

Guidance on Prayer and Dhikr from the Universal House of Justice

Questions on Obligatory Prayer and Repetition of the Greatest Name Ninety-five Times a Day

by Universal House of Justice

Compiled by Research Department of the Universal House of Justice.
2004-06-06

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter of 5 April 2004, in which you enquire whether the recitation of the specific verses associated with the performance of ablutions for the medium Obligatory Prayer would also be required when carrying out ablutions for the short and long Obligatory Prayers or for the recitation of the Greatest Name.

Responses to similar queries in the past have indicated that the recitation of the words specified in the medium Obligatory Prayer pertains only to that prayer; that is, for the short and long Obligatory Prayers it would be sufficient to wash one's hands and face in preparation for each of these two prayers. It follows then that the recitation of the specific verses need not be applied when performing ablutions prior to the recitation of the phrase "Alláh-u-Abhá" ninetyfive times. However, there would be no objection to saying the verses with the ablutions in such cases, should any of the friends so desire.

Concerning your second query in which you request additional statements from the Bahá'í Writings regarding repetition of the Greatest Name ninety-five times a day, we are enclosing a [memorandum](#) that was prepared by the Research Department at the Bahá'í World Centre in response to an earlier query on this topic.

We hope this will provide the clarification you seek.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
Department of the Secretariat

[Enclosure](#)

MEMORANDUM

To: The Universal House of Justice

Date: 15 September 2003

From: Research Department

Additional References Regarding Repetition of the Greatest Name Ninety-five Times a Day

The Research Department has studied the query raised by Dr. ... in his email message of 14 May 2003 to the Bahá'í World Centre. Dr. ... explains that he has conducted a preliminary search of the Bahá'í Sacred Writings and other references on the subject of the repetition of the Greatest Name ninety-five times a day. He appends a list of citations he has located, and explains that he has not found any additional insights or commentaries on “the law that brings ‘spiritual enrichment’ to our souls ‘by this simple act of worshipful meditation’”. He asks whether any additional references or materials are available on this law. We provide the following response.

Dr. ... is no doubt aware from a perusal of the Synopsis and Codification section of the “Kitáb-i-Aqdas”, that the “Repetition of the Greatest Name 95 times a day” is listed as one of the “Miscellaneous Laws and Ordinances”.¹

He has already referred to paragraph [18](#) in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas,² a segment of which reads:

It hath been ordained that every believer in God, the Lord of Judgement, shall, each day, having washed his hands and then his face, seat himself and, turning unto God, repeat “Alláh-u-Abhá” ninety-five times.

We bring to Dr. ...’s attention note [33](#) of “The Kitáb-i-Aqdas”,³ which refers to paragraph [18](#) and provides the following elucidation regarding the significance of the Greatest Name in relation to Bahá'u'lláh:

“Alláh-u-Abhá” is an Arabic Phrase meaning “God the All Glorious.” It is a form of the Greatest Name of God.... In Islám there is a tradition that among the many names of God, one was the greatest; however, the identity of this Greatest Name was hidden. Bahá'u'lláh has confirmed that the Greatest Name is “Bahá”.

The various derivatives of the word “Bahá” are also regarded as the Greatest Name. Shoghi Effendi’s secretary writing on his behalf explains that:

¹ “The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book” (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1993, 2003 printing), pp. [156–157](#).

² When reference is to the Book revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the title is written in Roman letters. When the words “The Kitáb-i-Aqdas” appear in italics or quotation marks, the reference is to the publication “The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book”, which includes the Questions and Answers, supplementary Tablets, copious notes and other material.

³ Ibid., pp. [181–182](#).

The Greatest Name is the Name of Bahá'u'lláh. "Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá" is an invocation meaning: "O Thou Glory of Glories!" "Alláh-u- Abhá" is a greeting which means: "God the All-Glorious." Both refer to Bahá'u'lláh. By Greatest Name is meant that Bahá'u'lláh has appeared in God's Greatest Name, in other words, that He is the supreme Manifestation of God.

The greeting "Alláh-u-Abhá" was adopted during the period of Bahá'u'lláh's exile in Adrianople.

The repetition of "Alláh-u-Abhá" ninety-five times is to be preceded by the performance of ablutions....

