

## Chant—Some Bahá'í References and Stories

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1. "Let us investigate a song which is above all songs; one which will develop the spirit and produce harmony and exhilaration, unfolding the inner potentialities of life." 'Abdu'l-Baha
2. "Thou must warble, like the nightingale of significances in the rose-garden, so that thou mayest inspire all the birds of the meadow to chant and sing." TAB volume 3, p. 561.
3. I desire for you a universal patriotism. A high soaring bird attaches not its heart to its earth nest and abode. At every dawn it sings a new melody and at every eve it warbles the streams of divine mysteries in a new meadow. At one time it rises above the summit of the green mountains and spreads its imperial wings over deserts and plains and anon it breaks into ideal harmonies and chants the secrets of God.

It is not attached to home and comfort nor is it limited to nest and abode. Nay, rather, it is intoxicated with the wine of the love of God, singing at all times the anthems and praises of the Almighty. This is the habit and custom of heavenly birds; this is the manner and conduct of the nightingale of the rose garden of the merciful! (Abdu'l-Baha, Divine Philosophy, p. 34)

4. "O servant of Baha! Music is regarded as a praiseworthy science at the Threshold of the Almighty, so that thou mayest chant verses at large gatherings and congregations in a most wondrous melody and raise such hymns of praise at the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as to enrapture the Concourse on High. By virtue of this, consider how much the art of music is admired and praised. Try, if thou canst, to use spiritual melodies, songs and tunes, and to bring the earthly music into harmony with the celestial melody. Then thou wilt notice what a great influence music hath and what heavenly joy and life it conferreth. Strike up such a melody and tune as to cause the nightingales of divine mysteries to be filled with joy and ecstasy." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a recently translated Tablet to an individual believer; Bahá'í Writings on Music, a compilation of the Universal House of Justice)(Compilations, Lights of Guidance, p. 410)
5. 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 detached soul, with tears overflowing, with a trusting heart and an eager spirit. Every joy is earthly save this one, the sweetness of which is divine. (Compilations, The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting)

6. O thou honorable one!

Thank thou God that thou art instructed in music and melody, singing with pleasant voice the glorification and praise of the Eternal, the Living. I pray to God that thou mayest employ this talent in prayer and supplication, in order that the souls may become quickened, the hearts may become attracted and all may become inflamed with the fire of the love of God! (Abdu'l-Baha, Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha v3, p. 512)

7. Supplicate to God, pray to Him and invoke Him at midnight and at dawn. Be humble and submissive to God and chant the verses of thanksgiving at morn and eve, for that He guided thee unto the Manifest Light and showed to thee the straight Path and destined to thee the station of nearness in His wonderful Kingdom. (Abdu'l-Baha, Baha'i World Faith - Abdu'l-Baha Section, p. 359)

8. Then the sick man breathed his last. Mirza Aqa Jan ran to Bahá'u'lláh, with word of the death. Not only had the patient ceased to breathe, but his body was already going limp. His family were gathered about him, mourning him, shedding bitter tears. The Blessed Beauty said, "Go; chant the prayer of Ya Shafi -- O Thou, the Healer -- and Mirza Ja'far will come alive. Very rapidly, he will be as well as ever." I reached his bedside. His body was cold and all the signs of death were present. Slowly, he began to stir; soon he could move his limbs, and before an hour had passed he lifted his head, sat up, and proceeded to laugh and tell jokes.

He lived for a long time after that, occupied as ever with serving the friends. (Abdu'l-Baha, Memorials of the Faithful, p. 157)

9. "...in this garden of God, lift up your voices and sing the blissful anthems of the spirit. Become ye as the birds who offer Him their thanks, and in the blossoming bowers of life chant ye such melodies as will dazzle the minds of those who know. (Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 11)

10. Regarding arrangements for the Bahá'í Sunday meeting for the purpose of worship, this is very suitable. But, in a meeting for worship, first, prayer should be chanted and supplication made until all gather; then communion should be made. After praying, sacred readings with melodious voices should be read by all together. As this is the commencement of holding meetings, this is sufficient. (Abdu'l-Baha, Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha v1, p. 15)

11. "dilate your breasts by chanting the verses of God, "(Abdu'l-Baha, Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha v1, p. 30)

