, as intoned by them who have drawn nigh unto Him, that the sweetness of thy melody may kindle thine own soul, and attract the hearts of all men. Whoso reciteth, in the privacy of his chamber, the verses revealed by God, the scattering angels of the Almighty shall scatter abroad the fragrance of the words uttered by his mouth, and shall cause the heart of every righteous man to throb."

9. Intercession

"Those who have ascended have different attributes from those who are still on earth, yet there is no real separation. In prayer there is a mingling of station, a mingling of condition. Pray for them as they pray for you."

Asked whether it was possible through faith and love to bring the New Revelation to the knowledge of those who have departed from this life without having heard of it, 'Abdu'l-Bahá replied, "Yes, surely! since sincere prayer always has its effect, and it has a great influence in the other world. We are never cut off from those who are there. The real and genuine influence is not in this world but in that other."

"He who lives according to what was ordained for him - the Celestial Concourse, and the people of the Supreme Paradise, and those who are dwelling in the Dome of Greatness will pray for him, by a Command from God, the Dearest and the praiseworthy."

"O Thou Omnipotent Lord! In this great dispensation Thou dost accept the

intercession of the sons and daughters in behalf of their parents. This is one of the special, infinite bestowals of this cycle. Therefore, O Thou kind Almighty, accept the request of this Thy servant at the threshold of Thy singleness and submerge my mother in the ocean of Thy Graces."

The science of going about prayer is so little understood that we find ourselves, in the words of Tennyson:

"A child crying in the night,
A child crying for the light,
And with no language but a cry."

'Abdu'l-Bahá suggested that there were four wonderful qualities that could help us to pray. The first is a detached spirit. It is a little like closing a window to the noises of the street, that the strains of the violin within the room may not be lost. The second is unconditional surrender of our own wills to the Will of God. This is very subtle and very difficult, for the self is inclined to argue with God and to rationalize its own desires, putting them always first. How few have the singular purity of the child who wanted a horse more than anything else in the world, and decided to pray for it. After a time her father said, "God did not answer your prayer, did He?" "But of course He did," she said simply, "He said no!" Concentrated attention is the third quality, and the fourth, true spiritual passion, that ardor and devotion which distinguishes the apostle from the multitude. Surely God will raise to His very Presence the least peasant who whole-heartedly casts himself at His feet, in preference to the kings of the earth who are complacent. In the highest prayer, man prays only for the love of God.

The actual words help concentration. It is good to repeat the words so that the tongue and heart act together and the mind is better able to concentrate. Then the whole man is surrounded by the spirit of prayer. The communes of Bahá'u'lláh are like invigorating breezes; there is great power in using them aloud, for the exalted pen of a Manifestation of God is a source of power in the world. Prayer may be likened to a song; both words and music make the song.

If prayer is to become a guiding force, a protection, a joy, and the source of divine companionship, it must become a habit. How often a human being waits for the vicissitudes of life to drive him Godward when in reality the harmony, health, and full victory lie in continual praise and supplication. One needs to be in a perennial state of prayer. "The greatest happiness for a lover is to converse with his beloved..."

Victorious Living

A man's goal is God. He is born to tread the Path to God. In the words of Baha'u'llah, "The purpose of God in creating man hath been, and will ever be, to enable him to know his Creator and to attain His Presence."

Success depends upon surrender to God at every turn. "O thou who hast surrendered thy will to God!" wrote Baha'u'llah, "By self-surrender and

perpetual union with God is meant that men should merge their will wholly in the Will of God, and regard their desires as utter nothingness beside His Purpose." This is the secret of happiness. "The liberty that profiteth you is to be found nowhere except in complete servitude unto God, the Eternal Truth. Whoso hath tasted of its sweetness will refuse to barter it for all the dominion of earth and heaven."

Those on the Path are conscious of this joy. They have a sense of victory that no circumstance, however ruthless, is able to destroy. When the earliest Bahá'í pilgrims found their way to the prison city of 'Akka, 'Abdu'l-Bahá would often call in such radiant souls as the aged Haydar-'Ali, who, because of his great suffering and saintly character, was called the angel of 'Akka. When the American visitors seemed discontented with their lot, 'Abdu'l-Bahá would say that Haydar-'Ali had also suffered; that he had been dragged across a desert with his head in a sack! But Haydar-'Ali made always the same reply, "I have known only the joy of serving my Lord."

Lady Blomfield, foremost early Bahá'í of England, records the tender moments when 'Abdu'l-Bahá made His journey through the West, and interviewed, under her own roof, so many of the thoughtful of that land. When the people said, "We are glad, oh! so glad that you are free," He replied:

"To me prison was freedom.

Troubles are a rest to me.

Death is life.

To be despised is honor.