The following excerpt from note [34](#) of "The Kitáb-i-Aqdas"⁴ explains ablutions as associated with the daily recitation of the Greatest Name ninety-five times: Ablutions are specifically associated with certain prayers. They must precede the offering of the three Obligatory Prayers, the daily recitation of "Alláh-u-Abhá" ninety-five times, and the recital of the verse prescribed as an alternative to obligatory prayer and fasting for women in their courses....

We attach for Dr. ...'s study a letter dated [28 December 1999](#) written by the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world, in which the laws which pertain to obligatory prayer, fasting and recitation of the Greatest Name ninety-five times a day were made universally applicable. In that letter the House of Justice expounds the potency of these laws and their influence both on the individual and the community. The letter states:

We have determined, therefore, that it is imperative for all the believers to deepen their awareness of the blessings conferred by the laws which directly foster the devotional life of the individual and, thus, of the community. The essentials of these laws are known to all Bahá'ís, but acquiring greater insight into their significance must include carrying out all the divinely revealed aspects of their observance. These are the laws which pertain to obligatory prayer, fasting and recitation of the Greatest Name ninety-five times a day.

Bahá'u'lláh asserts: "One who performeth neither good deeds nor acts of worship is like unto a tree which beareth no fruit, and an action which leaveth no trace. Whosoever experienceth the holy ecstasy of worship will refuse to barter such an act or any praise of God for all that existeth in the world. Fasting and obligatory prayer are as two wings to man's life. Blessed be the one who soareth with their aid in the heaven of the love of God, the Lord of all worlds."

Regarding how the Greatest Name is to be repeated, it might interest Dr. ... to know that in a letter of 19 October 1925 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, the significance of a spiritual principle is elucidated, namely, that "mere mechanical repetition of

⁴ Ibid., p. [182](#).

the syllables is not referred to” and that the “utterance of the word must be accompanied by the turning of the heart to God”. The letter states:

You ask for an explanation of the passage: “The mention of the Name of Bahá’u’lláh is the cause of the happiness of the hearts and whosoever utters that Word creates spiritual Beatitude, but it cannot be given as a name to any soul.” Of course by the phrase “mention of the Name of Bahá’u’lláh” mere mechanical repetition of the syllables is not referred to. The utterance of the word must be accompanied by the turning of the heart to God. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá once said: “The worshipper must pray with a detached spirit, unconditional surrender of the will, concentrated attention and spiritual fervour ... **AUTOMATIC, FORMAL PRAYERS WHICH DO NOT TOUCH THE CORE OF THE HEART ARE OF NO AVAIL.**” When we turn to God with our whole heart and invoke His Name, a spiritual connection is established through which we become a channel of divine influence.

We also bring to Dr...’s attention the following extract from a letter written on behalf of the House of Justice that attests to the spiritual power of the Greatest Name and the protection it affords in times of difficulties:

As a devoted believer in Bahá’u’lláh, you have the privilege of using the Greatest Name and the revealed prayers to draw on the power of the Holy Spirit, which is your shield and your protection through any difficulties and which will bring reassurance and serenity to your heart.

(4 January 1991, to an individual believer)

[Attachment](#)

Further Application of the Laws of the Kitab-i-Aqdas

by Universal House of Justice

1999-12-28

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Beloved Friends,

In the course of the Four Year Plan, we have been reviewing those laws of the Kitab-i-Aqdas which are not yet universally applied, in order to determine which of them it would be timely to implement now.

In every land we see a growing thirst for spiritual life and moral clarity. There is recognition of the ineffectiveness of plans and programs for human betterment which are not rooted in lives of

spiritual awareness and ethical virtue. Who should be better equipped to satisfy this longing than those who are already inspired by the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and aided by His Power?

We have determined, therefore, that it is imperative for all the believers to deepen their awareness of the blessings conferred by the laws which directly foster the devotional life of the individual and, thus, of the community. The essentials of these laws are known to all Bahá'ís, but acquiring greater insight into their significance must include carrying out all the divinely revealed aspects of their observance. These are the laws which pertain to obligatory prayer, fasting and recitation of the Greatest Name ninety-five times a day.

Bahá'u'lláh asserts: "One who performeth neither good deeds nor acts of worship is like unto a tree which beareth no fruit, and an action which leaveth no trace. Whosoever experienceth the holy ecstasy of worship will refuse to barter such an act or any praise of God for all that existeth in the world. Fasting and obligatory prayer are as two wings to man's life. Blessed be the one who soareth with their aid in the heaven of the love of God, the Lord of all worlds."