12. O maid-servant of God! Chant the Words of God and, pondering over their meaning, transform them into actions! (Abdu'l-Baha, Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha v1, p. 85)
13. By God, the True One, verily pure hearts are as clear and brilliant mirrors which imprint the one on the other, and hearts discover the secrets of hearts. Therefore, they (hearts) chant the verses of longing and recite the odes of glorification and praise. Consequently, the recourse is to pages of hearts, not pages filled with written lines. (Abdu'l-Baha, Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha v1, p. 121)
14. I beg of God that thou mayest find a cheerful life, cause the increase of the longing of all present in the meetings of the maid-servants of the Merciful One and bring joy and happiness to the handmaidens of God; so that thou mayest diffuse the fragrances and chant the manifest verses. Supplication to God at morn and eve is conducive to the joy of hearts, and prayer causes spirituality and fragrance. Thou shouldst necessarily continue therein. (Abdu'l-Baha, Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha v1, p. 185)
15. Supplicate to God, pray to Him and invoke Him at midnight and at dawn. Be humble and submissive to God and chant the verses of thanksgiving at morn and eve, for that He guided thee unto the Manifest Light and showed to thee the straight Path and destined to thee the station of nearness in His wonderful Kingdom. Verily I ask God to augment for thee, every day, the light of guidance and His gift of virtue, comfort and ease. Thus thou mayest set a good example in that region; that He may lift up the veil from before the eyes of thy mother and father, so that they may witness the lights of the Kingdom of God, which have encompassed all regions. (Abdu'l-Baha, Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha v2, p. 259)
16. Within the central edifice [The Mashriqu'l-Adhkar] there shall be read, chanted or sung only the words of the Sacred Scriptures of the revealed religions, or hymns based upon those words. (Baha'u'llah, Synopsis and Codification of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, p. 61)
17. All praise to the beloved Abhá Beauty, that those nightingales of the gardens of knowledge, those doves of the fragrant bowers of certitude, are singing the holy verses on the boughs of grace and bounty, celebrating the praise and glory of the Lord of the worlds, chanting His holy words, caroling to Him hymns of love, and extolling and lauding His blessed name. (Compilations, Bahiyyih Khanum, p. 193)
18. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's supreme joy is in observing that a number of leaves from among the handmaidens of the Blessed Beauty have been educated, that they are the essence of detachment, and are well-informed of the mysteries of the world of being; that they raise such a call in their glorification and praise of the Greatest Name as to cause the inmates of the Fanés of the Kingdom to become attracted and overjoyed, and that they recite prayers in prose and poetry, and melodiously

- chant the divine verses. I cherish the hope that thou wilt be one of them, wilt cast forth pearls, wilt be constantly engaged in singing His praise and wilt intone celestial strains in glorification of His attributes....(From a Tablet - translated from the Persian) (Compilations, The Compilation of Compilations Vol. II, p. 373)
19. We feel that it will be helpful to you to know that songs whose words are the primary Writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh or 'Abdu'l-Bahá are all quite fitting for the devotional portion of the Feast. Indeed, the Persian chants are such songs, out of a different tradition; they are a way of giving music to the holy Word, and each person who chants does it in a way which mirrors his feeling and expression of the Words he is uttering. As for songs whose words are poetic and the composition of persons other than the Figures of the Faith, these may be desirable but in their proper place, for, as you know, "music is the language of the spirit."
  20. Inasmuch as the spirit of our gathering is so much affected by the tone and quality of our worship, of our feeling and appreciation of the Word of God for this day, we would hope that you would encourage the most beautiful possible expression of the human spirits in your communities, through music among other modes of feeling. (22 February 1971 to the National Spiritual Assembly of Guyana, Surinam and French Guiana)(Compilations, The Compilation of Compilations vol. I, p. 450)
  21. "To chant but one verse with joy and gladness is better for you than reading all the Revelations of the Omnipotent God with carelessness." (Custodians, Ministry of the Custodians, p. 373)
  22. Sleep had departed from me that night. I was enthralled by the music of that voice which rose and fell as He chanted; now swelling forth as He revealed verses of the Qayyúmu'l-Asmá', again acquiring ethereal, subtle harmonies as He uttered the prayers He was revealing. (Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 5)
  23. Mirza Aqa Jan, recounting to Nabil his experiences, on that first and never to be forgotten night spent in Karbila, in the presence of his newly-found Beloved, Who was then a guest of Hajji Mirza Hasan-i-Hakim-Bashi, had given the following testimony: "As it was summer-time Bahá'u'lláh was in the habit of passing His evenings and of sleeping on the roof of the House.... That night, when He had gone to sleep, I, according to His directions, lay down for a brief rest, at a distance of a few feet from Him. No sooner had I risen, and ... started to offer my prayers, in a corner of the roof which adjoined a wall, than I beheld His blessed Person rise and walk towards me. When He reached me He said: 'You, too, are awake.' Whereupon He began to chant and pace back and forth. How shall I ever describe that voice and the verses it intoned, and His gait, as He strode before me! Methinks, with every step He took and every word He uttered thousands of oceans of light surged before my face, and thousands of worlds of incomparable splendor were unveiled to my eyes, and thousands of suns blazed their light upon me! In the moonlight that streamed upon Him, He thus continued to walk and to

