

PRAYER THEME

Possible themes to explore concerning Prayer:

1. What is prayer?
2. Helpful guidance on how to pray
3. Prayer and healing and tests and difficulties
4. Why we pray--the power and effects of prayer

For the core of religious faith is that mystic feeling that 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 to merely accept and observe the teachings. He should, in addition, cultivate the sense of spirituality, which he can acquire chiefly by the means of prayer. The Baha'i Faith, like all other Divine religions, is thus fundamentally mystic in character. Its chief goal is the development of the individual and society, through the acquisition of spiritual virtues and powers. It is the soul of man that has first to be fed. And this spiritual nourishment prayer can best provide..... 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, already stated, is the very foundation and purpose of the Religion of God. ~Shoghi Effendi, (Directives of the Guardian)

Setting Standards of Reverence—some suggestions:

In our children's classes, we always start each class year and the beginning of each camp by reviewing **basic standards for reverence** for during prayers and any reading of any scripture: sitting up straight, legs crossed or on knees, hands and tongue still, no chewing gum, treat the books with respect, have your prayer ready, do not look through the books while others are praying.

The **devotional portion** of class always begins with a designated child sounding a chime. The chime is to cue the students to stop focusing outward and to be quiet and go inward, to transition from the physical world to the spiritual. I encourage them to close their eyes in order to reduce distractions, so it is easier to detach from this outer/material world. Immediately following the chime, children are encouraged to take a deep breath in and out to calm and relax themselves, to let go of their busy thoughts and tensions that may get in the way of spiritual communion.

See Core Curriculum Lesson Planning Guide, Level 1, The Central Figures: Baha'u'llah. Look under "The Prayers and Meditations of Baha'u'llah". These Curriculum Guides are available in their entirety for free through <http://core-curriculum.bahai.us/index.php/lesson-planning-guides>

MUSIC—devotional music

- **Rain Down**

From Tara Ellis' *Deliver Me* CD, available for \$1.29 at 9StarMedia: [RainDown](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1QB-GiTS4I>

...rain down upon me that which will illuminate my face and enlighten my heart. ~Bahá'u'lláh, (Prayers and Meditations)

- **Educate These Children**

This prayer below can be found on *Immerse Yourselves* CD by Joe Crone. Available for \$1.29 at [educateprayer](#). It's also available for the same amount from the same site on the *Happy Ayyam-i-Ha* album with William Sears, [educatechildren](#) and for free at [educatechildrenprayer](#) on the Baha'i Blog site. There is a lovely free video at youtube, that corresponds to the words of the prayer, but I think if children are watching a video, they likely are not praying, i.e. communing w/ God. That said, it's a great way to help kids memorize the prayer. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FyFOoMMZp7Q>

O God! Educate these children. These children are the plants of Thine orchard, the flowers of Thy meadow, the roses of Thy garden. Let Thy rain fall upon them; let the Sun of Reality shine upon them with Thy love. Let Thy breeze refresh them in order that they may be trained, grow and develop, and appear in the utmost beauty. Thou art the Giver. Thou art the Compassionate. ~'Abdu'l-Bahá, (The Promulgation of Universal Peace)

- **O God Guide Me**

Here are 3 sources for the prayer below. I like all of them. One is sung by Julie Iraninejad & Shabnam Cyrus. It can be downloaded for free at [OGodGuideMe1](#) Ruhi Book 3 Memorization songs, Grade 1, Lesson 1 Prayer song, 3rd track in the list. It is also available at 9StarMedia by Taraz Nosrat on his The Divine Spark recording, track #5: [OGodGuideMe2](#) And finally another 3rd lovely version of this prayer is available for free on the *At First Light* CD, Vol. 2 from Soulrise melodies track #4 [OGodGuideMe3](#)

O God, guide me, protect me, make of me a shining lamp and a brilliant star. Thou art the Mighty and the Powerful. - 'Abdu'l-Bahá, (Baha'i Prayers)

Brilliant=radiant, sparkling, shining, bright, luminous

- **Enable Me to Grow**

Can obtain this one from Rose-Marie Peterson's Intone CD: <https://rosemariepeterson.bandcamp.com/>. Also available on the *Come and Sing* CD by Susan Engle and Jean Marks for \$1.29 [comeandsing](#) and on the *At*

First Light Vol 2 CD by Soulrise Melodies, #10. [EnableMeToGrow](#). This prayer below is also available for free on 2 videos on youtube: [tenderplant1](#) and [tenderplant2](#)

O Lord! I am a child; enable me to grow beneath the shadow of Thy loving-kindness. I am a tender plant; cause me to be nurtured through the outpourings of the clouds of Thy bounty. I am a sapling of the garden of love; make me into a fruitful tree. Thou art the Mighty and the Powerful, and Thou art the All-Loving, the All-Knowing, the All-Seeing. ~' Abdu'l-Bahá, (Baha'i Prayer)

Nurtured=supported, encouraged, developed

Sapling=young tree

We asked: What do you think might be the fruits of the human tree? (virtues, faith, unity, etc.)

These musical selections above go well with some of the memory verses and discussion points—especially how prayer is like life giving water for the soul.

- **O Son of Light**

By Mary Davis, from her *On Wings of Prayer* cassette. (No longer available—but older Baha'is may have a copy). This is also available on Munirih Sparrow's *Morning to Midnight* CD from 9StarMedia for \$1.29, track #3. [OSonOfLight](#) Other ways to listen: [OSonOfLight2](#).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BsEGoR_0nqM&list=OLAK5uy_ndBq7HIgcfFkvxSyVj68fADnx_sIWYFqg&index=15

O SON OF LIGHT! Forget all save Me and commune with My spirit. This is of the essence of My command, therefore turn unto it. ~Bahá'u'lláh, (The Arabic Hidden Words #16)

Essence=heart of, core, most important part

- **Strive**

Available from Joe Crone's *Immerse Yourselves* CD, (Individual songs available at 9StarMedia for \$1.29 each: [ImmerseYourselves](#))

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4y2WGjl_9n4

.....strive that your actions day by day may be beautiful prayers. Turn towards God, and seek always to do that which is right and noble. Enrich the poor, raise the fallen, comfort the sorrowful, bring healing to the sick, reassure the fearful, rescue the oppressed, bring hope to the hopeless, shelter the destitute! ~' Abdu'l-Bahá, (Paris Talks)

Strive=try hard, struggle

Noble=moral, upright, virtuous

Oppressed=mistreated, treated unfairly, unjustly, dominated harshly

Destitute=really poor, needy, in poverty

- **Invocation**

by Grant Hindin Miller from *Rivers of Light* CD. Available at 9StarMedia, track #5 for \$1.29 [Invocation](#)

O God, My God, My Beloved, My Heart's Desire. ~The Bab (as quoted by Shoghi Effendi in The Dawnbreakers)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKvHF0GzbxA>

We discussed how this selection above relates to the guidance on how to pray---with the love of God in one's heart. If there is little or no love, how powerful can our prayers really be? It's like asking someone we don't care about for favors.

- **Blessed is the Spot**

Too many sources to list all of them—just go to youtube or www.bahaiblog.net and type in Blessed is the Spot. Baha'i blog has both video and just audio. But one of our favorites is free from Baha'i Blog—and we made a slide show for it using mostly art drawn for children's books. [blessedSpot](#).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fbM1LbQELGE&t=2s>

More: This particular verse is one of the most popular selections from Baha'i scripture with musicians----It can be found on many, many Baha'i recordings such as: *On Wings of Prayer* cassette by Mary Davis, *Selections from the Baha'i Writings* by Paul Parrish, *Happy Ayyam-i-Ha* by multiple musicians, *Sacred Verses* by Grant Hindin Miller, *Intone* by Rose-Marie Peterson, *Songs of the Ancient Beauty* by the Baha'i Chorale, *Heartfelt Connections* by Elaine Merrill Losey, and *Make Firm Our Steps* by Mark McDowell.

Blessed is the spot, and the house, and the place, and the city, and the heart, and the mountain, and the refuge, and the cave, and the valley, and the land, and the sea, and the island, and the meadow where mention of God hath been made, and His praise glorified. ~Bahá'u'lláh, (Compilations, Baha'i Prayers)

Refuge=safe place, shelter

Blessed=sacred, blissful, favored, fortunate, special, protected

Glorified=honored, praised, worshiped, exalted

- **Be Swift**

by Barb Qualls from her *King of Days* CD. Available for 99 cents at Amazon: [BeSwift](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzUwdA7LEv0>

O SON OF GLORY!

Be swift in the path of holiness, and enter the heaven of communion with Me. Cleanse thy heart with the burnish of the spirit, and hasten to the court of the Most High. ~Bahá'u'lláh, (The Persian Hidden Words #8)

Communion=spiritual union, connection, deep relationship

Burnish=polish, shine, buff

Hasten=hurry

I asked the students: What is a powerful way we can “enter the heaven of communion” with God?

- **Power of Thy Name**

by Barb Qualls on her *King of Days* CD. Available for 99 cents at Amazon: [PowerOfThyName](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QwRukDndqt0>

Armed with the power of Thy name nothing can ever hurt me, and with Thy love in my heart all the world's afflictions can in no wise alarm me. ~Bahá'u'lláh, (Prayers and Meditations)

Afflictions=suffering, hardship, trouble

- **Remembrance of Thee**

by Mark McDowell from *Make Firm Our Steps* CD. Available through Amazon for 99 cents:

[RemembranceOfThee](#)

(It also includes another musical variation of the same verse as was used from the *King of Days* CD).

Also available in youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iT73m2Ft91c>

My remembrance of Thee, O my God, quencheth my thirst, and quieteth my heart.

Armed with the power of Thy name nothing can ever hurt me, and with Thy love in my heart all the world's afflictions can in no wise alarm me. ~Bahá'u'lláh, (Prayers and Meditations)

SUGGESTED MEMORY VERSES to take home—place on attractive paper or below images color copied from a book that represent the concept, go over big or unfamiliar words

...children are even as young plants, and teaching them the prayers is as letting the rain pour down upon them, that they may wax tender and fresh... ~`Abdu'l-Bahá, (Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá)

Wax=grow, expand

Tender=loving, gentle, warm, or soft and sensitive, opposite of hard hearted.

Pray to God that He may strengthen you in divine virtue, so that you may be as angels in the world...
~`Abdu'l-Bahá, (Paris Talks)

I beseech Thee... to make of my prayer a fire that will burn away the veils which have shut me out from Thy beauty, and a light that will lead me unto the ocean of Thy Presence. ~Bahá'u'lláh, (Prayers and Meditations)

Beseech=ask, beg

Presence=being there

We discussed what some of the veils might be, and why God's presence is referred to as an ocean.

Know thou of a certainty that every house wherein the anthem of praise is raised to the Realm of Glory in celebration of the Name of God is indeed a heavenly home, and one of the gardens of delight in the Paradise of God. ~`Abdu'l-Bahá

Anthem=song

O Lord! I am a tender plant; cause me to be nurtured through the outpourings of the clouds of Thy bounty. I am a sapling of the garden of love; make me into a fruitful tree... ~`Abdu'l-Bahá, (Baha'i Prayers)

Nurtured=supported, encouraged, developed

Sapling=young tree

MUSIC—Songs (often w/ actions to the lyrics)

Before playing all songs, we read the lyrics to reinforce the message.

- **“Pray Every Day”** by Jennifer Russell, taken from a CD set entitled *The Virtues Songs*, Vol. 3 (Available through Amazon, 3 CD set: [VirtueSongs](#). She has renamed the 3 CD set as *Angel Songs for the Little Ones*. At this Amazon link, you can buy the individual song for 99 cents, but I highly recommend the entire set—I use these songs constantly in my programs and my grand kids love them too. [AngelSongs](#)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBjE6gHU4Bc>

This one lends itself to simple pantomime actions:

Actions for specific words:

pray-- hands in prayer position

God-- hold up arms, hands open, and turn face upwards (we remind kids that God is not physically up in the sky, but everywhere)

God hears—cup both or one ear

My heart—put hands on heart

Anywhere—make sweeping gesture with arm to suggest all around everywhere

Connected—touch heart with index finger, point and raise up

Makes things clear—cover eyes with hands, open up as in a gate opening

Sad—look sad

I listen--cup both or one ear

Chorus:

Pray, pray

Pray, everyday

Pray, I pray

And in God’s presence I stay

I talk to God in silence or out loud

God hears my thoughts

And understands my heart

Anytime, anywhere

I am connected to the One Great Spirit

Prayer makes things clear when

I am confused

It gives me hope when I am sad
I become still and turn to God
I listen and receive true guidance
With an attitude of gratitude, I pray

- **“Believing”** This is a short segment of a DVD that is worth watching because it has a beautiful song and imagery about prayer. The music is by Jason Miles, Porter Carroll Jr., lyrics by Kathy Byalick. It comes from a CD called *People* (produced by Lightyear Entertainment). Available at [PeopleDVD](#) A note about this DVD:

The *People* DVD is based on the superb book by Peter Spier. This musical DVD takes children on an international journey to meet the beautiful diversity of the human race. It was created to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the United Nations. However, it could use a few more interracial groups and families, minorities in positions of authority, and sometimes unwittingly may perpetuate stereotypes. It really does show the beauty of diversity but does not stress unity in diversity enough in its animation of crowds, groups, and families, (except through explicitly calling for peace and tolerance.) But its basic message is positive, and the imagery can be gorgeous. The section for “Believing” is really beautiful with nothing objectionable that I can tell.

Story available in youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wiLxhSqK8tY&t=111s>

The words to the song *Believing* accompanying the animation are as follows:

Believing (repeats)

There are things
that cannot be seen but felt inside
faith is one
and it keeps us warm on the coldest night.

Some of us pray together, some of us pray alone,
but what really counts is what's in our hearts
as we go believing.

Believing--to talk to God we learn to pray
Believing--we do it in so many ways
Believing--and hope He hears what we have to say
Believing--to make it okay

Believing--and though we have so many faiths

Believing--the hope we feel is all the same.

Believing--it keeps us going each and every day

Believing--through sunshine and rain.

- **“Down to the River to Pray”**. This is a beautiful traditional folk song about prayer. We used the version from the movie “O Brother Where Art Thou?” sung by Alison Krauss. You can download it for free at [DownToTheRiverToPray](#)
- **“Prayer”** by Ernestine Atkins from *Singing with Ernestine* CD. (This CD seems to be no longer available, but many older Baha’is may have copies). We encouraged the kids to sing along, as its very repetitive.

Prayer is a ladder by which everyone may ascend to Heaven. ~(Attributed to Muhammad)

We did actions to the words:

Prayer: *Hold hands in prayer position*

Ladder: *Pretend to climb a ladder with our arms grasping the rungs and going up*

Everyone: *Sweep arm from left to right (or right to left)*

Ascend to Heaven: *Have palms facing up, raise arms upwards over head*

- **“Prayer-Hearing, Prayer-Answering God”** by Eric Dozier, on his *To the Glory of God* CD. (Unfortunately this CD is no longer available and I can’t find the song anywhere either. However, older Baha’is may have a copy).