The friends have long been familiar with the great importance which Bahá'u'lláh attaches to daily obligatory prayer and to the observance of the fast, but a number of aspects of the law, such as those concerning ablutions, travelling and the compensation for prayers missed, remained to be made universally applicable. This step is now taken. Thus all elements of the laws dealing with obligatory prayer and fasting are, without any exception, now applicable.

We have also decided that it is timely for Bahá'ís in every land to take to their hearts the words of the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*: "It hath been ordained that every believer in God, the Lord of Judgment, shall, each day, having washed his hands and then his face, seat himself and, turning unto God, repeat `Allah-u-Abha' ninety-five times. Such was the decree of the Maker of the Heavens when, with majesty and power, He established Himself upon the thrones of His Names." Let all experience the spiritual enrichment brought to their souls by this simple act of worshipful meditation.

The spiritual growth generated by individual devotions is reinforced by loving association among the friends in every locality, by worship as a community and by service to the Faith and to one's fellow human beings. These communal aspects of the godly life relate to the law of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkar* which appears in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*. Although the time has not come for the building of local *Mashriqu'l-Adhkar*s, the holding of regular meetings for worship open to all and the involvement of Bahá'í communities in projects of humanitarian service are expressions of this element of Bahá'í life and a further step in the implementation of the Law of God.

Bahá'u'lláh has written: "We have adorned the heaven of utterance with the stars of divine wisdom and holy ordinances as a bounty on Our part. Verily, We are the Ever-Forgiving, the

Most Generous. O friends of God throughout the regions! Know ye the value of these days and cling unto whatsoever hath been sent down from God, the Most Great, the Most Exalted. Verily, He remembereth you in the Most Great Prison, and instructeth you in that which will cause you to draw nigh unto a station that delighteth the eyes of the pure in heart. Glory rest upon you and upon those who have attained unto that living fountain which floweth forth from My wondrous Pen."

It is our prayer at the Sacred Threshold that the greater attention to the spiritual heart of the Teachings which these laws express will enhance the devotion of the friends to the Source of all bounties and attract to the Cause the receptive souls among His spiritually famished children.

[SIGNED:

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE;
CONFIRMATORY COPY TO FOLLOW]

Questions about Obligatory Prayer

by Universal House of Justice

2000-11-28

Introduction

1. [Recitation of the Short Obligatory Prayer at meetings](#)
2. [Substitution of "daughter of" for "son of"](#)
3. [Repetition of the Greatest Name in the Long obligatory Prayer](#)
4. [Raising hands twice in supplication](#)

MEMORANDUM

To: The Universal House of Justice

Date: 28 November 2000

From: Research Department

Questions about Obligatory Prayer

In its email message of 4 August 2000, the National Spiritual Assembly of the United Kingdom seeks clarification of a number of details in relation to the Obligatory Prayers. The questions posed by the National Assembly were raised by an Auxiliary Board member. We provide the following response.

1. Recitation of the Short Obligatory Prayer at meetings

With regard to the appropriateness of a believer's reciting the Short Obligatory Prayer at meetings, the extract from a letter dated 4 July 1995, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, cited below, provides the following guidance:

"Regarding the use of the Obligatory Prayers..., it is clear that when any of these three prayers is to be performed as a prescribed daily Obligatory Prayer, the worshipper is required to follow the instructions that accompany that prayer. Although there is no explicit prohibition on the use of these prayers, wholly or in part, as regular prayers without any genuflections, to open or close a meeting or fireside, it is preferable for the friends not to follow such a practice. Bahá'ís have so many other beautiful prayers revealed by the Twin Manifestations and 'Abdu'l-Bahá for such meetings."

2. Substitution of "daughter of" for "son of"

As to whether or not it is appropriate for a female to substitute the words "daughter of" for "son of" when reciting the Long Obligatory Prayer, we provide the following extract from a letter dated 31 August 1997, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice. The letter addresses this specific issue:

"With respect to your question as to whether it is permissible for a female in reciting the Long Obligatory Prayer to say, "I am Thy handmaiden, O my Lord, and the daughter of Thy handmaiden", you are correct in your understanding that the Guardian did not wish Bahá'ís to change the gender of pronouns and nouns in the revealed prayers. The following excerpt from a letter dated 14 January 1947 written on his behalf makes this clear:"

'In regard to the question you asked him: As Bahá'u'lláh Himself specified, in the long prayer for the dead, that the gender could be changed and "his" said for "her", etc., it is permissible to do it - nay obligatory - but in all other prayers, including those for the dead, we must adhere to the exact text and not change the gender.'

