

## Five Ways to Achieve Our Purpose in Life

By Susan Gammage <sup>1</sup>

What's my purpose? What's the purpose in being alive? These are two questions I often hear! Many people struggle with this question and never find an answer, because they are looking in the material realm; and not in the spiritual.

As Bahá'ís we're lucky because the Bahá'í Writings tell us clearly! The purpose of this life is to prepare us for the next life:

One must remember that the purpose of this life is to prepare the soul for the next. (Messages from the Universal House of Justice: 1963-1986, p. 32, #126.4)

There are 5 ways to accomplish this:

1. To know God and to be obedient to His commandments:

The purpose of God in creating man hath been, and will ever be, to enable him to know his Creator and to attain His Presence. To this most excellent aim, this supreme objective, all the heavenly Books and the divinely-revealed and weighty Scriptures unequivocally bear witness. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XXIX, p. 70)

If we accomplish this, we will be in paradise:

Whoso hath recognized the Day Spring of Divine guidance and entered His holy court hath drawn nigh unto God and attained His Presence, a Presence which is the real Paradise, and of which the loftiest mansions of heaven are but a symbol. Such a man hath attained the knowledge of the station of Him Who is "at the distance of two bows," Who standeth beyond the Sadratu'l-Muntaha. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XXIX, p. 70)

If we don't, we will have condemned ourselves to the misery of remoteness and the nethermost fire, no matter what our earthly life might look like.

---

<sup>1</sup> Prepared by David Bowie (2023) for posting, with permission of author, at [https://bahai-library.com/gammage\\_various\\_essays](https://bahai-library.com/gammage_various_essays)

Whoso hath failed to recognize Him will have condemned himself to the misery of remoteness, a remoteness which is naught but utter nothingness and the essence of the nethermost fire. Such will be his fate, though to outward seeming he may occupy the earth's loftiest seats and be established upon its most exalted throne. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XXIX, pp. 70-71)

The short obligatory prayer reminds us of our purpose every day when we say it:

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. (Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh, CLXXXI, p. 314)

2. To attain our share of the flood of grace which God pours forth for us.

The whole duty of man in this Day is to attain that share of the flood of grace which God poureth forth for him. Let none, therefore, consider the largeness or smallness of the receptacle. The portion of some might lie in the palm of a man's hand, the portion of others might fill a cup, and of others even a gallon-measure. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, V, p. 8)

3. To carry forward an ever-advancing civilization:

All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. The Almighty beareth Me witness: To act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man. Those virtues that befit his dignity are forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all the peoples and kindreds of the earth. Say: O friends! Drink your fill from this crystal stream that floweth through the heavenly grace of Him Who is the Lord of Names. Let others partake of its waters in My name, that the leaders of men in every land may fully recognize the purpose for which the Eternal Truth hath been revealed, and the reason for which they themselves have been created. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CIX, p. 215)

4. To acquire the virtues we'll need in the next world: Just as a baby in womb doesn't know why it's developing arms, legs, eyelashes etc; we can't understand why we need to develop virtues for the next world either. We have to take it on faith, trusting

that, just as it became apparent soon after birth, it will become clearly apparent in our next birth too:

As the child in the womb does not yet know the use of its members, it does not know what its eyes are for, neither its nose, nor ears, nor tongue -- so also it is with the soul on earth. It cannot understand here the uses and powers of its spiritual gifts, but directly it enters the eternal kingdom, it will become clearly apparent. ('Abdul-Bahá, Bahá'í Prayers 9, p. 48)

While the baby is in the womb, there are certain things which must be properly developed, or the baby will be handicapped in this world. Similarly, we must develop certain qualities in this world, or we will be handicapped in the next:

As it is not yet shown while the child is in the womb of its mother, what its condition will be, whether it will have all the gifts of God or not, whether it will be perfect in all its members or not, whether it will be blind, or deaf, or dumb—but afterwards, when it enters the world, then it becomes clearly apparent if it is defective or not—so it is with the soul in this present state. Its perfection or its lackness is not understood until it enters the heavenly kingdom; then it is clearly seen, and then the soul understands whether or not it is lacking in the gifts of God. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í Prayers 9, p. 47)

To put it another way:

...in this world he must prepare himself for the life beyond. That which he needs in the world of the Kingdom must be obtained here. Just as he prepared himself in the world of the matrix by acquiring forces necessary in this sphere of existence, so, likewise, the indispensable forces of the divine existence must be potentially attained in this world. What is he in need of in the Kingdom which transcends the life and limitation of this mortal sphere? That world beyond is a world of sanctity and radiance; therefore, it is necessary that in this world he should acquire these divine attributes. In that world there is need of spirituality, faith, assurance, the knowledge and love of God. These he must attain in this world so that after his ascension from the earthly to the heavenly Kingdom he shall find all that is needful in that eternal life ready for him. That divine world is manifestly a world of lights; therefore, man has need of illumination here. That is a world of love; the love of God is essential. It is a world of perfections; virtues, or perfections, must be acquired. That world is vivified by the breaths of the Holy Spirit; in this world we must seek them. That is the Kingdom of

everlasting life; it must be attained during vanishing existence. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 226, #81.3-81.5)

What are the virtues that are important?