chant. Every time He approached me He would pause, and, in a tone so wondrous that no tongue can describe it, would say: 'Hear Me, My son. By God, the True One! This Cause will assuredly be made manifest. Heed thou not the idle talk of the people of the Bayan, who pervert the meaning of every word.' In this manner He continued to walk and chant, and to address me these words until the first streaks of dawn appeared.... Afterwards I removed His bedding to His room, and, having prepared His tea for Him, was dismissed from His presence."(Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 115)

24. "Many a night," writes Nabil, depicting the tumult that had seized the hearts of Bahá'u'lláh's companions, in the days prior to the declaration of His mission, "would Mirza Aqa Jan gather them together in his room, close the door, light numerous camphorated candles, and chant aloud to them the newly revealed odes and Tablets in his possession. Wholly oblivious of this contingent world, completely immersed in the realms of the spirit, forgetful of the necessity for food, sleep or drink, they would suddenly discover that night had become day, and that the sun was approaching its zenith." (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 152)
25. "The voice of the Báb, as He dictated the teachings and principles of His Faith, could be clearly heard by those who were dwelling at the foot of the mountain. The melody of His chanting, the rhythmic flow of the verses which streamed from His lips caught our ears and penetrated into our very souls. Mountain and valley re-echoed the majesty of His voice. Our hearts vibrated in their depths to the appeal of His utterance."[1] (Shoghi Effendi, *The Dawn-Breakers*)
26. The messengers who acted as intermediaries between Hujjat and his companions were one day directed to inform the guards of the barricades to carry out the Báb's injunction to His followers and to repeat nineteen times, each night, each of the following invocations: "Allah-u-Akbar,"[1] "Allah-u-A'zam,"[2] "Allah-u-Ajmal,"[3] "Allah-u-Abhá,"[4] and "Allah-u-Athar."[5] The very night the behest was received, all the defenders of the barricades joined in shouting those words simultaneously. So loud and compelling was that cry that the enemy was rudely awakened from sleep, abandoned the camp in horror, and, hurrying to the environs of the governor's residence, sought shelter in the neighboring houses. A few were so shocked with terror that they instantly dropped dead. A considerable number of the inhabitants of Zanjan fled, panic-stricken, to the adjoining villages. Many believed that stupendous uproar to be a sign heralding the Day of Judgment; to others it signified the sending forth, on the part of Hujjat, of a fresh summons which they felt would be the prelude to a sudden offensive against them more terrible than any they had yet experienced.  
[1 "God the Great."]  
[2 "God the Most Great."]  
[3 "God the Most Beauteous."]  
[4 "God the Most Glorious."]  
[5 "God the Most Pure."]

"What," Hujjat was heard to remark, when informed of the terror that sudden invocation had inspired, "if I had been permitted by my Master to wage holy war against these cowardly miscreants! I am bidden by Him to instil into men's hearts the ennobling principles of charity and love, and to refrain from all unnecessary violence. My aim and that of my companions is, and ever will be, to serve our sovereign loyally and to be the well-wishers of his people. Had I chosen to follow in the footsteps of the ulamas of Zanjan, I should, as long as I live, have continued to remain the object of the slavish adoration of this people. Never shall I be willing to barter for all the treasures and honours this world can give me, the undying loyalty I bear His Cause."

The memory of that night still lingers in the minds of those who experienced its awe and terror. I have heard several eye-witnesses express in glowing terms the contrast between the tumult and disorder that reigned in the camp of the enemy and the atmosphere of reverent devotion that filled the fort. While those in the fort were invoking the name of God and praying for His guidance and mercy, their opponents, officers and men alike, were absorbed in acts of debauchery and shame. Though worn and exhausted, the occupants of the fort continued to observe their vigils and chant such anthems as the Báb had instructed them to repeat. The camp of the enemy at that same hour resounded with peals of noisy laughter, with imprecations and blasphemies. That night in particular, no sooner had the invocation pealed out than the dissolute officers, who were holding their wine-glasses in their hands, dropped them instantly to the ground and rushed out headlong, in bare feet, as if stunned by that stentorian outcry. Gambling tables were overturned in the midst of the disorder that ensued. Half dressed and bareheaded, a number ran out into the wilderness, while others betook themselves in haste to the homes of the ulamas and roused them from their sleep. Alarmed and overawed, these began to direct their fiercest invectives against one another for having kindled the fire of such great mischief.