"The House of Justice does not feel it appropriate to change Shoghi Effendi's usage of certain nouns in his translations. The challenge, therefore, is to accept the use of pronouns and of certain nouns such as "son" and "servant" in their generic sense, which will lead one to view the matter in terms of a spiritual response, rather than one of semantics."

3. Repetition of the Greatest Name in the Long obligatory Prayer

The National Spiritual Assembly observes that in the Long Obligatory Prayer, there are three occasions on which one has to repeat the Greatest Name three times. While it is clear that, on the first occasion, the believer has to raise his or her hands once and repeat the Greatest Name three times, the National Assembly enquires whether it is also necessary to raise one's hands on (1) the other two occasions.

In relation to the first of the three instances, the Universal House of Justice stated on 22 April 1991 that, in following the instruction "Let him then raise his hands, and repeat three times the Greatest Name", the believer is required to raise his hands once and to repeat the Greatest Name

three times in conjunction with that act. In relation to the second and third occasions, the Research Department has not, to date, been able to locate any specific guidance. It is, however, informative to consider the wording of the instructions:

"Let him then repeat the Greatest Name thrice, and bend down with hands resting on the knees, and say..." "Let him then repeat the Greatest Name thrice, and kneel with his forehead to the ground, and say..."

In contrast to the first occasion where the raising of the hands forms part of the explicit instructions, in the second and third instances no mention is made of raising the hands.

4. Raising hands twice in supplication

The National Spiritual Assembly refers to the instruction to stand and raise one's hands twice in supplication, and say the words that follow. It enquires "whether one should say each (of the two) phrase(s) each time one raises one's hands". While the intent of the question is not exactly clear to the Research Department, we provide the following extract from the letter dated 22 April 1991 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice. The letter addresses a question about the performance of this particular part of the Long Obligatory Prayer:

(1) *Bahá'í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Bab, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1993), p. [10](#); [14](#) and [15](#).

Regarding the direction "Let him then stand and raise his hands twice in supplication, and say;...", the believer does not have to read twice the paragraph which follows. Whether the believer raises his hands twice before the reciting of the passage, or commences the reciting after having raised his hands once, and raises them a second time soon thereafter, is left to his choice.

Contacting the Universal House of Justice; Obligatory Prayer, Greatest Name, Exemptions

by Universal House of Justice

1998-01-02

Jump to a section:

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[Memorandum on Obligatory Prayer, Greatest Name, Exemptions](#)

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Department of the Secretariat

[name and address omitted]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

Your email of 28 October 1997 inquiring about the recitation of obligatory prayers was forwarded by the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States to the Universal House of Justice. It in turn referred your query to the Research Department for further study, and we are enclosing a copy of the memorandum that was produced in reply.

You also inquire as to the circumstances under which an individual believer may submit questions to the National Assembly or the House of Justice, directly. As you know, Bahá'ís turn to Bahá'í literature, their fellow-believers (particularly those well-versed in the Writings) and the local and national institutions of the Faith for answers to any question they may have. If these avenues are explored to the utmost and further clarification is still needed, the friends are free to refer to the House of Justice for such guidance. It is hoped that this information will be of assistance to you in your endeavours.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

For Department of the Secretariat

Enclosure

cc: National Assembly of the United States (with enclosure)

M E M O R A N D U M

The Universal House of Justice

Date: 2 January 1998

From: Research Department

Obligatory Prayer, Greatest Name, Exemptions

The Research Department has studied the questions raised by Mr. ____, forwarded on his behalf by the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States in its email message of 29 October 1997 to the Universal House of Justice. We provide the following comments.

1. Obligatory Prayer

Short Obligatory Prayer

Mr. ___ seeks guidance concerning the action that should be taken when an individual who is in the habit of reciting the Short Obligatory Prayer either forgets or is unable to recite it during the prescribed period, from noon until sunset. Specifically, he wishes to know:

Is the individual "expected" to say the Long Obligatory Prayer even if not "in the state of humble adoration one is to be in to recite the long prayer"?

Has the opportunity to fulfil this spiritual responsibility been missed for that day?

Should the individual use the "substitution to be recited when one has been engaged in travel or insecure circumstances"?