This song was a gospel piece with a real danceable beat. So using silk scarves, many danced to it very energetically. We suggested that for the chorus, the kids toss the scarves into the air to represent their prayers, and the descending scarves are the blessings received via the prayer, or the answer.

Prayer-Hearing, Prayer-Answering God

let Your mercies rain down upon me

for I know that You have risen up

with healing in Your wings

I open my heart to receive

Every time I call Him,

He comes to see about me
He restores my soul, revives me
and sets my spirit free
I want You to hold me, mold me
make me, shape me into what You
want me to be
I open my heart to receive

You're All-Knowing
my Sustainer
You're my healer
my Provider
I open my heart to receive

- **“You can Call on Him”** by Ernestine Atkins, from *Fruits of the Spirit* CD (Produced for Louhelen Baha’i School by Pescado Productions. Unfortunately this CD is no longer available and I can’t find the song anywhere either. However, older Baha’is may have a copy). We talked about how we will all need to call on God for so many reasons: death of a loved one, danger, gratitude, love, praise, guidance, healing, broken heart, stress, etc. We listened and danced with silk scarves to this song: (If music unavailable, use as a poem.) The lyrics are as follows:

You can call on Him in the morning
You can call on Him in the evening
You can call on Him any time of day.
Why don’t you call on Him?
If you don’t know how to pray,
You can call on Him
and He will guide you all the way.
If you don’t know how to teach
You can call on Him
and He will send those souls to reach.
If you shed a lot of tears,
You can call on Him
and He will wipe away those fears.

STORIES/ARTICLES & Poems

Tip: When reading stories to wider community kids, or new Baha'is, refrain from using the term “Master” when referring to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá—its triggering for African Americans and has negative connotations b/c they have no idea about Bahá’u’lláh giving His Son this name as a token of honor and respect. I have asked Black friends about this, and they agree.

When I Pray by Bambi Betts from her Basic Truths Series. This simple book explains that prayer is spiritual food for the soul, and without it we grow weak and ill spiritually, just as we would physically if we did not eat. It also reminds us that our prayers are often answered in unexpected ways.

A Prayer for Fluffy by Roxana Faith Sinex. This beautifully illustrated book shows how our prayers are sometimes answered in ways we do not want, but end up being a blessing in disguise.

Nuala Says Her Prayers by Sahar Sabati. A little girl explores the question “Why do we pray?”.

Does God Hear My Prayers? By August Gold. It is a book written for children of all Faith traditions, with rhyming text and child oriented photos. Here is a description on the back of the book: “How can we talk to God? What should we say? Using simple, everyday examples that children can relate to, this colorful book guides us to develop a direct and personal relationship with God. It playfully guides children down their own path of spiritual discovery and reminds us all to invite God into our lives.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DpvZZigpbUA>

“The Power of Example: Learning to Pray with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá”. This is a very short story from *Brilliant Star* Baha’i Children’s Magazine, Sept/Oct 1998, p. 8. In this story ‘Abdu’l-Bahá trains a Baha’i on how to pray.

“Kids Thoughts on Prayer” This is an article from *Brilliant Star* Baha’i Children’s Magazine, Sept/Oct 1998: page 17. In this article, 4 children, ages 5-11, share what prayer means to them. Then we asked the students to share their thoughts on prayer, what it means to them. We all agreed that it involves communion with God’s spirit.

“Prayer Works!” This is an article from *Brilliant Star* Baha’i Children’s Magazine, Nov/Dec 1994, pages 14-15. In this article kids share examples of how prayer works for them. They answer the following questions: When do you turn to God in prayer? Where do you go, or what is your favorite place, to pray? Do you wait for an answer and arrive at a decision after your prayer? Why do you pray? We encouraged students to answer these questions also.

“**Saving the Silver-Tongued Nightingale**” is a true story on pages 2-7 under the topic of *The Prayers and Meditations of Bahá'u'lláh* from The Core Curriculum's The Central Figures: Bahá'u'lláh, Vol. 1

“**A prayer for Mirza Ja'far**” is a true short story on pages 8-9, under the topic of *The Prayers and Meditations of Bahá'u'lláh* from The Core Curriculum's The Central Figures: Bahá'u'lláh, Vol. 1.

“**A Space for Prayer**” is a short article from *Brilliant Star Baha'i* children's magazine, Special Edition 1991, pages 6-7. This article tells the story of how one little girl created her prayer space and provides photos.

Related Activity for the home:

I asked each child to create a prayer space at home if possible and parents are okay with it. We called it a “Blessed Spot”. I suggested that they adorn it with such things as pretty cloths and pillows, LED candles, a special carpet, a picture of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, religious art from their own faith tradition, or any beautiful art and/or some silk or dried flowers, ---anything to beautify it so that by just looking at it will beckon a soul to want to go there and praise God and find solace and comfort. Bahá'u'lláh exclaims that God is the essence and source of all beauty, and so I believe that beautiful places remind the soul of God and nurture spirituality.

I shared about how much attention was paid by Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice to the gardens at the Baha'i World Center and Bahji, (both in Israel) where Bahá'u'lláh is buried. I asked the children if, with the help of their family members, to see if they could find a relatively private, uncluttered, quiet small space somewhere in their house where they can seek refuge and tranquility in time of distress, or when their hearts want to spontaneously express gratitude or love to their Creator. (This space can really inspire them to act on these feelings through prayer. The more we can reinforce the habit of prayer in this world which so insidiously and powerfully lures and distracts souls from their spiritual life, the better. The more we can create a home environment which nurtures the tender souls of children and supports their fragile and subtle mystical feelings the better).

I suggested that as a final touch to their “Blessed Spots” they ask to spray perfume in it. We discussed how prayer releases *spiritual fragrance* and also enables one to inhale that fragrance from the spiritual worlds of God:

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. ~Bahá'u'lláh, (Gleanings)

Reciteth=say out loud

Throb=pound, thump, vibrate, beat

...strive to attain the paradise of His presence, and endeavor to inhale the fragrance of the incorruptible Flower, to breathe the sweet savors of holiness, and to obtain a portion of this perfume of celestial glory.

~Bahá'u'lláh, (Gleanings)

Endeavor=strive, work hard, attempt

Incorruptible=imperishable, everlasting, immortal, pure

Savors=aromas

Obtain=gain, get, acquire

Celestial=heavenly

This is the Day whereon every sweet smelling thing hath derived its fragrance from the smell of My garment - a garment that hath shed its perfume upon the whole of creation. ~Bahá'u'lláh, (Gleanings)

Whereon=in which

Derived=received, gotten

Garment=item of clothing, covering

...enable me to draw nigh unto Thee through the fragrance of Thy holiness. ~The Bab, (Selections from the Writings of The Bab)

Blessed is the Spot, illustrated by Anna Stevenson---is a lovely old (first printing 1958) illustrated version of this famous verse by Bahá'u'lláh. It's out of print, but older Baha'is may have a copy. There is one copy for sale at Amazon for a ridiculous rare book price if you want to see the cover: [OldBlessedSpot](#). There are newer versions: [BlessedSpot](#) and [BlessedSpot2](#) for Ages 2-5.

“Do You Have Rocks in Your Feeling Box?” is an article from *Brilliant Star* Baha'i children's magazine, Special Edition 1994, pages 12-13. It's about how prayer helps us rid ourselves of negative feelings.

Lena and the Dragon Slave Children short story that you will find in this document in its entirety (*has related game*—see under games) (Ages 5-9)

This story illustrates how prayer and faith promote courage and strength in a tiny girl who wants to rescue children who are enslaved by a mean dragon. The dragon is a metaphor for the lower nature of humans, which imprisons and enslaves us unless we have spirituality and faith. (*...one must learn to control and direct one's animal impulses, not to be a slave to them* ---From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, excerpts from a letter to all National Spiritual Assemblies, February 6, 1973, Lights of Guidance) Kids can figure this out with some prompting if they are familiar with the lower nature concept in the Baha'i Writings.

The reference to not picking up toys in the first paragraph was to get the children to associate that habit with something negative and undesirable—and maybe take pity on their parents who as you may note, tend to do daily what the dragon slave children are forced to do!

Jackie Mulhall and I collaborated on writing this story. We deliberately put in some very classic (cliche?) imagery for familiarity's sake. It was originally written for a preschool class. I later changed it and made it scarier for older children. You can adapt it to fit the age level of your group. I can assure you, if told with flair, they will be on the edge of their seats wide-eyed and attentive! With older kids, (like around age 7 and up), I make the room very dark and read by a pale blue light when Lena enters the dark tunnel. This really heightens the suspense.

An abbreviated picture-panel version (like a comic book) of this story was published in *Brilliant Star*, (July/Aug 2002) but the longer version is unpublished in hard form. The Brilliant Star version is wonderfully illustrated, so we let students look at it after sharing the full story. Also, at the end of the story the students are asked to try and **list as many virtues** that they can think of that Lena showed.

The last 2 musical selections in the Devotional Music section that use the verse *Armed with the Power of Thy Name* go perfectly with this story. (*Power of Thy Name* and *Remembrance of Thee*).

Here are the quotes that inspired this story:

QUOTES RELATING TO THE STORY OF LENA AND THE DRAGON SLAVE CHILDREN:

*Armed with the power of Thy name
nothing can ever hurt me,
and with Thy love in my heart
all the world's afflictions
can in no wise alarm me.*

~Bahá'u'lláh, (Prayers and Meditations)

*Thou art He Who changeth through His bidding
abasement into glory,
and weakness into strength,
and powerlessness into might,
and fear into calm,
and doubt into certainty.*

No God is there but Thee, the Mighty, the Beneficent.

~Bahá'u'lláh, (Prayers and Meditations)

*In Him have I placed My whole trust
and upon Him do the faithful place their complete reliance.*

~The Bab, (Selections from the Writings of The Bab)

*Heed not your weaknesses and frailty;
Fix your gaze upon the invincible power
of the Lord, your God, the Almighty....
Arise in His name, put your trust wholly in Him,
and be assured of ultimate victory.*

~ The Bab, (as quoted in Century of Light)

*Rely upon God. Trust in Him. Praise Him,
and call Him continually to mind.
He verily turneth trouble into ease,
and sorrow into solace, and toil into utter peace.
He verily hath dominion over all things.*

~`Abdu'l-Bahá, (Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá)

*Strive as much as ye can
to turn wholly toward the Kingdom,
that ye may acquire
innate courage and ideal power.*

~`Abdu'l-Bahá, (Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá)

*Look not upon thy weakness and thy powerlessness:
Look rather upon the might of thy Lord
that hath encompassed all horizons.*

~`Abdu'l-Bahá, (new translation taken from Tablet of the Heart)

*He whom the grace of Thy mercy aideth,
though he be but a drop,
shall become the boundless ocean,
and the merest atom which the outpouring
of Thy loving-kindness assisteth,
shall shine even as the radiant star.*

~`Abdu'l-Bahá, (Baha'i Prayers)

Trust in the favor of God.

***Look not at your own capacities,
for the divine bestowal can transform
a drop into an ocean;
it can make a tiny seed a lofty tree.***

~`Abdu'l-Bahá, (Promulgation of Universal Peace)

***Remember not your own limitations;
the help of God will come to you.***

Forget yourself. God's help will surely come!

***When you call on the Mercy of God waiting to reinforce you,
your strength will be tenfold.***

~`Abdu'l-Bahá, (Paris Talks)

***Now we must not consider our ability and capacity,
nay, rather, we must fix our gaze upon
the favors and bounties of God, in these days,
Who has made of the drop a sea, and of the atom a sun.***

~`Abdu'l-Bahá, (Tablets of the Divine Plan)

LENA AND THE DRAGON SLAVE CHILDREN

Long, Long ago, in a far away land there was a lovely little village nestled at the bottom of a mountain at the edge of a forest. Now this village was a pleasant place to live except that it had one very big problem. In the mountain next to the village there was a deep, dark cave, and in that cave there lived a nasty, dirty, stinky, mean, fire breathing dragon. Now, that dragon was a *really* lazy beast. He never liked to clean up after himself. Why, when he played with his toys, he never put them away afterwards! He never washed his plate after dinner, and he didn't even build himself a bathroom to go in!

The people of the village lived in constant fear because every once in a while, that dreadful dragon would swoop down on the village, grab a child in his talons, and take him or her home to be his slave. Those poor unfortunate children would be forced to clean up his playthings, wash his dishes, sweep up bones, and shovel mounds of dragon manure. OH, groooossss!!!

As you can imagine, this was very upsetting for everyone. The villagers were forever trying to rescue their children. Big brave men would hike from the village up the mountain to the dragon's cave, bearing swords, spears, arrows, and torches of fire, but they were never able to defeat the nasty dragon. They only came home tired, burned, and empty-handed. Things went on this way for years.

I didn't tell you about Lena yet. In the village lived a little tiny girl. Her name was Lena. Everyone in the village called her "teeny leeny." Lena may have been teeny but she had big dreams and a big heart. On nights when the wind blew down from the mountain into the village, Lena lay awake in her bed. Sometimes, if she listened hard, she could hear the mournful voices of the dragon slave children floating in on the breeze through her open bedroom window. What do you think she heard? (Heeeeelp us, please saaaave us, heeeeelp!)

It was at those times that Lena knew in her heart what she wanted to do most in life: Rescue the dragon slave children from their wicked dragon master!!

When Lena shared her dream with her family they all laughed and laughed. “How can a tiny child conquer a giant dragon? Why, even our strongest, bravest, biggest men have been unsuccessful! Lena, you’re way too tiny to do such a big thing!” her parents and brothers told her.

But Lena knew a secret that her family and those big strong men didn’t know: With the help of God, even the tiniest person could do more than 100 men.! This belief gave Lena courage and hope. She knew that if God wanted her to free the slave children, nothing, not even a dragon, could stop her. What do you think Lena did to get God’s help and to know what God wanted her to do? Pray!!!

For weeks and weeks, she prayed for a way to help the children. Then one night after praying with all her heart, she had a very clear dream. In her dream she walked outside her house and found a simple basket under some bushes. Inside the basket wrapped in a golden cloth was a most unusual wand. It looked as if it was made of gold and silver and it was tipped with a single feather. As Lena gazed at the wand, a shiny blue bird flew down and landed on her shoulder. It began to sing a sweet melody in her ear which Lena could fully understand. The bird told her that who ever was touched by the wand would be able to fly home to their nest, but that the holder of the wand would be wingless.

Just then, Lena woke up suddenly. Her heart was beating fast. She clearly remembered the dream and was seized with a very strong feeling that the wand in her dream was magical, but real--- and could be used to save the dragon slave children. The sun was just rising and the rest of the family was still sound asleep. She immediately got out of bed and ran to the same place outside she had seen in her dream. Sure enough, nestled under the same bushes was the very same simple basket. Lena dashed over to it and with great excitement flung open the lid.