Therefore I was full of happiness all through that prison time.

When one is released from the prison of self, that is indeed freedom! For self is the greatest prison.

When this release takes place, one can never be imprisoned. Unless one accepts dire vicissitudes, not with dull resignation, but with radiant acquiescence, one cannot attain this freedom."

Martha Root, greatest of the first-century Bahá'í teachers, knew the secret. On her last historic journey through the West, she was asked the secret of her success and happiness. This plain little woman who had stood before queens and emperors with such undeniable power, replied thoughtfully, "It is important to find out God's first choice about everything. Then the bounties flow, the hearts are made happy, and the spirit of attraction is at work."

Such a soul has nothing to fear. There is no circumstance that cannot be used for progress on the Path to God. "Nothing save that which profiteth them can befall My loved ones," testified Bahá'u'lláh. "The sea of joy yearneth to attain your presence, for every good thing hath been created for you, and will, according to the needs of the times, be revealed unto you."

Radiant acquiescence to the Will of God means obedience to His Commands and

contentment in all that befalls, but it never means inertia, laziness, and slothful living. Activity in God's Will is the law of victory. God can no more guide an inactive soul than a man can guide a car while it stands by the side of the road, inert. "Pray and act," Martha would say. Action attracts the answer to the prayer. That is the reason for the importance of deeds in victorious living. 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote, "By faith is meant, first, conscious knowledge, and second, the practice of good deeds." These deeds are the wealth of the friends of God.

Those who have arisen to teach these truths have all experienced the confirming power of assistance which Bahá'u'lláh promised to His sincere servants. "A company of Our chosen angels shall go forth with them, as bidden by Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Wise ... If he be kindled with the fire of His love, . . . the words he uttereth shall set on fire them that hear him. Verily thy Lord is the Omniscient, the All-Informed. Happy is the man that hath heard Our voice and answered Our call. He, in truth, is of them that shall be brought nigh unto us."

Even daily work done in the spirit of service is an important part of victorious living, for it is accounted by Bahá'u'lláh as worship. He writes, "We have made this, your occupation, identical with the worship of God, the True One." Living apart for pious worship is therefore discouraged. As Jesus gave His life to men in the market places, so must our spirituality find practical expression among the people.

No life is victorious that cannot live with its fellows. "Blessed is he who mingleth with all men in a spirit of utmost kindness and love." A Bahá'í drops away all forms of arrogance. His door is open to black and white, rich and poor, fellow countryman and foreign born. "Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony . . . So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth." The practice of social unity by a mere handful of the champions of God must slowly give rise to the harmony of the race.

Immortality

The Path to God is a stream of upward consciousness; it does not end with this small world. Our existence here may be likened to an acorn which, if quickened with life, becomes an oak. Or it may be likened to a child in the matrix of the mother as it develops its faculties of sight, hearing, and the like, for use in this world. So does the soul treat this world as a place of beginning in which it develops its spiritual faculties for use in all the worlds of God. The Word of God quickens the soul as the spring sunshine quickens the acorn, and from a single Word of even one of the Prophets or Manifestations of God, a soul may attain to the stream of consciousness. Many are the assurances of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá concerning this journey for the soul who faithfully sets out on the path to God.

First we must know that there is continuance. The true believer will "eternally live and endure. His spirit will everlastingly circle round the Will of God. He

will last as long as God, Himself, will last . . . It is evident that the loftiest mansions in the Realm of Immortality have been ordained as the habitation of them that have truly believed in God and in His signs. Death can never invade that holy seat."

The other world is a world of knowledge and memory. "Undoubtedly the holy souls who find a pure eye and are favored with insight will in the kingdom of lights be acquainted with all mysteries, and will seek the bounty of witnessing the reality of every great soul. Even they will manifestly behold the Beauty of God in that world." "The mysteries of which man is heedless in this earthly world, those will he discover in the heavenly world, and there will he be informed of the secret of truth; how much more will he recognize or discover persons with whom he hath been associated."

Not a static heaven, but a busy, active condition, bright with growth and progress, is visualized for us by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Those who have passed on through death have a sphere of their own. It is not removed from ours. Their work, the work of the Kingdom is like ours but it is sanctified from time and place. "It is as if a kind gardener transfers a fresh and tender shrub from a narrow place to a vast region. This transference is not the cause of the withering, the waning or the destruction of that shrub, nay rather it makes it grow and thrive, acquire freshness and delicacy and attain verdure and fruition."