The virtues and attributes pertaining unto God are all evident and manifest, and have been mentioned and described in all the heavenly Books. Among them are trustworthiness, truthfulness, purity of heart while communing with God, forbearance, resignation to whatever the Almighty hath decreed, contentment with the things His Will hath provided, patience, nay, thankfulness in the midst of tribulation, and complete reliance, in all circumstances, upon Him. These rank, according to the estimate of God, among the highest and most laudable of all acts. All other acts are, and will ever remain, secondary and subordinate unto them.... (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXXXIV, p. 290)

That world beyond is a world of sanctity and radiance; therefore it is necessary that in this world he should acquire these divine attributes. In that world there is need of spirituality, faith, assurance, the knowledge and love of God. These he must attain in this world so that after his ascension from the earthly to the heavenly Kingdom he shall find all that is needful in that life eternal ready for him. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Foundations of World Unity, p. 63)

That divine world is manifestly a world of lights; therefore man has need of illumination here. That is a world of love; the love of God is essential. It is a world of perfections; virtues or perfections must be acquired. That world is vivified by the breaths of the Holy Spirit; in this world we must seek them. That is the Kingdom of life everlasting; it must be attained during this vanishing existence. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Foundations of World Unity, p. 63-64)

Man is born naked and when dead he is also naked. He brings nothing with him to this world, and when he departs he cannot take anything physical with him to the next. But whatever he has given to the Cause of God while on this earth, his time, his labours, his resources, as well as his services to his fellow human beings, these he can take with him to the spiritual realms. This is one way of transforming something which belongs to the world of matter into the spiritual worlds of God. (Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh v 3, p. 78)

So from these quotes we see that in this world, we need to develop:

- trustworthiness

- truthfulness
- purity of heart while communing with God
- forbearance
- resignation to whatever the Almighty hath decreed
- contentment with the things His Will hath provided
- patience and thankfulness in the midst of tribulation
- complete reliance, in all circumstances, upon God
- sanctity
- radiance
- spirituality
- faith
- assurance
- illumination
- the knowledge and love of God
- the breaths of the Holy Spirit
- time, labour, resources
- service to our fellow man

We won't understand how these qualities will be needed till we get to the next world:

For just as the effects and the fruitage of the uterine life are not to be found in that dark and narrow place, and only when the child is transferred to this wide earth do the benefits and uses of growth and development in that previous world become revealed—so likewise reward and punishment, heaven and hell, requital and retribution for actions done in this present life, will stand revealed in that other world beyond. And just as, if human life in the womb were limited to that uterine world, existence there would be nonsensical, irrelevant—so too if the life of this world, the deeds here done and their fruitage, did not come forth in the world beyond, the whole process would be irrational and foolish.

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 185)

How can we acquire those things? Through:

- the knowledge of God
- the love of God
- faith
- philanthropic deeds
- self-sacrifice
- severance from this world
- sanctity and ho-liness

By what means can man acquire these things? How shall he obtain these merciful gifts and powers? First, through the knowledge of God. Second, through the love of God. Third, through faith. Fourth, through philanthropic deeds. Fifth, through self-sacrifice. Sixth, through severance from this world. Seventh, through sanctity and holiness. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 226, #81.6)

If we do these things, we will enjoy everlasting existence and more:

But if he possesses the knowledge of God, becomes ignited through the fire of the love of God, witnesses the great and mighty signs of the Kingdom, becomes the cause of love among mankind and lives in the utmost state of sanctity and holiness, he shall surely attain to second birth, be baptized by the Holy Spirit and enjoy everlasting existence. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 226, #81.6)

If we don't, we will surely be deprived of eternal life!

Unless he acquires these forces and attains to these requirements, he will surely be deprived of the life that is eternal. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 226, #81.6)

## 5. To Bear and Endure

In the Fire Tablet, we learn that we were created to “bear and endure”! This suggests that we can't expect life to go our way; or to be easy!

Thou wert created to bear and endure, O Patience of the worlds. (Bahá'u'lláh, Baha'i Prayers, p. 218)

As long as there is life on earth, there will also be suffering!

As long as there will be life on earth, there will be also suffering, in various forms and degrees. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 280, #944)

The reason is to advance our minds and spirits; draw us closer to God; and help us acquire virtues:

*“Does the soul progress more through sorrow or through the joy in this world? ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.—“The mind and spirit of man advance when he is tried by suffering. The more the ground is ploughed the better the seed will grow, the better the harvest will be. Just as the plough furrows the earth deeply, purifying it of weeds and thistles, so suffering and tribulation free man from the petty affairs of this worldly life until he arrives at a state of complete detachment. His attitude in this world will be that of divine happiness. Man is, so to speak, unripe: the heat of the fire of suffering will mature him. Look back to the times past and you will find that the greatest men have suffered most.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 178, #57.1)*

This takes us back to know and worship God – since our suffering reminds us to turn to God.

How can we achieve our purpose in life?

One way is through work!

You should also endeavour to engage in some useful occupation, or by training yourself to have such an occupation, as work in itself another means at our disposal, in accordance with our Teachings, to draw nearer to God, and to better grasp His purpose for us in this world. (Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance, p. 282, #953)

And another, of course is through prayer – specifically the Short Obligatory Prayer:

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. (Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh, CLXXXI, p. 314)