Just as in the dream, a golden cloth lay covering something. Lena held her breath as she gently unfolded it.....And there was the very same wand!!!. She immediately thanked God for this wonderful gift. She wasted no time and ran back inside to write a note to her family informing them that she had gone to the

mountain dragon cave to free the children. She threw on her traveling cape, wrapped some bread and cheese along with the wand in a handkerchief, filled a pouch with water, and set off. But as the door shut behind her, a breeze blew in and carried her note into the fireplace. Her parents never found it.

Lena set out on her journey full of hope and determination, knowing that God was with her. As she climbed the mountain, she prayed continually to God for courage and strength. But between the prayers she could not help but think about the second thing the bird in her dream had told her...” *The one who held the wand would be wingless....*” She had an anxious feeling that she may not be able to return home even if the slave children were freed. But she still continued to climb up the mountain past big jagged boulders and wind swept twisted trees. It was hard, hard work, but God gave her the strength to keep going up and up.

By the time she reached the mouth of the cave, her village was just a tiny speck below. Now the sun was setting, and the cave was dark but---a last ray of light shone on a small hole next to the cave-- too tiny for big men. Lena got down on her hands and knees and could just barely fit in the hole. When she got inside, she realized it was a narrow tunnel. It was very dark and she felt cold and frightened. Again, she prayed for God’s assistance and much to Lena’s surprise and relief, the wand began to glow a warm, soft light. So, using the light, she crawled along the twists and turns of the tunnel not knowing where it would lead. Then suddenly, by the light of her wand, much to her horror, Lena saw a pair of glowing green eyes staring right at her!!! Her heart seemed to stop. Who do you think it was?

Thank God!, it was *not* the dragon, but a beautiful red silky fox. He spoke to her kindly, in human words. He said: “Follow me, I will show you the way to the children.”

Lena felt God’s loving care through this friendly fox. She crawled behind the fox for quite a distance until they came to what seemed a dead end. “This is where I leave you” the fox said. He pointed his nose towards a large moss-covered boulder. “I am not strong enough to move this but God willing, you can.” Lena was quite sad to bid farewell to the fox, but oh so grateful for his companionship and guidance. She thanked him and offered him her bread and cheese, which he gladly nibbled. They shared a bit of water together then in a flash, he was gone.

Lena studied the rock boulder for a moment, then knew exactly what to do. She knelt on her knees and chanted a prayer for the remover of difficulties. Soon the wand felt very warm in her fingers and seemed to pull her hand towards the rock. When the wand touched the stone, it immediately began to crack and broke into a million pieces. Each piece sprouted wings and flew out of the tunnel! To Lena's joy, there was now an opening in the wall! She peered through it and saw ten village children!!! They were huddled around a fire. She listened to their weak and tired voices as they discussed preparing for bed. Their work was done for the day and they were exhausted, dirty, sad, and oh so, so, homesick. The dragon was nowhere to be seen. He must be in his own private chamber, Lena reassured herself. She began to softly whistle an old village folk tune. The children immediately looked up in wonder. They were amazed to see a little girl's face in a hole in the cave wall above them. Lena beckoned with her hands for them to climb up to her. Still stunned, they managed to scramble up the wall onto ledges, but terribly afraid that at any moment the dragon would enter. They were skinny, underfed children, just the right size to fit into Lena's tunnel. She grabbed hold of each of their hands and pulled them up, amazed at her own strength.

The children were so excited and hopeful. Using her glowing wand, Lena led them, on hands and knees through the tunnel. They barely made a sound for fear of being caught by the dragon. Finally, they arrived at the other end and joyously climbed out and hugged each other. They immediately began to scramble down the mountain. But before they got very far, a foul smelling, odorous cloud of green gases wafted over them. They all froze with terror. What do you think they smelled?

Next, the ground trembled beneath their feet and they heard a low, rumbling growl. Horrified, they began to whimper and cry. "The dragon has found us out!!!" They cried. "We will be severely punished! You will get it the worst!!!", they told Lena. Just then, the hideous, green, slimy, scaly, stinky creature appeared from out the mouth of the cave's main entrance. Lena was terrified to the bone, but she remembered the wand and firmly told the children to not run away. She ordered them to encircle her and they did just that (because they knew running was useless). Lena yelled: "Fly away home dear ones, to your nests you go!" And as she did so, she tapped each one on the head with the wand and they immediately rose up in the air and like a streak of lightning were gone.

The dragon could not track them they flew so fast. He was billowing smoke and was horribly angry by now. Lena was the only one left. She began to tremble uncontrollably as the dragon lumbered towards her, furiously gnashing his very sharp teeth, shaking the ground with each step.... Lena closed her eyes and begged God to help her.

Immediately she felt silky fur against her tiny leg. It was the friendly fox!!! He seemed to smile and nodded towards the wand. Lena then knew what to do. She mounted the fox and quickly tapped him with her wand just as the dragon lunged for her hand. But Lena was prepared—she had switched the wand around and she bravely thrust it *handle first* into his filthy, slimy, smoking mouth. Right at that moment, the dragon’s wings began to droop and shrivel up. He let out a terrible screech and tried to grab Lena and the fox, but they were already high in the air flying home to her nest. “God is Great, the Help in Peril!” they sang as they flew towards the guiding lights of the village.

THE END

Note to teachers: When we read the story to little kids, (who tend to have short attention spans and need frequent physical activity), we stopped reading at the point where Lena found the wand in her *waking state*. We then took the kids outside where to their great delight, under a bush, was a basket, and in the basket, were a bunch of the wands (described below) wrapped in gold cloth. Then we walked back to the house and continued the story. Also, if your group would not be overly scared, turn off the lights when Lena enters the cave, and read by a blue light or tiny flashlight. My students loved this....

Related Activity: Virtue Hunt

See how many virtues kids can find in the story which Lena expressed. Here are the ones the authors know of—there may be more:

Compassion/Caring

Idealism

Courage

Faith

Hope

Gratitude (She thanks God and the fox)

Consideration (leaving a note for her family)

Willingness to sacrifice her life for others

Generosity (sharing food with the fox)

Determination

Perseverance

Wisdom (knowing what to do and when to do it)

Service

Related Craft: Wand Making

Make wands so you can play “Rescue the Dragon Slave Children” game with children. We suggest you at least put a feather at the end of the wand to symbolize the power of flight. We used the flashiest, sparkliest pipe cleaners we could find. We bent the bottom 1/3 into a loop and twisted it onto the rest of the pipe cleaner so you have a handle. Then we cut pretty purple, bright blue, and pink straws in 1/3rds and for each wand, slid that 2 inches of straw down the pipe cleaner until it stopped at the handle loop. Then we found fluffy matching colored feathers and attached one to the end of the pipe cleaner—so the purple straw pipe cleaner had a purple feather, etc.—but any feathers and any straws and any pipe cleaners will do.

Related Game: (See *Free the Dragon Slave Children* under Games)

3 simple poems about prayer, encourage the students to fill in the blanks of the rhyming words:

(authors and titles unknown to me)

Why I Say a Prayer

I say a prayer each morning,
and I say a prayer each night,
because somehow they make
me feel that everything is right.

My morning and my evening prayers
are candle-wicks that burn
so I may walk the proper path
and know which way to turn.

God Gave Me

God gave me a tongue
to remember and pray
to ask Him to help me
to thank Him each day.
God gave me two eyes
to see His Creation
to read Holy Books
and behold His revelation

God gave me two ears
to listen when I pray
and hear God's Message
of love today.

Always Say a Prayer (ASAP)—can be read as poem or sung to the tune of the Beatles' song "Let it Be"

Intro: Have you ever wondered about the abbreviation ASAP? Generally we think in terms of even more hurry and stress in our lives. If we think of this abbreviation in a different manner, we may begin to find a new way to deal with those rough days along the way. So, to help us remember to "Always Say (or Share) A Prayer," here is a poem:

When there's work to do and
No time left to spare.
As you hurry and scurry ...
Always say a prayer.

In the midst of family chaos,
"Quality time" is rare.
Do your best; let God do the rest ...
Always say a prayer.

Say a prayer. Say a prayer.
Say a prayer. Say a prayer.
God will send us blessings if we'll
Always say a prayer.

It may seem like all your worries
Are too much to bear.
But stop and take a breather ...
Always say a prayer.

God knows how life can be
And wants to ease our cares.
He'll respond to all our needs if we'll
Always say a prayer.

Say a prayer. Say a prayer.
Say a prayer. Say a prayer.

God will send us blessings if we'll
Always say a prayer.

Say a prayer. Say a prayer.
Say a prayer. Say a prayer.

God will surely answer if we'll
Always say a prayer.

Prayer is a gift to all
That God wants us to share
Find another one in need and
Always share a prayer.

When your neighbor is in pain,
Take some time to care.
Go spend some special time with him and
Always share a prayer.

Share a prayer. Share a prayer.
Share a prayer. Share a prayer.
God will send us blessings if we'll
Always share a prayer.

God loves us unconditionally,
Please him if you dare.
Take the time to talk with Him as you
Always share a prayer.

Today let's share a little prayer
That God will send a smile to you,
and send you special blessings
In all that you do.

Share a prayer. Share a prayer.
Share a prayer. Share a prayer.
God will send us blessings if we'll
Always share a prayer.

Share a prayer. Share a prayer.

Share a prayer. Share a prayer.
God will surely answer if we'll
Always share a prayer.

Endlessly Poem: This was originally a song about prayer, “Endlessly” by Jerry Irish from *We will Have a School* cassette which is no longer available. But b/c it rhymes, it makes a nice poem that can easily lend itself to pantomime actions.

(Explain that *mirth* means laughter, joy, cheer, fun)

“The melody is tender and the words are as follows:

When the dreamin’s done and I must rise...

And I wipe the sleep from my eyes,

Thou art my Light, O Lord,

Give me eyes to see

The way to You, O Lord,

That is best for me.

When the sun floats high above the earth....

And my family share their mirth

Thou art my sounds, O Lord,

Give me ears to hear

The way to you, O Lord

That is best for me.

And I pray that I recognize you

Through Your many worlds, endlessly

And I pray that you will educate me,

That I will wing towards you...endlessly.

In the twilight hours when night pours in...

And I turn to you to clear my head,

Thou art my heart, O Lord,

Give me thoughts to know

The way to you, O Lord,

That is best for me.

“Prayer Can Help Us” by Robert Voigt from *We Will Have a School*. (This cassette is no longer still available. It was created as a fundraiser in 1983 to help build Louhelen Baha’i School in Davison, Michigan.)

Like the “Endlessly” song above, this song can be used as a poem. It reinforces awareness on reasons to pray.

If you think it’s safe, place stools and chairs around the room, and whenever the word “up” was used, the kids can stand on them, then quickly get down for the next “up”. The chorus should be used several times to encourage this.

Chorus: Prayer can help us in many, many ways

Prayer can make our hearts and spirits raise.

Up goes my heart. Up goes my soul.

Then I start to feel a whole lot better.

I have a special way to talk to God,

a special way to say how I feel.

Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha show us how to pray,

to connect our hearts to God so we feel good every day.

I have a special reason to talk to God,

A prayer can help me say how I feel.

I can pray to praise God or make a weak person strong.

I can pray to help me grow or help someone else along.

CREATIVE DRAMATICS—skits

This list is also a guessing game under *Miscellaneous Activities*.

- **“Some of the Many Excellent Reasons to Pray”**. Kids act out the scenes below, and the audience is to guess what reason for praying that situation would suggest. The reasons are displayed on a board, so kids can survey them for answers. Often more than one reason is appropriate, acknowledge that, but keep nudging the group to find the exact one in this list. (For example, prayers for teaching others about God usually involve requests for assistance and guidance). Skits should generally be under a minute long. Ages 6 (with older kids helping) and up

In the list below, the *reasons* to pray that we came up in relation to the scenarios are listed *above* the scenarios. Performers privately chose a scenario with a team of 2 or 3, (they were printed out on strips of paper and put in a basket for retrieving. The performers can have the reason printed with their scene to help them fine tune their performance and understand what they are doing better). They were asked not to use the words or synonyms of the reasons so it's not too easy to guess. To turn this into a guessing game, (which engages the audience more), there needs to be rooms or areas that the actors can retreat to in order to rehearse privately or at least quietly in separate corners of a large room. The teacher should request that the audience show courtesy and respect and pay attention to the actors, and not blurt out the reason during the skit—but raise their hands to be called on.

Guidance

Examples: you fight w/ a friend and need to know what to say/do, or you are lost in some woods

Steadfastness

Examples: you need to do chores, but your friends want to play, or kids make fun of your religion and you're tempted to agree w/ them

Forgiveness

Examples: you hit your sibling, or you give a put down

Teaching God's cause/religion

Examples: you want to tell someone who is feeling sad about God's love, or you want to share that there is a new Messenger whose teachings will help bring peace to the world

Progress of deceased soul

Examples: a dear relative has died, or people die in a hurricane

Detachment

Examples: mom made cookies for grandparents, and you want to sneak some more even though you already had some, or someone has upset you and you want to gossip about them

Nearness to God, love of God

Examples: you feel spiritually empty and just want to watch TV, or you don't feel close to God and are starting to just not care about Him

Protection from danger or from one's own ignorance and vain imaginations (we discussed the meaning of vain imaginations i.e., = false beliefs or desires that are spiritually empty)

Examples: you are around someone who is a big bully, and they are angry at you for some reason, or you start to think you are better than others, or that immigrants are bad, and should all leave, or that you're so smart you don't need to study God's Words

Assistance, Remover of difficulties

Examples: you are about to go on a long journey, or a friend is in big trouble at school

Unity

Examples: there is a lot of arguing and bickering in your family, or your team is losing all the time b/c members are not working together and all are trying to be the one who gets the goals

Spiritual growth and transformation for yourself or others i.e., spiritual qualities such as love, kindness, tolerance, etc.

Examples: you need to be more patient or kind or your best friend is starting to pick up bad habits that are hurtful to them or to others

Healing

Examples: your sister or brother is sick and may miss summer vacation, or a close friend just dumped you.

To thank God

Examples: your sick parent got better, or you just moved and found a new wonderful friend, or you are grateful for God's beautiful and wise teachings.

To praise God

Examples: you went on vacation and got to see the awesome Grand Canyon, or you feel loved and safe in your life.

Summary of the reasons we came up in relation to the scenarios are as follows:

guidance

steadfastness

forgiveness

teaching God's cause

progress of deceased soul

detachment

nearness to God, love of God

protection from danger or from one's own ignorance and vain imaginations (we discussed the meaning of vain imaginations i.e., = false beliefs or desires that are spiritually empty)

assistance, remover of difficulties

unity

spiritual growth and transformation i.e., spiritual qualities such as love, kindness, tolerance, etc.

other people's spiritual growth

healing

to thank God

to praise God

GAMES

- **Snakes in the Grass:** (It can be played indoors if weather is inclement).

The quote that inspired this game is:

Shun all manner of vices as you shun a poisonous snake... ~`Abdu'l-Bahá

Shun=avoid, turn away from

Vice=bad habit, negative behavior

First we demonstrate the act of shunning. Then we explain that we are all striving to reflect the light of God in the mirror of our hearts as we journey towards God and want to show our love for God and grow nearer to Him. But it is easy to become addicted to things or pick up habits that act as layer of dust and grime on the mirror of our hearts and that do not reflect our love for God and spiritually move us farther away from Him. We called these things vices and we talked about the meaning of vice. We explain that vices can pollute our souls, as a venomous snake would poison your body.

