

Our Daily Work: Spiritually Illumined, Whether We Know It or Not

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Some Baha'i teachings are quite simple to understand, but others don't penetrate the mind so readily. When we hear them for the first time the words may just hang in the air, defying comprehension.

I've found the Baha'i idea that work done in the spirit of service to humanity is to be regarded as worship as an example of that phenomenon. Work as worship sounds good—but what does it really mean?.

I definitely spend more time on the job than I do at rest or in a state of prayer. If my work is worship, that makes me feel vaguely more spiritual than I would otherwise. But that doesn't mean I can really see the connection between the practical requirements of the work day and the act of my soul communing with its Creator.

Perhaps Baha'u'llah, the prophet and founder of the Baha'i Faith, was trying to broaden our concept of worship to include activity we don't usually think of as worship. We may not need to comprehend an act's character as worship for it to *be* worship. We all understand conscious worship, which humanity has always known. But, according to Baha'u'llah, there is also unconscious worship which includes engagement, to use his words **“in some occupation—such as a craft, a trade or the like.”** – *The Most Holy Book*, p.31.

Back in the spring of this year, as part of my work, I was doing a landscaping job at someone's home. My morning task was to clear out a few mulched beds around some shrubs and small trees. The surroundings were beautiful. The weather was pleasant. For a while I worked alone and undisturbed. It was an environment conducive to the sprouting of spiritual and intellectual seeds that might otherwise stay dormant under harsher conditions.

As I worked, I started thinking about Baha'u'llah's teaching that work is to be regarded as worship. I had been aware of this idea for fourteen years. In that time, I had given it some hard attention, too. But still, as I was looking at my tools, the ground below me, and everything I was doing with them, I just wasn't seeing it as worship. Perhaps, I thought, this was an opportunity to change the way I saw things.

I tried to insert into my work a little bit of prayer in the more usual manner. With each repetition of my task I said *Ya Baha'u'l-Abha!*, an expression in Arabic meaning *O Glory of the All-Glorious!* I did that for twenty minutes or so. The work was still as mundane and tedious as ever. But somehow, after twenty minutes, my mundane and tedious labor seemed a little more luminous, spiritual, and connected to a higher reality than it had been before. I could feel the unconscious becoming conscious.

Since then I've been spending at least a few minutes during my workday meditating on the spiritual character of the work I'm performing at that moment. I've been reminding myself, based on what I've

read in the Baha'i writings, that the work is worship whether I'm aware of it or not. Just look at how Abdu'l-Baha once answered someone who asked him, "Should prayer take the form of action?" He began his reply by saying:

Yes: In the Baha'i Cause arts, sciences and all crafts are (counted as) worship. The man who makes a piece of notepaper to the best of his ability, conscientiously, concentrating all his forces on perfecting it, is giving praise to God. Briefly, all effort and exertion put forth by man from the fullness of his heart is worship, if it is prompted by the highest motives and the will to do service to humanity. – Abdu'l-Baha, *Paris Talks*, pp. 176-177.

In the example Abdu'l-Baha gives, the man isn't saying to himself "O God, guide me" while he's making the paper. That can be distracting, which I've been learning the hard way. He's just doing the work to the best of his ability.

There is something about doing the task well that draws the soul nearer to its Creator, even if it's just raking dead leaves from a garden bed. With every job there is some outcome the worker is striving toward, some standard of excellence by which to measure one's effort. The process of getting from beginning to end, drawing upon one's powers along the way, is a spiritual endeavor, however aware or unaware of that the worker may be.

So the next time you go to work, think about how you're serving humanity, and know that you're giving praise to God.