Bahá'u'lláh speaks of the power bestowed upon the faithful in the world of continuance. "The soul that hath remained faithful to the Cause of God, and stood unwaveringly firm in His Path shall, after his ascension, be possessed of such power that all the worlds which the Almighty hath created can benefit through him. Such a soul provideth, at the bidding of the Ideal King and Divine Educator, the pure leaven that leaveneth the world of being, and furnisheth the power through which the arts and wonders of the world are made manifest. Consider how meal needeth leaven to be leavened with. Those souls that are the symbols of detachment are the leaven of the world. Meditate on this, and be of the thankful."

And again, joy is the keynote! "O Son of the Supreme! I have made death a messenger of joy to thee. Wherefore dost thou grieve? I made the light to shed on thee its splendor. Why dost thou veil thyself therefrom?"

"Death proffereth unto every confident believer the cup that is life indeed. It bestoweth joy and is the bearer of gladness. It conferreth the gift of everlasting life. As to those who have tasted of the fruit of man's earthly existence, which is the recognition of the one true God, exalted be His glory, their life hereafter is such as We are unable to describe. The knowledge thereof is with God alone, the Lord of all the worlds."

"O my servants! Sorrow not if, in these days and on this earthly plane, things contrary to your wishes have been ordained and manifested by God, for days of blissful joy, of heavenly delight, are assuredly in store for you. Worlds, holy and spiritually glorious, will be unveiled to your eyes."

The greatest gift of all, bestowed in the worlds of light, must be the gift of companionship with the holy souls of every age. The heart is immediately stirred by such a possibility. The grandeur of Moses comes close to us; we sit again at the feet of Jesus the Christ! In short, we come to the conclusion that the true believer of this illumined time is the associate and intimate of the apostles of former times. "Likewise will they find all the friends of God, both those of the former and recent times, present in the heavenly assemblage."

"Blessed is the soul which, at the hour of its separation from the body, is sanctified from the vain imaginings of the peoples of the world. Such a soul liveth and moveth in accordance with the Will of its Creator, and entereth the all-highest Paradise. The maids of Heaven, inmates of the loftiest mansions, will circle around it, and the Prophets of God and His chosen ones will seek its companionship. With them that soul will freely converse, and will recount unto them that which it hath been made to endure in the path of God, the Lord of all worlds. If any man be told that which hath been ordained for such a soul in the worlds of God, the Lord of the throne on high and of earth below, his whole being will instantly blaze out in his great longing to attain that most exalted, that sanctified and resplendent station."

An American friend who had enjoyed the privilege of more than one visit to 'Akka during the days of the exile of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, related an incident that took place at His table. With her sat persons of varied races, some of them traditional enemies who had now grown so to love one another that life and fortune would not have been too much to give if called upon to do so. As the reality of their love gradually became plain to her, there was born a ray of the knowledge of the intimacy of the near ones in the world beyond. When the meal drew to a close, 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke of the immortal worlds. As nearly as she could remember, the words he spoke were these:

"We have sat together many times before, and we shall sit together many times again in the Kingdom. We shall laugh together very much in those times, and we shall tell of the things that befell us in the Path of God. In every world of God a new Lord's Supper is set for the faithful!"

The secret of so great a fulfillment is intimacy with God through His Messenger. Revelation, the open door to God, is forever linked with the Revelator. With one gracious gesture God bestows upon the world a divine physician, a lawgiver, a perfect pattern, and a point of union with its God. Happy is the heart that experiences fusion with the Manifestation of God's Perfection. Paul would be made alive in Christ Jesus. Stephen, radiant even as the excited mob hurled him from the cliff, cries, "Behold, I see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of God the Father." 'Ali, youthful disciple of this day, proclaims as he offers his life, "If I recant, whither shall I go? In Him, I have found my paradise."

The Word of God is the Water of Life, one Word throughout cycles and ages. The soul, refreshed by new waters, finds itself yet on the old Path, the ancient, eternal Path. To tread that Path with dignity and joy, through this world and

hereafter, is every man's birthright. Therefore, once in about a thousand years, God, in His great compassion, clears the Path of superstition and division, that the Way may be made plain once more for the sincere seeker. And so Bahá'u'lláh has come.

Today the stage is set for the greatest spiritual drama of history, for the rebirth of the powers of the human race will be for the first time world-wide and in proportion to infinitely higher development. The coming of Bahá'u'lláh marks the close of a great cycle, the beginning of one infinitely greater. Man has come of age; a world-wide unity will appear, enjoyed by a new race. Bahá'u'lláh is the Father promised by Isaiah, the Michael spoken of by Daniel, the Spirit of Truth prophesied by Jesus, the Mihdi foretold by Muhammad, the Friend promised by Gautama, the Shah Bahram of Zoroaster. His coming is the bow of promise in the sky. "The universe is wrapped in an ecstasy of joy and gladness." "Peerless is this Day, for it is as the eye to past ages and centuries, and as a light unto the darkness of the times."

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