We explained that if we want the *mirror of our heart to be pure* so it can reflect the light of God and *grow near to Him*, then we need to avoid vices. Vices poison/pollute our souls. We asked the kids for examples of vices, which they readily and accurately supplied. These would include addiction to material things, drug abuse, backbiting, gambling, the habit of putting oneself first, resort to violence when angry, lying, cheating, alcohol, etc. (If working with children under 8, let them come up with the list, and only add bad habits they would be familiar with at their age—i.e., lying, cheating, etc., not gambling or drug addiction, etc.) The snakes in the game represent these vices. We hissed at them like this to make the point: Visssssssssssssse Ssssssssnakes. They naturally mimicked us. We also explained that one of the purposes of religion is to warn and protect us from vices and guide us safely through life.

We reiterated that if you want to show your love for God and keep the mirror of your hearts clean and polished and grow nearer to Him, you should avoid vice snakes throughout your life—***and regular prayer really helps with this!***

A volunteer (and perhaps one or 2 kids who don't like the suspense of possibly getting caught) lay down on their bellies in the middle of a distance marked by 2 cones. They are the snakes, and they could not get up on their knees or leave a certain defined corridor. The goal is to leap, jig jag, run, etc. past the snakes w/o getting touched (poisoned—addicted to vice). We explain that the distance between the starting point and the safe zone (also marked by cones), is a year in your life and the goal is to get through each year w/o being poisoned by a vice-snake. If you get touched, you have come in contact with the vice and gotten poisoned and you become a snake too and join those in the snake corridor. We emphasize that the snakes can't grab, pinch or

scratch and the runners must be careful not to step or jump on the snakes. The kids had to learn to work together and run as a group b/c then the snakes were not all focused on one person. They learned to take advantage of a snake being distracted. Obviously, the game gets harder as the number of snakes grows, and the winners are those few that are the last ones to become a snake. But as with all our games, we never exalt a winner or make a big deal out of it.

Also, it is important to explain that you wait until all have gone through to run again. When all children have either reached the safe side or have become snakes, a new round begins, and kids run back again the opposite way. The snakes rotate to face the new direction from which kids will be coming each time. It does not work if kids are running back and forth from different sides, unless you are playing outside and have enough snakes to face both directions. We prefer to have everybody wait to run back until all have crossed, otherwise chaos can easily ensue. It also inspires kids to go quickly if they know that if they wait, they may be the last one running and all snakes will be focused on them alone. The width of the corridor will depend on how many kids you have starting as snakes and running. You can also adjust the width as more snakes arrive so that it does not become impossible to cross too soon. Just experiment.

- **Sacred Rain**

Ages 6 and up. In this game, the sacred rain is prayer. This game was inspired by these quotes using water and rain metaphors:

Obligatory prayers and supplications are the very water of life...Take great care with this... ~'Abdu'l-Bahá,
(The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting)

Obligatory=required, mandatory, necessary

Supplications=requests, pleas, prayer

Thou hast written concerning the Obligatory Prayer. Such prayer is mandatory and necessary for everyone. ... it is the cause of ascent for the souls. It is ...living waters from the gardens of paradise. It is a clear duty prescribed by the All-Merciful. In no wise is it permissible to postpone or neglect it. ~'Abdu'l-Bahá, (The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting)

Obligatory=required

Mandatory=needed, obligatory

Ascent=rise

Prescribed=ordered, strongly advised

Postpone=put off, delay

Neglect=ignore, forget, avoid

We emphasized with the students that when we pray, it is as if we are drawing down rain showers from heaven, which are the bounties of God. When we engage in communion with God, the Divine Spirit, this prayer cleanses and revitalizes, refreshes, and renews our hearts, enables us to grow and thrive spiritually, and protects us from our lower natures, represented by the person wearing an ugly mask.

Then we showed them some extraordinarily beautiful giant rain drops (4-5 inches tall and about 3 inches wide) which I had made using sticky backed holographic foil sheets bought from Nasco Arts and Crafts Catalog. This product and the patterns I used are no longer available from them. Here are some alternatives from Amazon that don't look quite like water, but are still very pretty: [holographicpaper1](#) or [holographicpaper2](#)

Or—one can just use silver: [silvervinyl](#) or even just silver foil paper that you paste on a tear drop shape yourself. (Though that will show wear and tear much more than vinyl.) But the holographic papers are amazingly lovely in light—reflecting multitudes of colors and the patterns change depending on one's angle. They really do look somewhat mystical! The kids “oohed” and “aahed” over them, so we knew they were attractive to them. (Also, they were stuck onto cardboard and then cut out so they would be firmer.) We told the kids that these drops represented prayer and that's why they were so beautiful.

We explained that one of us was going to hide these lovely raindrops outside in the commons and in the acre of woods included in the commons. They would not be under anything, they would be in plain sight, but you would still have to look closely to notice them since we were playing in a large area.. They may be tucked in a branch, or behind a tree trunk or laid among vegetation on the ground. A teacher was going to wear a Grinch mask, and she stood for greed, selfishness, anger, materialism, ignorance, etc.--all those aspects that are manifestations of the lower nature—aspects which prayer can protect us from.

We would count to 20 and give them a head start. They were to run outside and locate the Sacred Rain as fast as possible. The masked teacher would chase them and could freeze them if they did not have one of the drops. This symbolized how the lower nature can stifle spiritual progress w/o the influence of prayer. But all was not lost. If you got frozen, you should yell for help. Another soul could find another drop and unfreeze you by giving it to you. But one could not give up their own raindrop—they had to find an extra one.

She had hidden several more drops than children, so in case some were not found, at some point, the game would still be able to end b/c every child would have one. Since the game will end when everyone is holding a sacred rain drop, it is important to not give them too much of a head start or to hide the drops in too obvious locations.

The other rule was that in order to be safe from the lower nature, players would need to hold the water drop between two hands, as in prayer position. If the lower nature saw you gesticulating with it in the air or holding it to your side, she could grab it away from you and freeze you—the lesson being: Never let life keep

you from prayer b/c the corruption of the world and lower nature are very powerful and can pollute your soul so easily. This is one of the reasons why Baha'u'llah exhorts us to pray every day. It was fun to sneak up from behind a child who was distracted and grab the raindrop. (The masked teacher then put it out of play by putting in her pocket). But it was also heartwarming to see how eagerly all the students came to the rescue and searched for more sacred rain to liberate that child. (This is also another reason to have a few extras hidden.)

The masked teacher also tried to tempt them to surrender their raindrop with promises of fame, fortune, swimming pools, horses, etc., just like the devil (which is a metaphor for the lower nature according to Baha'i teachings) would tempt a person to sell their soul. But even though they teased her by stepping away and removing the drop from the prayer position, they never handed it over for material gain.

- ***Circle of Prayer, Hula Hoop Pass***

(Ages 5 and Up) Get children in a circle. Hook one or more hoops on the arms of some of the children. Then all hold hands and proceed to pass the hoops around the circle. Kids have to get their whole body through the hoop before passing it, *w/o letting go of the hands they are holding* in the circle. You can make this a race between two teams if you must—the goal is to get all your hoops back to the starting person first. It is more lively if more than one hoop is being passed around the circle, that way more than 2 kids are engaged at one time. We have even used one hoop for each child and that can get really fun---- and chaotic.

For our unit on prayer, we said the hoops represented prayer circles, and each child the hoop passed over was a person being prayed for in a prayer circle. We shared how there have been scientific studies which prove that those who are sick heal better if prayed for by a prayer circle, even if they and their doctors are unaware of this and those praying for them don't know them personally. The other metaphor one could use is that the circle of children is the prayer circle, and the hoops are the prayers being said by the members. The holding of hands symbolizes spiritual connection or unity.

Variation 1: (Ages 6 and Up) This really works: Have 2 or more hoops going around each circle of children, *in opposite directions*, which must get back to their original starting locations. At some point, they have to pass each other. The hoops should have something to identify them (such as being a different color or marked with tape) so one knows that they have actually passed over each other.

Variation 2: (Ages 6 and Up) And because the weather was so lovely, and the kids needed more physical activity, we played a hoop toss game using the hula hoops. The students spread out in the grass in an open area and my co-teacher and I flung the hoops through the air like frisbees, and students attempted to dive into them. To prevent hogging, we asked those who succeeded to give others a chance. The hoops can stand for prayers, (or prayer circles) and if you were encircled by one, then meant that you got the benefit of a prayer. Some kids enjoyed trying to dive into the hoops in pairs b/c that was even more challenging. Players were

encouraged to not just stand in one spot if the hoop was flying over them, but to move quickly to receive it. Those tossing need to be youth or older and have decent aim and be careful to toss high, slowly, and lightly, as hula hoops can really hurt an unsuspecting nose or mouth.

Variation 3: (Ages 8 and Up) Students spread out in an open area and a hoop is tossed very high, and a name is called, and that child runs to try and dive inside the hoop. If that is too hard, the name can be called before the hoop is tossed. Some kids don't even try if the hoop is not right next to them. I admonished them that this is like having a prayer circle arranged for you, but then you don't act to make things happen. (According to Baha'i teachings, action is a critical part of effective prayer). Another fun technique is to toss 2-5 hoops at once (they are stacked but spread out in unpredictable directions as they fly out) and see how many of the hoops kids can get inside.

Note: Instead of the hoops for the tossing game, we *decided to use giant cloth frisbees with holes in the center called Beamos—which are softer and less likely to create an ouch*. Beamos are ideal for this, just give kids time to practice with these giant fabric discs of varied colors stitched together. They come in 20inch and 30 inch diameters, and some places even have 16inch. Walmart has knock off brands as well. If you get these make sure you tell kids not to bend them or play tug of war in an attempt to get it from someone else. Use on grassy areas only as blacktop may tear the fabric around the hoop. They usually cost anywhere from \$18-25 a piece).

[20inBeamo](#)

[30inBeamo](#)

We also played a spontaneous game of keep away b/c we had time: My co-teacher and I put on masks and played the lower nature—which prayer helps protect us from. The beamos were prayer circles and we tried to get them away from the students. They worked together to keep them away from us by tossing them to each other as we ran towards them. It was really fun.

- ***Sacred Light***

Ages 6 and up. This game would be played exactly like *Sacred Rain*, except that light symbol would be used instead of rain drops. We want the students to really understand and remember the concept that prayer and the Words of God are like rain and sunlight for the human heart and soul—and like a plant, they need these to be healthy and thrive spiritually.

Like Sacred Rain, we prefer to play this game outside, but if the weather is nasty, you can play it inside. Inside, the lower nature crawls on knees or hands and feet so the kids stand a chance at escape. While I

explained the rules and quotes, my co-teacher hid the light sticks in the playroom, hideout, living room and dining room, so just a little part of the yellow part was showing. (However the description below is for outside b/c that is how it is usually played.)

The following quotes using the light metaphor are used instead of the water metaphor: (Children can guess the underlined words if you decide to share these quotes.)

Remembrance of Me is a healing medicine to the souls and a light to the hearts of men.

~Bahá'u'lláh, (Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude)

Verily, by His remembrance the eye is cheered and the heart is filled with light.

~Bahá'u'lláh, (The Kitab-i-Aqdas)

Verily=truthfully

I beseech Thee by them Who are the Day-Springs of Thine invisible Essence, the Most Exalted, the All-Glorious, to make of my prayer a fire that will burn away the veils which have shut me out from Thy beauty, and a light that will lead me unto the ocean of Thy Presence. ~Bahá'u'lláh, (Prayers and Meditations)

When one supplicates to his Lord, turns to Him and seeks bounty from His Ocean, this supplication brings light to his heart, illumination to his sight, life to his soul and exaltation to his being.

~`Abdu'l-Bahá, (Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude)

Exaltation=great joy, upliftment

(For the light symbols, I had bought wooden sun shapes, double coated both sides of them with yellow paint markers specifically for wood, stuck a sun sticker in the center for extra pizzazz, and glued flat blue craft sticks to the back side—the side w/o the sticker.)

The light sticks represent Prayer. The symbol should be held up to the heart for protection from the lower nature bad guy.

We told the students that one of the most important habits we need to develop in life is to practice regular? (prayer) so that we can grow closer to? (God) and become more spiritually radiant. This will also protect us from ours? (Lower natures) and from the corruption and unspiritual forces in the world. We explained that the other teacher was going to hide these lovely light symbols outside in front of our house and on the East and West sides. (Normally we hide things in the commons behind my house, and in the acre of woods included in the commons, but we did that with Sacred Rain several times. We wanted to change to a new outdoor space since so many of the regular students know the best hiding places in the commons.) Anyway,

the light symbols would not be under anything, they would be in plain sight, but you would still have to look closely to notice them. My co-teacher was going to wear an ugly monster mask, and she stood for materialism, greed, selfishness, the darkness of ignorance, etc.--all those forces in the world that corrupt us and that are manifestations of the lower nature. If we don't have the light of prayer in our hearts, these forces can halt our progression towards God. This is why she can freeze you if you don't have the prayer symbol on your heart.

We would count to 10 and give them a head start. They were to run outside and locate a prayer light symbol as fast as possible. The lower nature would chase them and could freeze them if they did not have one of the prayer light symbols. But all was not lost. If you got frozen you should yell for help. Another soul could find another prayer light symbol and unfreeze you by giving it to you. But one could not give up their own light symbol—they had to find an extra one.

We had hidden several more prayer light symbols than children, so in case some were not found, at some point, the game would still be able to end b/c every child would have one. Since the game will end when everyone is steadfastly holding a light symbol over their heart, it is important to not give them too much of a head start or to hide the symbols in too obvious locations. My co-teacher stuck them in branches and laid them on the ground, but one still had to look a little bit to notice them, since we were playing on an acre of wooded land.

The other rule was that in order to be safe from the lower nature played by my co-teacher, you had to hold the symbol over your heart, to symbolize that you had the light of prayer “in your heart”. If she saw you gesticulating with it in the air or holding it to your side, she could grab it away from you and freeze you—the lesson being: Never let the light of prayer out of your heart b/c the corruption of the world and the lower nature are very powerful and can pollute your soul so easily. This is one of the reasons why Baha'u'llah exhorts us to pray every day and revealed hundreds of prayers for us to use. It was fun to sneak up from behind a child who was distracted and grab the light symbol. (It was then put out of play by putting in a pocket). But it was also heartwarming to see how eagerly all the students came to the rescue and searched for more prayer light symbols to liberate that child. (This is also another reason to have a few extras hidden.)

As in Sacred Rain, the lower nature also tried to tempt them to surrender their light symbols with promises of fame, fortune, swimming pools, horses, etc., just like the devil (which is a metaphor for the lower nature in the Baha'i teachings) would tempt a person to sell their soul. But even though they teased the lower nature by stepping away and removing the symbols away from their hearts, they never handed it over for material gain.

