

## Devotional Gatherings for Inspiration and Renewal

Inspiration, rejuvenation, motivation, purpose, meaning—all are essential ingredients to one's sense that his or her life is on track, is worth living. As we learn in "Reflections on the Life of the Spirit", Book 1 of the Ruhi Institute, the Baha'i teachings prescribe daily prayer and intimate communion with God as the foundation for a life devoted to spiritual advancement and service to humanity. The Word of God, say the Bahá'í writings, provides inspiration, rejuvenates souls, gladdens hearts, and renews one's sense of purpose.

Thus, Bahá'ís host devotional gatherings in homes and communities to take advantage of such benefits through prayer and the reading together of the Bahá'í writings and other scriptures and to create an environment of unity and harmony. Prayer is a central element in all religious traditions and these meetings stress its universal nature.

Prayer offers us an opportunity to commune with our Creator, draw on the revitalizing power of the Word of God, and to contemplate and more deeply appreciate our lives.

The meetings, often simple, have a variety of elements to accommodate participants regardless of their religious background. Music, food, and discussion are often present, though the primary purpose is to use prayer's power to transform, unify, and revitalize.

For many, these gatherings become a refreshing refuge from the discordant and grinding aspects of everyday life. Participants are able to meditate on spiritual principles and gain some perspective on how these principles can be applied to their day-to-day affairs.

*"... it is essential to the spiritual life of the community that the friends hold regular devotional meetings in local Bahá'í centres, where available, or elsewhere, including the homes of the believers."* - The Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message, 1996

Upon completing "Reflections on the Life of the Spirit" graduates are encouraged to host devotional gatherings in their neighbourhoods. Friends, family, neighbours and colleagues are invited to join the gatherings which can take a variety of approaches as shared above. Encouraging collective prayer and devotion is one of the easiest ways to offer service to one's community.

Invitations can be as simple as 'We're inviting neighbours to our home for prayers for (e.g. peace, unity in our neighbourhood, for the children's upcoming exams, for the passing of Mrs ...) We would love you to join us.'" Sharing prayers with friends and neighbours when having conversations with them can be a natural way to respond to difficulties and challenges that they are encountering. If they find the prayers uplifting, they are likely to be very open to attending or host a devotional gathering as well.

Members of your area teaching committee are often prepared to accompany new graduates of Book 1 to host their first few devotional gatherings. Your tutor can advise you about who you can contact in your area. Quotations and prayers from Book One or the other Ruhi materials can be used in preparing devotions, but there are several good websites on the internet that will also help provide a variety of approaches, devotional materials, and ideas. Try searching for <http://www.bahaidevotions.org/devotionals.asp> or [bahaiblog.net/site/.../8-creative-ideas-for-your-next-devotional-gathering](http://bahaiblog.net/site/.../8-creative-ideas-for-your-next-devotional-gathering).

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-Adhkár which appears in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Although the time has not come for the building of local Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs, 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. (28 December 1999, from the *Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World*)

...the flourishing of the community, especially at the local level, demands a significant enhancement in patterns of behaviour: those patterns by which the collective expression of the virtues of the individual members and the functioning of the Spiritual Assembly are manifest in the unity and fellowship of the community and the dynamism of its activity and growth. This calls for the integration of the component elements -- adults, youth and children -- in spiritual, social, educational and administrative activities; and their engagement in local plans of teaching and development. It implies a collective will and sense of purpose to perpetuate the Spiritual Assembly through annual elections. **It involves the practice of collective worship of God. Hence, it is essential to the spiritual life of the community that the friends hold regular devotional meetings in local Bahá'í centres, where available, or elsewhere, including the homes of believers.** (*The Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message 153*)

It befitteth the friends to hold a gathering, a meeting, where they shall glorify God and fix their hearts upon Him, and read and recite the Holy Writings of the Blessed Beauty -- may my soul be the ransom of His lovers! The lights of the All-Glorious Realm, the rays of the Supreme Horizon, will be cast upon such bright assemblages, for these are none other than the Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs, the Dawning-Points of God's Remembrance, which must, at the direction of the Most Exalted Pen, be established in every hamlet and city... These spiritual gatherings must be held with the utmost purity and consecration, so that from the site itself, and its earth and the air about it, one will inhale the fragrant breathings of the Holy Spirit. (*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, sec. 55, pp. 93-94)

Every meeting which is organized for the purpose of unity and concord will be conducive to changing strangers into friends, enemies into associates, and Abdu'l-Bahá will be present in His heart and soul with that meeting. (*Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, vol. 2, p. 533 and *Consultation: A Compilation*, p. 9)

...It behoveth the friends in whatever land they be, to gather together in meetings, and therein to speak wisely and with eloquence, and to read the verses of God; for it is God's Words that kindle love's fire and set it ablaze. (*Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'í Meetings The Nineteen Day Feast*, p. 3)