As soon as the enemy had discovered the purpose of that loud clamour, they returned to their posts, reassured, though greatly humiliated, by their experience. The officers directed a certain number of their men to lie in ambush and to fire in any direction from which those voices might again proceed. Every night they succeeded in this way in slaying a number of the companions. Undeterred by the losses they were repeatedly sustaining, Hujjat's supporters continued to raise, with undiminished fervour, their invocation, despising the perils which the offering of the prayer involved. As their number diminished, that prayer grew louder and acquired added poignancy. Even the imminence of death was powerless to induce the intrepid defenders of the fort to give up what they deemed the noblest and most powerful reminder of their Beloved. (Shoghi Effendi, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 552)

27. You have asked whether it is permissible for the friends to recite prayers other than those revealed by the Central Figures of our Faith, prefacing your query by

citing an instance when a prayer from a different source was chanted at a Bahá'í public meeting. No prohibition has been found in the Bahá'í Writings against the recitation at public gatherings of prayers other than those provided in Bahá'í Scriptures. You are no doubt aware that in devotional programs at Bahá'í Houses of Worship it is permissible to include scriptures from other revealed religions, which may include prayers. (Letters, 2001 Sep 19, Definition and Scope of 'Devotional Meetings')

28. Qabil's life of service and dedication is clearly indicative of a potent and transforming influence on his soul, partly derived from his chanting of some passages of The Hidden Words every day.

He was a zealous and enthusiastic man, a poet of remarkable talent, a teacher of wide repute and, above all, devoted to Bahá'u'lláh. He lived to old age, after suffering many persecutions and spending much of his life in travel and teaching. He used to stay at home with his family only a few months each year; the rest of the time he traveled long distances on a donkey, riding from village to village and town to town. His enthusiastic spirit, coupled with his deep love for Bahá'u'lláh, cheered and uplifted the believers whom he met on his way. They would gather to meet him and he would often request them, whenever circumstances permitted, to chant in unison certain Tablets or poems of Bahá'u'lláh which lent themselves to collective chanting, and would teach them to sing together some of his own beautiful, soul-stirring songs composed in praise and glorification of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá or Shoghi Effendi.[The eldest grandson of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, appointed by Him as His successor and 'Guardian of the Cause of God'.]

In those days the playing of musical instruments was frowned upon by the Muslim clergy, and the Bahá'ís were careful not to upset a fanatical populace by playing them. But Qabil had a certain genius in clapping his hands to accompany their songs of love and praise. Where greater freedom prevailed, a homemade drum was a welcome accompaniment to his chant of love for Bahá'u'lláh. The believers, who were often oppressed and persecuted, always welcomed the few days that Qabil spent with them, for he created joy and enthusiasm wherever he went. (Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Baha'u'llah v 1, p. 77)

29. Az-Bagh-i-Ilahi is an ode revealed not long before the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh....The chanting of this beautiful ode creates an atmosphere of ecstasy and joy. It moves the heart and evokes a feeling of awe and excitement within the soul. No wonder that the companions of Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdad, who chanted it in their gatherings, were carried away into the realms of spirit, completely oblivious of this world and all its peoples. (Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Baha'u'llah v 1, p. 218)

30. Subhanika-Ya-Hu: A beautiful tablet in Arabic and in Bahá'u'lláh's own hand was revealed in Constantinople on the eve of the 5th of Jamadiyu'l-Avval 1280 A.H. (19 October 1863), the anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb. ...Like those

revealed near the time of Bahá'u'lláh's declaration, this Tablet pulsates with an indescribable power that can emanate only from the Pen of the Supreme Manifestation of God. Here, the matchless utterances of Bahá'u'lláh, original and profound, are possessed of such beauty and rhythm as no pen can describe. Composed in a style that lends itself to collective chanting, this Tablet creates an atmosphere of ecstasy and joy when chanted by the believers. (Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Baha'u'llah* v 2, p. 18) [1 Not to be confused with congregational prayer, which (with the exception of the Prayer for the Dead) is forbidden by Bahá'u'lláh. Tablets in the original language are chanted by an individual. Occasionally, when there is a refrain in a Tablet, it has been customary for others to join in the refrain if it is suitable to do so.]