- **Free the Dragon Slave Children** (Goes with Lena and the Dragon Slave Children story under Stories section)

Ages 6 and up. One person is the dragon. An adult or older youth is a good choice for this role, but not essential. If you want, give him or her a slightly scary mask. (They can be a dragon, an ogre, a goblin, or any

kind of monster you wish). Several kids are the slave-prisoners and the Dragon stands guard over them. The dragon and his or her prisoners should have a defined area using a rope, rug, tape or chalk drawn on pavement. The dragon can't step outside of or chase rescuers beyond the bounds of the marked area. The prisoners can't step out of the bounds unless freed.

One or more other kids are the rescuers and they have wands. (If there are more than 2 rescuer children, you will need 2 dragons, otherwise the game will end way too fast.) If they can touch a child-prisoner with the wand (and the prisoner is aware of it—since it is a feather) that child is free to fly away—but if the dragon touches the rescuer the rescuer has to drop the wand and become a prisoner. If the child is touched by the wand and escapes, the dragon can not re-claim him or her by touching them---unless they pick up a wand and become a rescuer and get touched trying to free another. The wand may be retrieved by others that are free. The rescuers win if all the children escape, but the dragon wins if all the children are captured. If the game is too easy for the rescuers, you can allow the dragon to step one foot out of the circle when trying to touch a rescuer. Or you can allow the dragon to re-capture a freed (i.e., touched by the wand) slave if the dragon touches them before they get out of reach.

Encourage kids to work together—if several try to free the captives at once, coming from different sides of the taped boundaries, they have a much better chance b/c the dragon can't go after kids in front and be guarding his/her rear at the same time. Sacrificing one's own freedom for the release of others is definitely a possibility in this game, as it was in Lena's story.

- **Power and Effects of Prayer Memory Game.** We played a game using the list made from the quotations shared for the “Power and Effects of Prayer”— (located in long section of quotes under *Miscellaneous Quotations*). This list is based entirely on quotes compiled from the Baha'i Writings. I studied the list and selected the phrases that could be either represented through simple drawings (like the classic Pictionary game) or pantomimed easily w/ or w/o props. (The phrases that did not lend themselves to either of these forms of expression were put on a 2nd list that was used for another game outside, described below). The selected phrases were printed in large font on a sheet of paper and each student got one copy to refer to if necessary. This game could also be included under *drama* or *art*, as both are used here. Ages 9 and up

1. Strengthens soul
2. Changes ourselves
3. Revives our soul
4. Feeling of inner peace and contentment
5. Eye is cheered
6. Heart filled with light
7. Healer of ills

8. Illumination to sight
9. Means for heavenly ascent
10. Lamp unto hearts
11. Living waters from the gardens of paradise
12. Causes a connection between the servant and the True One
13. Produces awakening in man
14. Share secrets with the True Beloved
15. Self love is obliterated and disappears
16. Joy and gladness infuse the heart
17. Sorrows disappear
18. Circle of divine knowledge is ever wider
19. Fire of the love of God burns brighter
20. Makes us signs of guidance unto all mankind
21. Makes us brilliant stars
22. Makes us towering trees in the Abha paradise
23. Bestows (spiritual) life
24. Experience divine sweetness
25. Fire that burns away veils that shut us out from God's beauty
26. Light that leads us to Ocean of God's Presence

Markers and a dry erase board were provided if a student chose to draw rather than act. The first to guess what phrase the picture or pantomime represented (exact wording was not necessary, synonyms were acceptable) gets to be the next artist or actor. However, if one has answered correctly first more than twice, then that child chooses another student from the class who has not yet had a chance. If all have gotten to perform, then a child is chosen who has had only one opportunity as opposed to two. I marked off the phrases already completed and asked the new artist or actor to choose one that had not been done. The students in the audience however do not see this sheet—theirs still show the entire list, so it remains a challenge to discern which phrase is being acted out until the very last one. Students are reminded that they are not to draw or act out being God, but symbols (such as a sun) or pointing up are okay.

- **Power and Effects of Prayer Remember and Run Outdoor Memory Game**

We played this game using the list made from the quotations shared for the “Power and Effects of Prayer”— (located in long section of quotes under *Miscellaneous Quotations*). This list is based entirely on quotes compiled from the Baha’i Writings. Ages 9 and up

List from our compilation of the Power and Effects of Prayer:

1. Gain increased firmness and steadfastness

2. Become familiar with God
3. Gifts of the spirit are received
4. State of spiritual communion with God
5. Cultivate a sense of spirituality
6. Provides spiritual nourishment
7. Absolutely indispensable to inner spiritual development
8. Stimulant to the soul
9. Purifies the soul
10. Insures the soul's steady development
11. Greatest help in recreating ourselves
12. Attracts divine confirmations (i.e., aid, support)
13. Enter into a much closer communion with God
14. Brings life to the soul
15. Brings exaltation to our being
16. Is a healing medicine
17. Draws us nearer to God
18. Produces awareness in man
19. Protects and preserves us from tests
20. Causes us to reach the kingdom of mystery
21. Causes man to attain the worship of the Supreme One
22. Enables us to converse intimately with the True Beloved
23. No greater pleasure
24. Causes heart to become attentive to the Kingdom of God
25. Enables us to acquire bounties of God
26. Attain the confirmations of the Holy Spirit
27. Is the very foundation of the Cause of God

After verbally reviewing the list of selected phrases for the outdoor game we went outside to our large rectangular-ish playing field. We placed 1 set of goal cones at each end. I divided the group into 2 equal (if possible) teams, trying to balance age and experience evenly on each side. Then each team came to the center (can be marked with a rope or yardstick) and faced each other almost touching the center line.

Then I held the list and chose a phrase and started giving generous clues in the form of 1-3 words. For example, "prayer helps us become familiar with _____?" (God) or "prayer insures the soul's s_____ d_____" (steady development). The first person to remember/guess the phrase was met with a loud "Yes!" from me. At that point the team who had the member with the correct answer begins to chase the other team, who is only safe from capture if they make it through the goal cones on their side of the field. If anyone is tagged before reaching the goal cones, that person becomes a member of the other team.

So, the basic rule is, if a member of your team is first to get a correct answer, your team chases the other team. The team who did not have the member with the right answer first, runs away. (This is very similar to the *True VS False* game we often play as a review at the end of a unit). It is also helpful to point to the team w/ the correct answer so it is clear who got it and thus who should do the chasing. If both teams got the right answer at the same time, I usually point to the smallest team so that they can increase their numbers by tagging members of the other team.

ART/CRAFTS

- **Illustrate a prayer**

Students were to use the concrete imagery in this verse and any of following materials they liked to create an illustration:

O Lord! ... I am a tender plant; cause me to be nurtured through the outpourings of the clouds of Thy bounty. I am a sapling of the garden of love; make me into a fruitful tree... ~'Abdu'l-Bahá, (Baha'i Prayers)

Suggested Materials:

Small paper or felt plant leaves—an example: [SmallFeltLeaves](#)

Markers

Cotton balls for clouds

Silver paint pens for making rain drops and/or 3D raindrop stickers—an example: [3DRaindropStickers](#)

3D heart stickers—3 examples: [FeltHeartStickers](#) plastic raised heart stickers: [PlasticHeartStickers](#) or if you want more than just red hearts: [PlasticMulticolorHearts](#)

Tiny red, yellow, and orange pom poms for fruits—an example: [TinyPomPoms](#)

Light blue metallic/pearlescent cardstock—an example: [LightBluePearlescentCardstock](#)

Glue sticks

Glue for pom poms

Pencils, sharpeners, and erasers

Little cutouts of people in diverse skin color for example: [3inchpaperdolls](#)

The verse on gold paper Gold Metallic Paper [GoldPaper](#)

- **Decorate a Prayer Card**

These 2 business sized cards can be bought at these links:

Brilliant Star: [BrilliantStarCard](#)

O God, guide me, protect me, make of me a shining lamp and a brilliant star. Thou art the Mighty and the Powerful. - 'Abdu'l-Bahá, (Compilations, Baha'i Prayers)

Blessed Spot: [BlessedSpotCard](#)

Blessed is the spot, and the house, and the place, and the city, and the heart, and the mountain, and the refuge, and the cave, and the valley, and the land, and the sea, and the island, and the meadow where mention of God hath been made, and His praise glorified. ~Bahá'u'lláh, (Compilations, Baha'i Prayers)

Kids paste these cards (they are blank on backside) onto a small matboard or thick cardstock. Then they decorate around it.

Suggested *Materials*:

- 5x7 mat board or cardstock (I always got the matboard for free or very cheaply at picture framing places—just ask for smaller scraps unless you have a paper cutter and can cut it yourself)
- glue stick paste
- markers—metallic, sparkley, and regular washable (or permanent which often have stronger colors).
- pretty stickers such as hearts, stars, smiling faces
- pencils, erasers, sharpeners
- sticky backed gems in various shapes

MISCELLANEOUS ACTIVITIES

- **Prayer Plant Metaphor using a dinosaur plant.** (Also sold as Resurrection plants). They are available for around \$7.75 a piece. They can lay dormant and un-watered but alive for 50 (yes, that's fifty) years. They are ancient plants that thrived when the dinosaurs did. When dry, they look totally, utterly dead, brown and shriveled. When watered, within 3 hours a full plant has grown, turning a slightly reddish green. Within ½ hour one can see signs of life. (Available on the internet at Amazon and other places, just type in "dinosaur plant"). What a great visual metaphor for the influence of prayer and/or obligatory prayer and its effect on our souls! We shared this quote in conjunction with this plant:

Obligatory prayers and supplications are the very water of life... Take great care with this... ~'Abdu'l-Bahá,
(The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting)

Obligatory=required, mandatory, necessary

Supplications=requests, pleas, prayer

(It was explained that there are 3 certain obligatory prayers that were revealed by Baha'u'llah for His followers. Reciting one of these daily becomes obligatory only when a Baha'i turns 15).

The dead-looking and dried up plant was passed around the class so children could feel just how brittle and dry it was. Then each student watered the plant using a special lovely silver pitcher. The plant and the rocks that come with it are supposed to be rinsed, so a large bowl was put under the small clear container that holds the plant and its rocks and water from the pitcher was poured repeatedly over it. The water from last pouring was kept in the clear container. Then it was put on a sunny windowsill and we watched it transform throughout the afternoon and discussed how prayer *revives*, *renews*, *transforms*, and *stimulates* our souls to grow just like the water did for these ancient plants.

- **Prayer Plant Metaphor using a small flowering plant.** We presented a potted flowering plant in a small pot wrapped with golden foil, sitting on a pretty saucer that was slightly wilted. We said this plant represents your soul. Then we explained that our souls are like this plant in that we need the light of God's guidance and the rain showers of His bounties in order to grow and be healthy spiritually. Many, many Baha'i prayers and tablets use the analogies of plants for people and gardens for hearts and sunlight and rain to symbolize God's bestowals and gifts. (For example, see the prayers in the devotional music section). Like with the dinosaur plant, each child was invited to sprinkle some water on the plant and we put it on a sunny windowsill. We said: Let's see how this tender plant looks next class after it has received water and sunlight for 2 weeks. (For the 9 year plan conferences, if they are

a few days or even just one day, the slightly wilted plant will show visible improvement even in that limited time).

Then we pointed to an upside-down bucket and we asked the kids what would happen to the plant if it were to be placed under the bucket. They answered correctly that the plant would receive no light or water. We explained that this is like not praying and not reading the Creative Word--it cuts us off from the light of God's guidance and the showers of His gifts. Souls that cut themselves off from God do not grow and they wither spiritually. When flowers get enough sun light and rain they bloom and reveal their beautiful blossoms. What do you think might be the blossoms of the human soul? (Virtues, good deeds, etc.)

We lifted the bucket (which had the words “Not Praying” written on a label attached to it) to reveal a very pathetic and shriveled plant of the same species as the one above. (I had bought 2 vibrant flowering pansies (mums are also great) I micro-waved one of them for about 3 minutes before the class began and that worked perfectly. So, if you're in a time crunch to get a wilted plant—now you know what to do!)

(If working with preschoolers, a suitable activity would be to describe an action such as prayer, stealing, lying, memorizing the Creative Word, etc., and children point to the flower that best represents the impact on their soul. They can also share behaviors, actions, attitudes, feelings, etc. and point to the appropriate flower that would reflect the consequences to the soul).

Relevant quotes to the above presentations:

(Its more engaging if one asks the students to guess the underlined words. Provide hints, clues, pantomime, first few letters etc., as necessary).

Remembrance of Me is a healing medicine to the souls and a light to the hearts of men.

~Bahá'u'lláh, (Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude)

“Me” in this case refers to either God or His Divine Manifestation and of course “men” refers to humanity in general.

When one supplicates to his Lord, turns to Him and seeks bounty from His Ocean, this supplication brings light to his heart, illumination to his sight, life to his soul and exaltation to his being.

~`Abdu'l-Bahá, (Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude)

Supplicate=plead, pray, beg, requests

Bounty=gifts, generosity

Exaltation=joy, upliftment

Verily, by His remembrance the eye is cheered and the heart is filled with light.

~Baha'u'lláh, (The Kitab-i-Aqdas)

...withered the heart that is devoid of the remembrance of its Lord. ~ Bahá'u'lláh, (The Tabernacle of Unity)

Devoid=lacking, without

These children are even as young plants, and teaching them the prayers is as letting the rain pour down upon them, that they may wax tender and fresh... ~ `Abdu'l-Bahá, (Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá)

Remembrance of God is like the rain and dew which bestow freshness and grace on flowers and hyacinths, revive them and cause them to acquire fragrance...and renewed charm...Strive thou, then, to praise and glorify God by night and by day, that thou mayest attain infinite freshness and beauty. ~ `Abdu'l-Bahá, (Prayer, Meditation and the Devotional Attitude)

Bestow=give, impart, grant

Revive=renew, revitalize, restore, refresh, wake up

renewed =new, improved, transformed

- **“About Me and My Prayers”**. Students were asked questions based on an activity from page 7 of *Brilliant Star* Baha’i Children’s magazine, Sept/Oct 1998. The assignment provides an attractive header and asks kids to write answers to the following: (Which we did verbally as a group).

My name

My favorite prayer is:

Prayer helps me because: (Or ways prayer helps me)

When I pray, I feel:

At the bottom of the page is a drawing assignment: Where is your favorite place to pray? Or, if you could create your own place for praying, what would it look like. Draw yourself praying in this place.

- **“Blessed is the Spot Maze”** activity from *Brilliant Star* Baha’i Children’s magazine (Sept/Oct 1998 issue, page 6. It contains the prayer, and a maze with pictures of places from the prayer. I gave this as a voluntary take home assignment.
- **An interactive presentation on the mirror of the heart.** This activity also included an **interactive discussion and activity on reasons to pray.**

We presented a heart shaped mirror. The mirror had black crayon smeared all over it. We asked what that might represent. Most students understood right away that it likely represents our lower natures, and all that

veils us from the light of God. (We asked for examples, and students shared things like ignorance of His teachings, anger, greed, selfishness, prejudice, materialism, etc.) We held a light up to the mirror, and of course it could not reflect it. Then we asked: How can we cleanse the mirror of our hearts? There were many good answers, such as good deeds and reading the Word of God daily, and of course this one: we talked about how whenever we pray, for any reason, we are cleansing the mirror of our hearts so that they can reflect God's light and beauty more clearly.

