When Abdu’l-Baha was in New York, He called to Him an ardent Baha’i and said, “If you will come to Me at dawn tomorrow, I will teach you to pray.” Delighted, Mr. M arose at four and crossed the city, arriving for his lesson at six. He was very excited for his lesson. He found Abdu’l-Baha already in prayer, kneeling by the side of the bed. Mr. M kneeled by the bed too, placing himself directly across from Abdu’l-Baha.

Seeing that Abdu’l-Baha was quite lost in prayer, Mr. M began to pray silently for his friends, his family, and even the kings of Europe! No word was uttered by the quiet Man before him. He went over all the prayers he know then, and repeated them twice, three times- still no sound broke the expectant hush.

Mr. M started to rub one of his knees and wondered about his back. He began again, hearing as he did so, the birds welcoming the morning outside the window. An hour passed, and finally two. Mr. M was quite numb now. His eyes, roving along the wall, caught sight of a large crack. Then he let his gaze pass again to the still figure of Abdu’l-Baha across the bed.

The joy that he saw surprised him and he couldn’t stop staring. Suddenly he wanted to pray like that. His selfish desires were forgotten. Even his immediate surroundings were as if they never been. He was conscious of only one thing, a strong desire to draw near to God.

Closing his eyes again he set the world firmly aside, and amazingly his heart teemed with prayer, eager, joyous, tumultuous prayer. He felt cleansed by humility and lifted by a new peace. Abdu’l-Baha had taught him to pray!

Abdu’l-Baha immediately arose and came to him. His eyes rested smilingly upon the newly humbled Mr. M. “When you pray,” He said, “you must not think of your aching body, nor of the birds outside the window, nor of the cracks in the wall!” He became very serious then, and added, “When you wish to pray you must first know that you are standing in the presence of the Almighty God!”

Adapted from Vignettes from the Life of Abdu’l-Baha by Annamarie Honnold