The Universal House of Justice in a letter dated 26 April 1987, written on its behalf, provides the following general guidance concerning what is to be done when an individual forgets to say the Obligatory Prayer:

The action of a believer who forgets to recite his obligatory prayer is a matter of personal conscience.

With regard to whether it is necessary to perform the prostrations and repeat the verse prescribed in paragraph 14 of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* if the Obligatory Prayers are missed for reasons other than "a condition of insecurity", a letter dated 15 April 1987, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, relates to this issue.¹ Addressed to an individual who asked if this requirement also applied to Obligatory Prayers that were missed on

¹ *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust 1993), ¶14 and note 21.

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account of such factors as forgetfulness, ailment, and inability to say the prayer while being in the company of others, the letter of the House of Justice points out that the law regarding actions to be taken in place of an Obligatory Prayer missed on account of insecure conditions is not binding upon the believers in the West. This is a matter on which the Universal House of Justice will legislate at the appropriate time.

Long Obligatory Prayer

Mr. ___ is aware that the Universal House of Justice has not, to date, defined the beginning of the 24-hour period for the recitation of the Long Obligatory Prayer. He asks what should be done

"in the meantime". When a similar question concerning the 24-hour period was posed to the Universal House of Justice, it provided the following response in a letter dated 17 December 1990, written on its behalf:

The beginning of the 24-hour period for the recitation of the Long Obligatory Prayer has not been specifically stated in the Sacred Texts, and the Universal House of Justice has not made any ruling on this point.

Mr. ___ may come to his own understanding on this matter.

2. Recitation of the Greatest Name

Mr. ___ wishes to know whether, as in the case of Obligatory Prayer, the daily recitation of the Greatest Name 95 times and the reading of the Writings in the morning and evening are "to be suspended during illness". The Universal House of Justice, in a letter dated 31 March 1983 written on its behalf to an individual believer, distinguishes between the "law of Obligatory Prayers" and "the recitation of the Greatest Name 95 times a day":

The House of Justice agrees that the recitation of the Greatest Name 95 times a day, as prescribed in the Laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, can exert a powerful influence on the souls of the believers, and it asks us to say that there is no reason why those who wish to obey this law should not do so. It does not feel that the time has yet come to make it binding on the friends in Europe....

The law of the Obligatory Prayers is, of course, binding on the friends in Europe, and regular, wholehearted, obedience to this law will in itself nourish the growth of spirituality.

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Further, in response to a query about the application of the laws of the Faith, the Universal House of Justice, in a letter of 7 October 1993 written on its behalf to an individual believer, characterized the recitation of the Greatest Name 95 times as one of the "laws of conscience":

There is ... divine wisdom in a gradual, rather than immediate, application of all the laws. The fact that a number of these laws are not yet binding has to do with the state of society and of the Bahá'í community. While certain laws of conscience, such as the repetition of the Greatest Name 95 times daily, may not yet have been specified by the House of Justice as applicable in the West, individual are free to practice them if they wish; however, no issue should be made of such matters.

The Research Department has not been able to locate any Bahá'í texts which relate to whether or not a believer is relieved of the duty of reciting the Greatest Name or of reading the Writings in the morning and evening on account of ill health. In the absence of such guidance, Mr. ___ is free to make his own decisions in these matters.

3. Exemptions Due to Illness

Reference is made to the following statement concerning the observance of the laws of fasting and obligatory prayer by the sick:

In time of ill-health it is not permissible to observe these obligations; such hath been the bidding of the Lord, exalted be His glory, at all times.²

Mr. ___ wishes to know if it is left to the discretion of the believer to decide whether he or she is "sufficiently ill not to recite the prayer" or whether the Obligatory Prayer should not be recited if the individual "feel[s] ill at all". We provide, below, an extract from a letter dated 9 January 1994 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual with a chronic health problem who had requested a definition of "ill health" as it relates to the exemption from Obligatory Prayer and fasting. The letter states:

The following excerpt from a letter dated 14 April 1947 written on behalf of the Guardian provides instruction for determining whether one should participate in the Fast.

As to your question regarding the Fast: if there is any doubt in the mind of a person as to whether it will really be bad for that person's health to keep it, the best doctor's advice should be obtained.

² Ibid., Questions and Answers, [93](#).

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Insofar as the exemption from the saying of obligatory prayers is concerned, this is left to the conscience of the individual.