(One can easily make a suitable heart mirror substitute by gluing any shaped mirror on the bottom layer of 2 pieces of red cardboard cut in a heart shape. Then cut an opening for the mirror in the top layer cardboard and seal the 2 layers together. Edge the heart with some pretty fabric or edging from the fabric store to make it extra beautiful.)

(A fairly relevant and catchy playful song, which has lyrics that mention hearts reflecting light is called "Radiance" and its free at Ruhi.org. Radiancesong.org).

We then briefly shared these **quotes**, asking the students to fill in the underlined words.

You must pray that your hearts may become filled with glorious lights, even as a purified mirror; then will the lights of the Sun of Truth shine therein. You must supplicate and pray to God every night and every day, seeking His assistance and help...~`Abdu'l-Bahá, (Promulgation of Universal Peace)

Glorious=magnificent, splendid, wonderful

Supplicate=beg, implore, plead, ask

The most important thing is to polish the mirrors of hearts in order that they may become illumined and receptive of the divine light. ~`Abdu'l-Bahá, (Promulgation of Universal Peace)

Receptive=open to, responsive to

...our duty lies in seeking to polish the mirrors of our hearts in order that we shall become reflectors of that light and recipients of the divine bounties which may be fully revealed through them. ~`Abdu'l-Bahá, (Promulgation of Universal Peace)

Recipient=receiver

Bounties=gifts, rewards, blessing

I prayed at the Court of Holiness to deliver thee from the darkness of the attachment to this world, enlighten thee by the Divine Illumination and purify the mirror of thy heart, so that the Rays of the Sun of Truth may shine therein. ~`Abdu'l-Bahá, (Japan Will Turn Ablaze)

Enlighten=make aware, inform, free from ignorance, awaken

Illumination=spiritual light, spiritual insight

Then we explained that there are many **reasons to pray**. We gave these examples: As a young adult, you are considering getting married to a person and want to know if this person is the right one for you, so you pray for *guidance*. You are old enough to fast and are tempted to eat out with your friends at lunch time during the Baha'i fast, so you pray for *steadfastness*. You backbited. You need to pray for *forgiveness*.

It is challenging for most humans to love, trust and rely on such a mysterious force we call God, but it can be a huge source of strength and tranquility:

Rely upon God. Trust in Him. Praise Him, and call Him continually to mind. He verily turneth trouble into ease, and sorrow into solace, and toil into utter peace. He verily hath dominion over all things. ~'Abdu'l-Bahá, (Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá)

We told the students that we were going to play a **short guessing game to go along with the mirror of the heart** (described above) which was to teach them many of the **reasons to pray**. (*This game was engaging and appropriate for some of the students, but too advanced for others. Kids need a break w/ physical movement before doing this cerebral activity and should be at least 7 or 8 yrs. old*).

For older kids, we would describe a situation and they would guess the motive or reason to pray. If they got it right, they *got to wipe a small section of the heart mirror clean with a wet baby wipe*, which was distributed to each student. Students were asked to raise their hands, and this way we made sure that every child got an opportunity to do some polishing of the heart mirror. This is a nice visual demonstration which symbolizes the effect of prayer on the human heart or soul.

Of course, many of the answers were not black and white. For example, prayers for teaching others about God usually involve requests for assistance and guidance, so these answers were acceptable also. We tried to give situations that would have clear answers, but there is definitely overlap.

We read all the reasons (*in italic*) first without the scenario/situation examples, so kids could then retrieve them from memory to match with the scenario/situations. We also wrote the reasons on a white board as an extra aid for those who could read and made sure not to share the examples in order of the list b/c obviously, that would make it too easy. We titled the list: "Some of the Many Excellent Reasons to Pray".

We also read all the examples for each reason at the same time, to make it more likely the students could figure out the reason. There were usually 2-3 examples for each reason.

(If you have limited time or younger kids, or you sense that the group would not tolerate such extensive talking, you can also skip the scenarios listed below and instead ask students to provide examples of actions that cleanse the human heart. Urge them not to copy each other's examples. You will likely get a lot of virtue-based actions, as opposed to spiritual habits like reading the Words of God, prayer, fasting, etc. After sharing an appropriate answer, a child would then get to wipe a part of the heart clean with their baby wipe).

The **reasons to pray** that we came up in relation to the scenarios are as follows:

Guidance

Examples: you fight w/ a friend and need to know what to say/do, or you are lost in some woods

Steadfastness

Examples: you need to do chores, but your friends want to play, or kids make fun of your religion and you're tempted to agree w/ them

Forgiveness

Examples: you hit your sibling, or you give a put down

Teaching God's cause/religion

Examples: you want to tell someone who is feeling sad about God's love, or you want to share that there is a new Messenger whose teachings will help bring peace to the world

Progress of deceased soul

Examples: a dear relative has died, or people die in a hurricane

Detachment

Examples: mom made cookies for grandparents, and you want to sneak some more even though you already had some, or someone has upset you and you want to gossip about them

Nearness to God, love of God

Examples: you feel spiritually empty and just want to watch TV, or you don't feel close to God and are starting to just not care about Him

Protection from danger or from one's own ignorance and vain imaginations (we discussed the meaning of vain imaginations i.e., = false beliefs or desires that are spiritually empty)

Examples: you are around someone who is a big bully, and they are angry at you for some reason, or you start to think you are better than others, or that immigrants are bad, and should all leave, or that you're so smart you don't need to study God's Words

Assistance, Remover of difficulties

Examples: you are about to go on a long journey, or a friend is in big trouble at school

Unity

Examples: there is a lot of arguing and bickering in your family, or your team is losing all the time b/c members are not working together and all are trying to be the one who gets the goals

Spiritual growth and transformation for yourself or others i.e., spiritual qualities such as love, kindness, tolerance, etc.

Examples: you need to be more patient or kind or your best friend is starting to pick up bad habits that are hurtful to them or to others

Healing

Examples: your sister or brother is sick and may miss summer vacation, or a close friend just dumped you.

To thank God

Examples: your sick parent got better, or you just moved and found a new wonderful friend, or you are grateful for God's beautiful and wise teachings.

To praise God

Examples: you went on vacation and got to see the awesome Grand Canyon, or you feel loved and safe in your life.

At the end of the activity, the heart was quite clean, and when we held a light to it, of course it reflected it beautifully.

Summary of the reasons we came up in relation to the scenarios are as follows:

guidance

steadfastness

forgiveness

teaching God's cause

progress of deceased soul

detachment

nearness to God, love of God

protection from danger or from one's own ignorance and vain imaginations (we discussed the meaning of vain imaginations i.e., = false beliefs or desires that are spiritually empty)

assistance, remover of difficulties

unity

spiritual growth and transformation i.e., spiritual qualities such as love, kindness, tolerance, etc.

other people's spiritual growth

healing

to thank God

to praise God

We reminded them that only the Manifestations are the Perfect Mirrors of God. No human soul has a perfectly spotless heart.

- **Discussion on how to pray.** We talked about praying sincerely with focus, without thinking about the physical world, lunch, a sound outside, etc. I shared that often my mind wanders off the words I am saying, but that does not mean I should assume that the prayer was a waste of time.

We assured the children that learning to pray well can take years of practice or be really easy and to not be hard on themselves. As a matter a fact, I am still learning how to pray even though I am 63 years old and became a Baha'i at 19! Sometimes I feel an intensely beautiful and powerful connection when I pray, other times, it is as if I am praying to a wall.

We talked about how God is not a vending machine—we should not always pray just to get what we want, but also for thanks and praise. And unlike vending machines, we often have no idea what the result or answer will be—and the reply is usually not immediate or obvious or what we had in mind, though sometimes it is. In the Baha'i Faith, we are encouraged to use the words of the Bab, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Bahá'u'lláh in our prayers. They left us hundreds and hundreds of supplications. They are considered more powerful than our own words.

We explained that perhaps this may be the case b/c these words were given to these special spiritual teachers by God, and so they are most pleasing to Him. The prayers given to us by these beings are in God's language, and they ask for things that are acceptable to God, and leave room for God's will to be done, not our own. For example, one can say to God in prayer: Please help me win this race or score this goal in my soccer game. Or one can say Bahá'u'lláh's words: "I beseech Thee to aid and assist me under all times and all conditions." That implies that we trust God will assist us in the way He deems best. Maybe winning the race or scoring the goal is not what is best b/c we have not worked hard enough to be that fast or we have not been cooperative and unified with our team and should not learn that we can get good results with little effort or when there is disunity within a team. We can ask God to help us get rich, or say: *"...Supply me, then, with the*

good of this world and of the next.” ~Bahá'u'lláh. Maybe what is best and good for us is not material wealth, but something else...

The true worshipper, while praying, should endeavour not so much to ask God to fulfil his wishes and desires, but rather to adjust these and make them conform to the Divine Will. Only through such an attitude can one derive that feeling of inner peace and contentment which the power of prayer alone can confer.

~Shoghi Effendi, (Prayer, Meditation and the Devotional Attitude)

Endeavor=try, attempt, strive

Conform=match, align, agree with, fit

Derive=get, receive

Confer=bestow, grant, give

However, of course we can pray in our own words, and often the most ardent prayers are in the form of feelings. And we can pray while walking, twirling, dancing, biking, etc. We don't have to be in a particular position. Only in the 3 Baha'i obligatory prayers are positions prescribed.

Then we shared and discussed this quote from the Baha'i teachings:

Prayer and meditation are very important factors in deepening the spiritual life of the individual, but with them must go also action and example... Both are essential. ~Shoghi Effendi, (Prayer, Meditation and the Devotional Attitude)

Essential-necessary

We talked about how important it is to take action after we have prayed for guidance or assistance.

According to Baha'i teachings, we do not attract divine assistance if we are passive and inert. We can't just pray for something like finding a friend, and not make an effort to be friendly, kind, and find ways to interact with new kids. Chances are very high that a new friend will not magically ring your doorbell.....but on the other hand, sometimes miracles do happen!

- **Discussion on the role of prayers in healing through sharing or summarizing several quotes:**
(Ages 8 and up—children really want to know if prayer can heal sick and injured loved ones!)

Spirit has influence; prayer has spiritual effect. Therefore, we pray, "O God! Heal this sick one!" Perchance God will answer. Does it matter who prays? God will answer the prayer of every servant if that prayer is urgent. His mercy is vast, illimitable. He answers the prayers of all His servants.....God will answer anyone.....

But we ask for things which the divine wisdom does not desire for us, and there is no answer to our prayer. His wisdom does not sanction what we wish. We pray, "O God! Make me wealthy!" If this prayer were universally answered, human affairs would be at a standstill. There would be none left to work in the streets, none to till the soil, none to build, none to run the trains. Therefore, it is evident that it would not be well for us if all prayers were answered. The affairs of the world would be interfered with, energies crippled and progress hindered. But whatever we ask for which is in accord with divine wisdom, God will answer. Assuredly!

For instance, a very feeble patient may ask the doctor to give him food which would be positively dangerous to his life and condition. He may beg for roast meat. The doctor is kind and wise. He knows it would be dangerous to his patient so he refuses to allow it. The doctor is merciful; the patient, ignorant. Through the doctor's kindness the patient recovers; his life is saved. Yet the patient may cry out that the doctor is unkind, not good, because he refuses to answer his pleading.

God is merciful. In His mercy He answers the prayers of all His servants when according to His supreme wisdom it is necessary. ~`Abdu'l-Bahá (Promulgation of Universal Peace)

Perchance=maybe, perhaps

Urgent=important, needing immediate attention

Vast=huge, limitless

Illimitable=unlimited, endless, never ending

Sanction=approve, permit, allow

Evident=clear, obvious, plain

Interfered=hindered, held up, disturbed, obstructed

Hindered=held up, delayed

Accord=in agreement with, in harmony with

Assuredly=surely, certainly

Feeble=weak

Pleading=begging, asking

Merciful=compassionate, caring

Supreme=highest, great

There are two ways of healing sickness, material means and spiritual means. The first is by the treatment of physicians; the second consisteth in prayers offered by the spiritual ones to God and in turning to Him. Both means should be used and practiced.

Illnesses which occur by reason of physical causes should be treated by doctors with medical remedies; those which are due to spiritual causes disappear through spiritual means. Thus, an illness caused by affliction, fear, nervous impressions, will be healed more effectively by spiritual rather than by physical treatment. Hence, both kinds of treatment should be followed; they are not contradictory. Therefore, thou shouldst also accept physical remedies inasmuch as these too have come from the mercy and favour of God, Who hath revealed and made manifest medical science so that His servants may profit from this kind

of treatment also. Thou shouldst give equal attention to spiritual treatments, for they produce marvellous effects.

Now, if thou wishest to know the true remedy which will heal man from all sickness and will give him the health of the divine kingdom, know that it is the precepts and teachings of God. Focus thine attention upon them. ~`Abdu'l-Bahá, (Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá)

Consisteth=made up of, based on

Affliction=suffering, hardship

Contradictory=opposing, conflicting

Precepts=teachings, laws

The last paragraph above engendered a lot of deep discussion on the root causes of many illnesses and how these root causes would be eliminated if the majority of the world accepted and applied the teachings of God's new Manifestation---teachings that would prevent war, pollution, trauma, abuse, alcoholism, the production of harmful foods and products, depression, etc. Violence, abuse, greed, addictions, materialism and consumerism are spiritual illnesses that either directly or indirectly cause physical illness.

The prayers which were revealed to ask for healing apply both to physical and spiritual healing. Recite them, then, to heal both the soul and the body. If healing is right for the patient, it will certainly be granted; but for some ailing persons, healing would only be the cause of other ills, and therefore wisdom doth not permit an affirmative answer to the prayer.

.....The power of the Holy Spirit healeth both physical and spiritual ailments.

~`Abdu'l-Bahá, (Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá)

Permit=allow

Affirmative=positive,

Ailments=illnesses, sicknesses

(Also available on many Baha'i CD's, such as *At First Light*, Vol.2 by Soulrise Melodies track 14, [HealingPrayer](#) and Munirih Sparrow's Nightsong CD).

Thy name is my healing, O my God, and remembrance of Thee is my remedy. Nearness to Thee is my hope, and love for Thee is my companion. Thy mercy to me is my healing and my succor in both this world and the world to come. Thou, verily, art the All-Bountiful, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. ~Bahá'u'lláh

Succor=help, aid, support, assistance, comfort

- **Give as a small take home gift: Business card sized prayer cards [MiniPrayerCards](#)** They are called Teaching Cards at the website. 5 suggestions:

Healing Prayer:

Thy name is my healing, O my God, and remembrance of Thee is my remedy. Nearness to Thee is my hope, and love for Thee is my companion. Thy mercy to me is my healing and my succor in both this world and the world to come. Thou, verily, art the All-Bountiful, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. ~Baha'u'lláh

Dominion is God's: This prayer is for use when one is scared of a storm or other frightening natural event. On the front of the card is a photo of a stormy looking sky, with the following words of Bahá'u'lláh from The Kitab-i-Aqdas

"Dominion is God's, the Lord of the seen and the unseen, the Lord of creation".

