

Is it a Bahai teaching that the obligatory prayers should be said in private?

To: XX,<TARIKH-LIST@LISTSERV.BUFFALO.EDU>
Subject: Ablutions
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Thank you for a charming picture of the devotions at the Shrine.

You say:

> 2. Given that we are enjoined to perform our obligatory prayres in
> the privacy of our chambers ...

I wonder if this is true? There is of course the tablet which says

"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."
(Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 295)

But this does not say that we **must** pray in private, only that our
prayers will have their effect on others **even if** we pray in private.

For a discussion and translation of the tablets in which `Abdu'l-Baha
refers to the saying of obligatory prayers in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar
building, and in devotional meetings, see R. Jackson Armstrong-
Ingram. *Music, Devotions, and Mashriqu'l-Adhkar* (Kalimat Press, 1987),
pp. 312-325. In addition to the tablets cited there, there is a tablet
of `Abdu'l-Baha to the Baha'is of Bushruyyeh, printed in
Ishraq-Khavari's *Ganjinih Hudud va Ahkam* p. 230, which refers to the
friends coming together in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar to say the obligatory
prayer.

The question is, how these tablets are to be related to the law of the
Kitab-i-Aqdas which forbids obligatory prayers in congregation
(paragraph 12). Taking `Abdu'l-Baha's station as authorized
interpreter of the Baha'i teachings as a given, (thus supposing his
instruction to the Bahais of Bushruyyeh is normative), we can perhaps
resolve the problem by looking at the definition of congregational

prayer which is implied in the instructions for the prayer for the dead, which is "to be recited by ****one**** of those present while the remainder of the party stands in silence" (Kitab-i-Aqdas, note 19, page 172), and to the following tablet of `Abdu'l-Baha:

"As to the obligatory prayer (to be said three times a day): Each one must say his prayer alone by himself, and this is not conditional on a private place; that is, both at home and in the worshipping-place, which is a gathering-place, it is allowable for one to say his prayer; but each person must say his prayer by himself (i. e., not in company with others who might recite the same words and continue the same postures together at the same time)." (Tablets of `Abdu'l-Baha Abbas, p. 464).

The material in brackets is presumably from the translator, so this should be treated with caution, but the tablet does suggest a solution: we ***should*** say our obligatory prayers in the devotional meeting or mashriq, but ***not*** in the manner of the prayer for the dead, in which one prayer leader prays on behalf of the others.

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