31. Haji Mirza Haydar-'Ali describes the effect of being in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh when He chanted a Tablet He had revealed for him. This is the translation of some of his words: [1 See vols. 1 and 2.]

This Tablet... was chanted by the Beauty of the All-Bountiful.[1]What an effect it had on me! To what a world did I ascend! To what a paradise did I enter! What did I see! In what way did I hear that voice and that melody!...These I cannot tell. I entered that Paradise which no eye had seen, and no ear had heard, nor any heart had felt. I saw the Kingdom of grandeur and majesty, and felt the might, the transcendent power, the glory, and the sovereignty of the ever-living, the ever-abiding, the incomparable God. But to speak of it, write about it, give an image or likeness of it, exalt and sanctify it, allude to it, extol and Praise it, or describe and narrate it, all these are impossible for this humble servant or anyone else in the world. We have only access to words and terms, whereas that experience and condition are exalted above all things. They cannot be put into words or described by talks. No one can interpret the inner feelings of one's conscience... But this condition remains only for a single moment. It is a fleeting experience. It's manifestation within the human being is due to a special bounty of God. Its duration, varying from the twinkling of an eye to a longer period, depends upon one's capacity to become the recipient of this bounty. The deeds and actions of the person demonstrate its existence. But it has never been heard that this condition lasted for three or four months in a person except in Badi'...(6) [1 Bahá'u'lláh.](Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Baha'u'llah* v 3, p. 181)

32. ...there are Tablets or prayers revealed by Bahá'u'lláh or 'Abdu'l-Bahá which in the original language lend themselves to be chanted in unison. (Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Baha'u'llah* v 3, p. 351)
33. 'Abdu'l-Bahá in a Tablet (10) describes the beauty of the scenery of a summer residence where Bahá'u'lláh stayed one summer. This was in one of the villages in the area of Shimiran close to the Alburz mountain near Tihiran. This place had beautiful gardens and a lake. A huge stone platform was built in the middle of the lake. Upon it a tent was pitched surrounded by flowers. This was in the early days of the Bábí Faith and the believers used to come there, sometimes a hundred and

- fifty of them. Enchanted by the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, they would all sit around and chant the divine verses amid the charm of the surroundings. This is just an example of how He loved to spend His days in the countryside. (Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Baha'u'llah* v 3, p. 415)
34. I am straining my ears toward the East and toward the West, toward the North and toward the South that haply I may hear the songs of love and fellowship chanted in the meetings of the faithful. (H.M. Balyuzi, *Abdu'l-Baha - The Centre of the Covenant*, p. 405)
  35. Shoghi Effendi stood at the door of the Shrine and anointed every one with attar of rose as we passed him. When the last had entered, he came in and prostrated himself, trying to contain his tears which were streaming from his eyes. When he rose, he stood silent for a moment, and then intoned a chant with such sweetness as cannot be expressed in words. His voice rose and fell with varied degrees of tonality, expressing sorrow and joy, exaltation and hope. I became unaware of place and time, transported on the wings of the chant to a remoteness filled with joy, into a stillness of space far above the toil and suffering of man, where I heard the hum of the universe in all its immensity. There and then my soul was eternally linked with Shoghi Effendi, the purest channel between man and eternity, between all the Prophets of God and His children. (Ugo Giachery, *Shoghi Effendi - Recollections*, p. 20)
  36. ...may they, in their longing to meet Thee, invoke and pray unto Thee, intoning wondrous orisons at the dawn of light -- (Abdu'l-Baha, *Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha*, p. 6)
  37. Now is the time for the lovers of God to raise high the banners of unity, to intone, in the assemblages of the world, the verses of friendship and love and to demonstrate to all that the grace of God is one. Thus will the tabernacles of holiness be upraised on the summits of the earth, gathering all peoples into the protective shadow of the Word of Oneness. (Abdu'l-Baha, *Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha*, p. 20)
  38. Intone, then, before the face of the peoples of earth and heaven, and in a most melodious voice, the anthem of praise, for a remembrance of Him Who is the King of the names and attributes of God. (Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, p. 283)
  39. Create, ... O my God, out of the lights shed by Thy throne, handmaidens who will intone the melodies of Thy wondrous and most sweet invention, that they may magnify Thy name with such words as have not been heard by any of Thy creatures, be they the inmates of Thy heaven or the dwellers of Thine earth, nor been comprehended by any of Thy people. (Baha'u'llah, *Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah*, p. 326)