Dominion=power, authority, control

On the back side, it says:

On the appearance of fearful natural events call ye to mind the might and majesty of your Lord, He Who heareth and seeth all, and say "Dominion is God's, the Lord of the seen and the unseen, the Lord of creation". ~Bahá'u'lláh

Succor=help, aid, support, assistance, comfort

Brilliant Star:

O God, guide me, protect me, make of me a shining lamp and a brilliant star. Thou art the Mighty and the Powerful. - 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Children's Prayer:

O Thou kind Lord! These lovely children are the handiwork of the fingers of Thy might and the wondrous signs of Thy greatness. O God! Protect these children, graciously assist them to be educated and enable them to render service to the world of humanity. O God! These children are pearls, cause them to be nurtured within the shell of Thy loving-kindness. Thou art the Bountiful, the All-Loving. ~'Abdu'l-Bahá

Blessed Spot:

Blessed is the spot, and the house, and the place, and the city, and the heart, and the mountain, and the refuge, and the cave, and the valley, and the land, and the sea, and the island, and the meadow where mention of God hath been made, and His praise glorified. ~Bahá'u'lláh

MISCELLANEOUS QUOTATIONS to elucidate themes of prayer—for teacher deepening or for 9 yrs and up

How to Pray:

Guidance from these quotes below and made a list on how to pray (and how not to) on a pad of easel paper. One side of the sheet was titled: “How TO Pray” and the other side’s column was labeled: “How NOT to pray”. The bolded parts were summarized and written on the list.

My brother! How great, how very great, is the law of obligatory prayer... When a man commenceth the recitation of the Obligatory Prayer, he should be severed from all created things and regard himself as utter nothingness before the will and purpose of God, in such wise that he seeth naught but Him in the world of being. This is the station of God’s well-favored ones and those who are wholly devoted to Him. Should one perform the Obligatory Prayer in this manner, he will be accounted by God and the Concourse on high among the people of prayer. ~Bahá’u’lláh

Commenceth=begins, starts

Severed =detached, cut off

Utter=complete

Naught=nothing

Devoted=loyal, faithful, dedicated

Accounted=considered

Concourse=assembly, gathering

...approach Me not with lifeless hearts, defiled with worldly desires and cravings. ~Bahá’u’lláh, (The Persian Hidden Words #19)

Defiled=corrupted, tainted, polluted, stained

The most acceptable prayer is the one offered with the utmost spirituality and radiance; its prolongation hath not been and is not beloved by God. The more detached and the purer the prayer, the more acceptable is it in the presence of God. ~The Bab, (Selections from the Writings of The Bab)

Prolongation=continuation, extending

Purer=more genuine, real, sincere

We talked about what a prayer offered “with the utmost spirituality and radiance” might be like, and what is obviously not a state of spirituality and radiance when praying. (For example, with boredom, begrudgingly, in anger, etc.) We also discussed what detached and pure prayer might look like, and how easy it is to pray only

to get things and to be totally attached to what we want. For example, praying to beat someone in a game, is probably not pure or detached, or praying while thinking about dinner, or praying with no love of God, might not be pure prayers.

Whenever, with full concentration and humility, we undertake the obligatory prayer before God, and we recite it with complete purity, we shall taste such sweetness as to endow all existence with eternal life.

~'Abdu'l-Bahá, (The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting)

Humility=humbleness, lack of pride, meekness, modesty

Endow=give, grant, bestow

If one friend feels love for another, he will wish to say so. Though he knows that the friend is aware that he loves him, he will still wish to say so.... God knows the wishes of all hearts. But the impulse to prayer is a natural one, springing from man's love to God.

....Prayer need not be in words, but rather in thought and attitude. But if this love and this desire are lacking, it is useless to try to force them. Words without love mean nothing. If a person talks to you as an unpleasant duty, with no love or pleasure in his meeting with you, do you wish to converse with him?

(Report of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words as quoted in J. E. Esslemont, "Baha'u'llah and the New Era")

Impulse=desire, urge

Lacking=missing, absent

Converse=talk, communicate

Likewise, if we pray to God w/ no love in our hearts for Him, do we expect Him to answer?

- **Discussion regarding the Short Obligatory Prayer**—for kids 10 and up, teacher deepening

I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee. I testify, at this moment, to my powerlessness and to Thy might, to my poverty and to Thy wealth. There is none other God but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. ~Bahá'u'lláh, (Prayers and Meditations)

Bear= uphold, show

Testify=confirm, give evidence, state

Poverty=deficiency, lack, need

Peril=danger

Self-subsisting=dependent on no one or anything for life

I asked students: What are some ways to better know God? (Read and ponder His guidance, i.e., the Creative Word, pray, strive to develop His attributes in ourselves, study the behavior and life of His Messengers, study His messages in nature**, etc.).

*****Every created thing in the whole universe is but a door leading into His knowledge, a sign of His sovereignty, a revelation of His names, a symbol of His majesty, a token of His power, a means of admittance into His straight Path...~Bahá'u'lláh, (Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'lláh)***

What does worship mean? (Adore, love, revere). What else should we worship besides God? His Manifestations. Nothing else, ---not friends, spouses, money, things, nature, etc. Though loving others, having reverence for nature, is good, (after all God created them)---worship implies a much higher level of adulation and glorification. What are some ways we can worship God? (Commune with His Spirit, develop His attributes in ourselves, i.e. the virtues, serve humanity, serve His Cause, obey His laws, etc.) I also shared that according to Baha'i scripture, work done in the spirit of service, to the best of one's ability, and service to God and to humanity, are all forms of worship. (Obviously, not all work is included, like making products that are harmful, etc).

I asked the students what virtue is being cultivated by the phrase: "I testify, at this moment, to my powerlessness and to Thy might, to my poverty and to Thy wealth." (especially humility, but also respect, selflessness) In all the world's sacred scriptures one finds passages on how God detests vainglory, pride, and arrogance. Though we are noble and amazing beings who are made in the image of God, compared to Him, we are as nothing. We talked about how everything belongs to God, everything is made out of matter that He created. We are so poor in comparison.

Students were also asked what they think prayer is. Some of their answers were: "Worship, praise, a way to get close to God, talking to God, talking to His Messenger". I explained it as communion with God's spirit or conversing with Him.

- **Discussion and Quotes on Obligatory Prayers**—Ages 10 and up, or for teacher deepening

It was explained that there are 3 certain obligatory prayers that were revealed by Baha'u'llah for His followers. Reciting one of these daily becomes obligatory only when a Baha'i turns 15. However, one can begin saying an obligatory prayer at a younger age and reap the spiritual benefits. Children younger than 15 are exempt from, not forbidden to say obligatory prayers.

A youth wrote a letter to Shoghi Effendi**** asking about obligatory prayers. This was the answer:

The Guardian particularly appreciates the fact that you have been faithfully observing Baha'u'llah's injunction regarding the recital of the daily obligatory prayers, and have thereby set such a high example before your Baha'i fellow-youth. These daily prayers have been endowed with a special potency which only those who regularly recite them can adequately appreciate. The friends should therefore endeavour to make daily use of these prayers, whatever the peculiar circumstances and conditions of their life. ~Shoghi Effendi, (Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude)

Particularly=mainly, especially

Injunction=command

Regarding=concerning

Recital=saying aloud

Obligatory=mandatory, necessary, required, essential

Endowed=given, gifted

Potency=strength, power, influence

Adequately=satisfactorily, effectively

Endeavor=try, strive

Peculiar=unique, unusual, special

...the obligatory prayers are by their very nature of greater effectiveness and are endowed with a greater power than the non-obligatory ones, and as such are essential. ~Shoghi Effendi, (Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude)

Essential=necessary, vital, crucial

****(Shoghi Effendi was appointed as the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will & Testament in 1922. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was the son of Baha'u'llah and Shoghi Effendi was the grandson of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The Guardianship is an institution created by 'Abdu'l-Bahá that after His passing had sole authority to interpret Baha'i scripture and guide the administrative order of the Baha'i Faith. Shoghi Effendi passed away in 1957. Now the Universal House of Justice, an institution created by Baha'u'llah, administers the affairs of the Baha'i world community).

Short midday Obligatory Prayer: This has no genuflections and only requires that when saying it the believer turn his face towards 'Akka where Bahá'u'lláh is buried. This is a physical symbol of an inner reality, just as the plant stretches out to the sunlight - from which it receives life and growth - so we turn our hearts to the Manifestation of God, Baha'u'llah, when we pray; and we turn our faces, during this short prayer, to where His dust lies on this earth as a symbol of the inner act.

Bahá'u'lláh has reduced all ritual and form to an absolute minimum in His Faith. The few forms that there are - like those associated with the two longer obligatory daily prayers - are only symbols of the inner attitude. There is a wisdom in them, and a great blessing, but we cannot force ourselves to

understand or feel these things, that is why He gave us also the very short and simple prayer, for those who did not feel the desire to perform the acts associated with the other two. ~Shoghi Effendi, (Prayer, Meditation and the Devotional Attitude)

Genuflections=bowing, kneeling, respectful body movements

Ritual=ceremony, formal religious behavior

Absolute=total, complete

Minimum=smallest amount

We discussed how bowing one's head to the ground is a good symbol for the inner attitude of humility, lowliness, submission, and reverence.

Know thou that in every word and movement of the obligatory prayer there are allusions, mysteries and a wisdom that man is unable to comprehend, and letters and scrolls cannot contain. ~'Abdu'l-Bahá, (Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude)

Allusions=reference, hint

Comprehend=understand

We discussed and I demonstrated the genuflections and talked about the differences between the 3 obligatory prayers, (short, medium, and long) and their requirements in terms of time of day and frequency. They all are to be done in private, require ablutions and facing East. The 3x a day medium prayer may be more attractive to those who come from a Muslim background, b/c in Islam, obligatory prayers are said 5 times a day. Only once a day may seem unnatural to them. (Both the short and the long obligatory prayers are said only once a day).

Know thou that religion is as heaven; and fasting and obligatory prayer are its sun and its moon. We entreat God, exalted and glorified be He, to graciously aid all men to act according to His will and good-pleasure. ~Bahá'u'lláh, (The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting)

Entreat=plead, beg, ask

Exalted=high, lofty

Graciously=kindly, generously

According=in agreement with, in harmony with

We talked about how if religion is like the sky, then fasting and obligatory prayer must be really important according to the above quote.

My brother! How great, how very great, is the law of obligatory prayer... ~Bahá'u'lláh, (The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting)

O thou servant of the True Lord! Obligatory prayer and other supplications are essential to servitude unto Him Who is the All-Sufficing... ~'Abdu'l-Bahá, (The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting)

Supplications=prayers, requests, pleas

Essential=vital, necessary, crucial

All-sufficing=completely enough

- **Discussion about prayers and tests and difficulties using quotes:** (Ages 9 and Up, or for teacher deepening)

Who is there that hath cried after Thee, and whose prayer hath remained unanswered? Where is he to be found who hath reached forth towards Thee, and whom Thou hast failed to approach? ~Bahá'u'lláh, (Prayers and Meditations)

Even if every grief should surround me, as soon as I engage in conversing with God in obligatory prayer, all of my sorrows disappear and I achieve joy and gladness.

~'Abdu'l-Bahá, (The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting)

Engage=become involved in

Today, humanity is bowed down with trouble, sorrow and grief, no one escapes; the world is wet with tears; but, thank God, the remedy is at our doors. Let us turn our hearts away from the world of matter and live in the spiritual world! It alone can give us freedom! If we are hemmed in by difficulties we have only to call upon God, and by His great Mercy we shall be helped.

If sorrow and adversity visit us, let us turn our faces to the Kingdom and heavenly consolation will be outpoured.

If we are sick and in distress let us implore God's healing, and He will answer our prayer.

When our thoughts are filled with the bitterness of this world, let us turn our eyes to the sweetness of God's compassion and He will send us heavenly calm! If we are imprisoned in the material world, our spirit can soar into the Heavens and we shall be free indeed! ~'Abdu'l-Bahá, (Paris Talks)

Hemmed in=surrounded by

Adversity=hardship, trouble

Consolation=comfort, relief

Implore=beg, plead

Distress=suffering, stress, worry, trouble

Bitterness=sharpness, unpleasantness, negativity, hostility

Naturally there will be periods of distress and difficulty, and even severe tests, but if that person turns firmly toward the divine Manifestation, studies carefully His spiritual teachings and receives the blessings of the Holy Spirit, he will find that in reality these tests and difficulties have been the gifts of God to enable him to grow and develop. ~Shoghi Effendi

Although you seem to feel that your prayers have not so far been answered and do no longer have any hope that your material conditions will ameliorate, the Guardian wishes you nevertheless not to allow such disappointments to undermine your faith in the power of prayer, but rather to continue entreating the Almighty to enable you to discover the great wisdom which may be hidden behind all these sufferings. For are not our sufferings often blessings in disguise, through which God wishes to test the sincerity and depth of our faith, and thereby make us firmer in His Cause?

The true worshipper, while praying, should endeavour not so much to ask God to fulfil his wishes and desires, but rather to adjust these and make them conform to the Divine Will. Only through such an attitude can one derive that feeling of inner peace and contentment which the power of prayer alone can confer. ~Shoghi Effendi, (Prayer, Meditation and the Devotional Attitude)

Ameliorate=improve, get better

Undermine=weaken, damage

Entreating=begging, pleading

Sincerity=honesty, genuineness

Endeavor=strive, try

Confer=give, grant

The guidance below from Shoghi Effendi, quoted by the Universal House of Justice, was summarized by the bolded phrases.

.... use these five steps if we have a problem of any kind for which we desire a solution or wish help.

1. **Pray and meditate about it.** Use the prayers of the Manifestations, as they have the greatest power. Learn to remain in the silence of contemplation for a few moments.
2. During this deepest communion take the next step. **Arrive at a decision and hold to this.** This decision is usually born in a flash at the close or during the contemplation. It may seem almost impossible of accomplishment, but if it seems to be an answer to prayer or a way of solving the problem, then immediately take the next step.
3. **Have determination to carry the decision through.** Many fail here. The decision, budding into determination, is blighted and instead becomes a wish or a vague longing. When determination is born, immediately take the next step.

4. **Have faith and confidence**, that the Power of the Holy Spirit will flow through you, the right way will appear, the door will open, the right message, the right principle or the right book will be given to you. Have confidence, and the right thing will come to meet your need. Then as you rise from prayer take immediately the fifth step.
5. **Act as though it had all been answered.** Then act with tireless, ceaseless energy. And, as you act, you yourself will become a magnet which will attract more power to your being, until you become an unobstructed channel for the Divine Power to flow through you.
(The Universal House of Justice, Messages 1963 to 1986)

- **Power and Effects of Prayer**— (Ages 9 and up or for teacher deepening—ends w/ memory game)

We wrote on a giant pad of easel paper: THE POWER AND EFFECTS OF PRAYER. Then we **discussed and made a list of all the key phrases from the following quotes:** The phrases in **bold** are the ones that we used to compile the list—usually in regular English and summarizing. (Underlined words students were to deduce via context, pantomime, hints, clues, etc.)

I beseech Thee by them Who are the Day-Springs of Thine invisible Essence, the Most Exalted, the All-Glorious, to make of my prayer a fire that will burn away the veils which have shut me out from Thy beauty, and a light that will lead me unto the ocean of Thy Presence. ~Bahá'u'lláh, (Prayers and Meditations)

Verily, by His remembrance the eye is cheered and the heart is filled with light.

~Bahá'u'lláh, (The Kitab-i-Aqdas)

Verily=truthfully

The healer of all thine ills is remembrance of Me, forget it not. ~Bahá'u'lláh, (Persian Hidden Words, # 32)

Remembrance of Me is a healing medicine to the souls and a light to the hearts of men.

~Bahá'u'lláh, (Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude)

When one supplicates to his Lord, turns to Him and seeks bounty from His Ocean, this supplication brings light to his heart, illumination to his sight, life to his soul and exaltation to his being. ~`Abdu'l-Bahá, (Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude)

Supplicate=ask, pray, beg

Illumination=enlightenment, awareness, clarification

exaltation=intense joy, upliftment

Ready is He to answer whosoever calleth upon Him, and nigh is He unto such as commune with Him.

~Bahá'u'lláh, (The Summons of the Lord of Hosts)

Commune=converse, communicate, connect to

One of the laws is obligatory prayer. He Who is the Bearer of the divine mysteries hath called it the ladder of ascent. He saith: “Obligatory prayer is the means for the heavenly ascent of the believer.” Within it are hidden and concealed a myriad pearls and gems. Indeed, they are beyond computation. How great would be a man’s indolence and his injustice to himself if he were to abandon this ladder of ascent and attach himself to earthly treasures. ~Bahá'u'lláh, (The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting)

Ascent=rise

Myriad=countless, many

Computation=calculation, measuring

Indolence=laziness, sluggishness

Thou hast written concerning the Obligatory Prayer. Such prayer is mandatory and necessary for everyone. No doubt thou wilt guide all to its observance, because it is the cause of ascent for the souls. It is a lamp unto the hearts of the righteous and living waters from the gardens of paradise. It is a clear duty prescribed by the All-Merciful. In no wise is it permissible to postpone or neglect it. ~'Abdu'l-Bahá, (The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting)

Mandatory=not optional, essential

Observance=practice, performance

Wilt=will

Prescribed=ordered, commanded

Postpone=delay, put off

O thou spiritual friend! Thou hast asked about the wisdom of obligatory prayer. Know thou that such prayer is mandatory and essential. Man under no pretext whatsoever is excused from observing the prayer unless he is incapable of performing it or some great obstacle intervenes. The wisdom of obligatory prayer is this: That it causeth a connection between the servant and the True One..... obligatory prayer and fasting produceth awareness and awakening in man, and are conducive to his protection and preservation from tests. ~'Abdu'l-Bahá, (The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting)

Pretext=excuse

Obstacle=barrier, difficulty

Conducive=helpful, contributing

Preservation=defense, safeguarding

I asked the students about what kind of awakening ‘Abdu’l-Bahá may be referring to here. Also, I shared that based on my understanding and experience, this quote does not mean if we say our obligatory prayer we will never be tested---only that prayer will help us pass the tests or not be harmed by them.

Obligatory prayer and supplication cause man to reach the kingdom of mystery, and to attain the worship of the Supreme One. They bestow nearness unto His threshold. There is a pleasure in offering prayers that transcendeth all other pleasures, and there is a sweetness in chanting and singing the verses of God which is the greatest desire of all the believers, men and women alike. While reciting the Obligatory Prayer, one converseth intimately and shareth secrets with the true Beloved. No pleasure is greater than this, if one proceedeth with a soul detached, with tears overflowing, a trusting heart, and an eager spirit. Every joy is earthly save this one, the sweetness of which is divine.

~’Abdu’l-Bahá, (The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting)

Supreme=highest, greatest, matchless

Bestow=give, grant

Threshold=entrance

Transcendeth=goes beyond, rises above, exceeds, surpasses

Reciting=saying out loud

Intimately=closely, deeply

Proceedeth=begins, continues

Eager=enthusiastic

Obligatory prayer causeth the heart to become attentive to the Kingdom of God. One is alone with God, converseth with Him, and acquireth bounties. If one performeth the Obligatory Prayer with his heart in a state of utmost purity, he will obtain the confirmations of the Holy Spirit, and self-love will be obliterated and disappear. I hope that thou wilt persevere in the recitation of the Obligatory Prayer, and thus will come to understand the power of prayer and supplication.

~’Abdu’l-Bahá, (The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting)

Attentive=listening carefully, paying attention, focused

Converseth=talk with, communicate

Acquireth=get, obtain, gain

Bounties=rewards, gifts

Obtain=get, gain

Confirmations= assistance, support

Obliterated=wiped out

I suggested that perhaps the self-love in the above quote refers to self-conceit, egotistical love.

Obligatory prayer is the very foundation of the Cause of God. Through it joy and gladness infuse the heart. Even if every grief should surround me, as soon as I engage in conversing with God in obligatory prayer, all of my sorrows disappear and I achieve joy and gladness. A condition descendeth upon me which I am unable to describe or express. ~'Abdu'l-Bahá, (The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting)

Foundation=base, supporting structure

Infuse=fill, permeate

Descendeth=comes down, comes over

Recite the Obligatory Prayer and supplications as much as thou art able, so that day by day thou mayest attain to increased firmness and steadfastness, find greater joy and gladness, and discover that the circle of divine knowledge is ever wider and the fire of the love of God burns ever brighter within thee.

~'Abdu'l-Bahá, (The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting)

Supplications=pleadings, prayers, requests

Steadfastness=commitment, loyalty, devotion

Thee=you

It is incumbent upon you to ponder in your hearts and meditate upon His words, and humbly to call upon Him, and to put away self in His heavenly Cause. These are the things that will make of you signs of guidance unto all mankind, and brilliant stars shining down from the all-highest horizon, and towering trees in the Abha Paradise. ~'Abdu'l-Bahá, (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá)

Incumbent=obligatory, necessary

Ponder=think about, contemplate, meditate on

Humbly=mEEKly, respectfully, modestly

Abha=glorious

Abha Paradise=heaven

The state of prayer is the best of conditions, for man is then associating with God. Prayer verily bestoweth life, particularly when offered in private and at times, such as midnight, when freed from daily cares.

~'Abdu'l-Bahá, (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá)

Bestoweth=give, grant

I asked the students what does 'Abdu'l-Bahá mean when He says "bestoweth life"—i.e. what kind of life?

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. The greatest happiness for a lover is to converse with his beloved, and the greatest gift for a seeker is to become familiar with the object of his longing....~`Abdu'l-Bahá, (Baha'i World Faith)

Converse=communicate, speak with

Familiar=well known, intimate

When a person becomes a Baha'i, actually what takes place is that the seed of the spirit starts to grow in the human soul. This seed must be watered by the outpourings of the Holy Spirit. These gifts of the spirit are received through prayer, meditation, study of the Holy Utterances and service to the Cause of God..

~Shoghi Effendi, (The Importance of Deepening)

Utterances=words

For the core of religious faith is that mystic feeling that 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 Baha'u'llah has so much stressed the importance of worship. It is not sufficient for a believer to merely accept and observe the teachings. He should, in addition, cultivate the sense of spirituality, which he can acquire chiefly by the means of prayer. The Baha'i Faith, like all other Divine religions, is thus fundamentally mystic in character. Its chief goal is the development of the individual and society, through the acquisition of spiritual virtues and powers. It is the soul of man that has first to be fed. And this spiritual nourishment prayer can best provide...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, already stated, is the very foundation and purpose of the Religion of God. ~Shoghi

Effendi, (Directives of the Guardian)

Mystic=spiritual, supernatural, mysterious

Communion= union, intimacy, connection

Cultivate=grow, develop, nurture

Acquire=obtain, get, attain

Fundamentally=basically, essentially, primarily

Acquisition=gaining

Indispensable=crucial, vital, necessary

The power of God can entirely transmute our characters and make of us beings entirely unlike our previous selves. Through prayer and supplication, obedience to the divine laws Baha'u'llah has revealed,

***and ever-increasing service to His Faith, we can change ourselves.* ~Shoghi Effendi, (Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude)**

Transmute=change, transform

Previous=former, earlier

Supplication=request, plea

In relation to the above quote and the one below, we discussed how every single one of us needs to transmute our characters, needs help in becoming victorious over self, assistance in overcoming failings in our own characters, etc. None of us are perfect.

The believers, as we all know, should endeavour to set such an example in their personal lives and conduct that others will feel impelled to embrace a Faith which reforms human character. However, unfortunately, not everyone achieves easily and rapidly the victory over self. What every believer, new or old, should realize is that the Cause has the spiritual power to re-create us if we make the effort to let that power influence us, and the greatest help in this respect is prayer. We must supplicate Baha'u'llah to assist us to overcome the failings in our own characters, and also exert our own will-power in mastering ourselves.

~Shoghi Effendi, (Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude)

Endeavor=strive, try, attempt

Conduct=behavior

Impelled= moved, strongly encouraged, driven

Exert=put forth, apply, exercise

"As regards fasting, it constitutes, together with the obligatory prayers, the two pillars that sustain the revealed Law of God. They act as stimulants to the soul, strengthen, revive and purify it, and thus insure its steady development." ~Shoghi Effendi, (Directives from the Guardian)

Constitutes=makes up, forms

Sustain=uphold, maintain, support

Stimulant=quicken, activators

Revive=renew, revitalize, refresh

Insure=make sure or certain, guarantee, protect

...daily pray to Baha'u'llah to let you meet a soul receptive to His Message. The power of prayer is very great, and attracts the Divine confirmations. ~Shoghi Effendi, (Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude)

Receptive=open, responsive, interested

Confirmations=support, aid, blessings, gifts

"These daily obligatory prayers, together with a few other specific ones, such as the Healing Prayer, the Tablet of Ahmad, have been invested by Baha'u'llah with a special potency and significance, and should therefore be accepted as such and be recited by the believers with unquestioned faith and confidence, that through them they may enter into a much closer communion with God, and identify themselves more fully with His Laws and precepts."

~Shoghi Effendi, (Directives of the Guardian)

Invested=endowed, gifted, given

Potency=strength, power

Significance=meaning or importance

Recited=spoken, read out loud

Precepts=teachings

...feeling of inner peace and contentment which the power of prayer alone can confer.

~Shoghi Effendi, (Prayer, Meditation and the Devotional Attitude)

Confer=give

NOTES: After reviewing the complete list above, we **played a memory game**: I divided the class into 2 teams, trying to balance age and experience evenly on each side. Then I presented a bowl of tokens and turned the easel with the list on it away from the students. Anybody that could name anything from the list off the top of their head got 2 tokens for their team, which team captains put in their team cup. However, the right to answer alternated back and forth between the 2 teams—unless one team was totally stumped and no one could answer—then the question could go back to the other team. Also, one had to raise their hand and be called on b/c I wanted to give the younger kids an equal chance and also b/c otherwise it would have disintegrated into a shouting match.

To get a point/token, the exact wording was not required—just a close synonym or paraphrase. Once the teams ran out of answers from sheer memory, then I started giving clues in the form of a first word or syllable, then a second word or syllable, or pantomime. But if 2 clues have been given, and none of the teams got it, then any team can answer—b/c its an unfair advantage for the team that has heard more than 2 clues. Sometimes, for newer or younger students, questions were targeted just at them, and only they could answer for their team. (Otherwise, they would just be quiet and let the older, more experienced students answer). Each token was worth 2 jelly beans—the number was rounded up to the next number that could be divided evenly among the team members.

Most of you who know me know that I think children and adults consume way too much sugar. However, sweetness is metaphor used extensively in the Baha'i Writings. Thus, I believe sugar (in moderation) may be used to teach or reinforce spiritual concepts, and also to enrich special occasions.

Whenever, with full concentration and humility, we undertake the obligatory prayer before God, and we recite it with complete purity, we shall taste such sweetness as to endow all existence with eternal life.

~'Abdu'l-Bahá, (The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting)

Endow=give, bestow

There is a pleasure in offering prayers that transcendeth all other pleasures, and there is a sweetness in chanting and singing the verses of God.... While reciting the Obligatory Prayer, one converseth intimately and shareth secrets with the true Beloved. No pleasure is greater than this, if one proceedeth with a soul detached, with tears overflowing, a trusting heart, and an eager spirit. Every joy is earthly save this one, the sweetness of which is divine. ~'Abdu'l-Bahá, (The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting)

Transcendeth=goes beyond, rises above, exceeds, surpasses

Reciting=saying out loud

Intimately=closely, deeply

Proceedeth=begins, continues

Eager=enthusiastic

Summary of power and effects based on quotes above:

1. Strengthens soul
2. Changes ourselves
3. Revives our soul
4. Feeling of inner peace and contentment
5. Eye is cheered
6. Heart filled with light
7. Healer of ills
8. Illumination to sight
9. Means for heavenly ascent
10. Lamp unto hearts
11. Living waters from the gardens of paradise
12. Causes a connection between the servant and the True One
13. Produces awakening in man
14. Share secrets with the True Beloved
15. Self love is obliterated and disappears

16. Joy and gladness infuse the heart
17. Sorrows disappear
18. Circle of divine knowledge is ever wider
19. Fire of the love of God burns brighter
20. Makes us signs of guidance unto all mankind
21. Makes us brilliant stars
22. Makes us towering trees in the Abha paradise
23. Bestows (spiritual) life
24. Experience divine sweetness
25. Fire that burns away veils that shut us out from God's beauty
26. Light that leads us to Ocean of God's Presence
27. Gain increased firmness and steadfastness
28. Become familiar with God
29. Gifts of the spirit are received
30. State of spiritual communion with God
31. Cultivate a sense of spirituality
32. Provides spiritual nourishment
33. Absolutely indispensable to inner spiritual development
34. Stimulant to the soul
35. Purifies the soul
36. Insures the soul's steady development
37. Greatest help in recreating ourselves
38. Attracts divine confirmations (i.e., aid, support)
39. Enter into a much closer communion with God
40. Brings life to the soul
41. Brings exaltation to our being
42. Is a healing medicine
43. Draws us nearer to God
44. Produces awareness in man
45. Protects and preserves us from tests
46. Causes us to reach the kingdom of mystery
47. Causes man to attain the worship of the Supreme One
48. Enables us to converse intimately with the True Beloved
49. No greater pleasure
50. Causes heart to become attentive to the Kingdom of God
51. Enables us to acquire bounties of God
52. Attain the confirmations of the Holy Spirit
53. Is the very foundation of the Cause of God