

The True Meaning of Prayer

As with most human spiritual endeavors, we see noticeable differences in how prayer is practiced or observed in different cultures. The Abrahamic religions (Islam, Judaism and Christianity) practice structured ritualistic prayers, with prescribed demeanors, like swaying, kneeling, bowing, clapping or raising of hands. These prayers tend to be vocal and practiced in groups at designated locations, e.g. a church, mosque or other meeting locations. The focus of these prayers is usually a request or petition to the higher spiritual power, for the granting of one's wishes. Even on occasions of prayers of thanksgiving, (after the granting of a wish, or the experiencing of an unexpected windfall or deliverance), the prayers still harbor, expressed or unexpressed, the hope that the beneficiary will continue to receive blessings and protection.

When the wish is not directly personal, for example when we pray for peace, it usually occurs when things are out of control, and we see the only viable recourse as an appeal to the higher powers for their direct help to resolve the situation. Such prayers are seldom offered when things appear to be okay.

Other traditions' practice of prayer varies, as summarized below.

- Prayer in Buddhism and Hinduism is an experiential sensory practice, integrated into daily life. Offerings, and ritual worship are performed at home shrines or in temples.
- Native American groups integrate prayer into music, dance, and connection to the natural world. Chanting, drumming, and using the smoke of sacred herbs are used to purify the spirit of the person.
- Other cultures practice prayer tied to the land, often accompanied by offerings or sacrifices to soothe the spiritual protectors, to ensure good harvests.

The primary focus in some of these traditions is away from the fulfillment of personal desires. For example, rather than petitioning for material wishes, the focus of the Buddhist prayer is for the individual to cultivate compassion, peace, and mindfulness . Others may focus on the removal of darkness from the world through lighting lamps, or incantations to send blessings into the world.

Never-the-less, it can arguably be said that man's communication with the higher spiritual power is almost invariably driven by the granting of personal wishes, or protection against the unseen and unknown future.

An objective thinker, upon deeper reflection, may see a paradox in some of these prayer practices. For example, many who pray regularly also believe that the higher spiritual powers are intimately involved in their lives, watching over them very closely. If that is the case, shouldn't these higher spiritual powers be already aware of their predicament, or their needs? Why should they have to appeal so ardently to these powers for something they are already aware of? Worse, what kind of benevolent higher power would demand very loud and repetitive petitioning before granting a request? Would a parent, seeing their child's suffering or great need, demand such groveling from the child, before responding or offering help? Also, the questionable practice, for millennia, of using prayer to call upon the higher deity to strike down one's enemy. This, even when, through coveting their neighbor's property and goods, they want to use

subterfuge to march off to a war or conquest? Unfortunately, the religious and temporal history of mankind is full of such actions preceded by prayers.

Yet, there is no doubt that many human beings genuinely sense that there is something greater than themselves. The grandeur of nature, the many inexplicables of life, and the indisputable order evident in nature and the universe peaks are desire for more knowledge and communion with the forces behind this magnificence. This impulse for communion is what has evolved overtime into the various forms of worship and prayer, with which modern man is familiar. So, regardless of the distortions or abuses that we see in how we have translated this urge into practice, we need to admit that this attempt at communion, that we call prayer, has an important role in our life. We just have to find the proper way in which to express and practice it.

For guidance on what true prayer should look like, we may want to examine what Jesus Christ had to say on this subject.

But first, why Jesus Christ, and not any other sage?

The answer is threefold; (1) The Abrahamic tradition is the most dominant in today's world, and it is still spreading and gaining ground all over the world. (2) The essence of Jesus Christ's teachings is the bed rock of all Abrahamic religions, even if they are interpreted differently by Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Jesus repeatedly referred to the teachings of the prophets of the old testaments. Therefore, it is immaterial if orthodox Judaism still refuses to acknowledge him. They acknowledge the prophets, whose teachings Jesus only clarified, removing all distortions introduced by the misleading dogma that had obscured their purity over the centuries. (3) The true essence of other religious traditions captures the fundamentals of Jesus' teachings, especially concerning man's relationship to his or her neighbors, and their environment.

At Jesus' time, as it is today, many Jews had fallen back into the habit, like their neighbors, of appealing to GOD to relieve them from their suffering, through offerings and sacrifices. Unfortunately, dogma had gradually redirected the focus of the people away from living aright, according to the commandments and the teachings of the prophets. Rather, people were encouraged to rely on adherence to the edicts of the priests, and offerings at the synagogues.

Needless to say, as they no longer abided by the commandments and the teachings of the prophets, they sowed seeds of disharmony and strife with their thoughts, words, actions and attitudes. And they had to reap the consequences in accordance with the laws of creation.

This was the scenario in which Jesus was born. The people had forgotten the law of sowing and reaping. So, with this famous quote from Matthew 7:12, *"..whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets"*, Jesus was simply reminding the Jews of this truth that was in their sacred books. For example,

- **Proverbs 11:18:** *"the one who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward,"*
- **Hosea 8:7:** *"They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind."* This warns that when people plant foolish or wicked deeds, the resulting consequences are far greater and more destructive than the original action

- **Job 4:8:** *"Those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same."*

Also, in Matthew 6:26-34, Jesus tried to redirect the Jews gaze away from petitioning GOD, that they had become too used to.

Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?

So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

However, recognizing that many were no longer able to operate without the act of praying, as they had been taught, Jesus composed just **one** prayer, known to many as The Lord's Prayer, to serve as a simple guide post for daily life. Unfortunately, even this simple prayer was coopted into the dogma of the ensuing Christian religion. And its true meaning and purpose is little recognized today. As a result, Christians are often advised or required to say multiple repetitions of this prayer at the same time, as penance, to ward off evil, or as the introduction or ending for their main petition.

In his lecture titled Prayers, in the Grail Message, Abdrushin shows how Jesus' modern-day followers, in the main, no longer understand the intention behind The Lord's Prayer. Summarized below are the salient points of Abdrushin's explanations on this point.¹

- Christ did not intend the Lord's Prayer to be prayed all at once, but in it He summarized *that* for which a person with an earnest volition may, in the first instance, ask with the certainty of being heard.
- The petitions in the Lord's Prayer contain the foundation for *everything* which man needs for his physical well-being and spiritual ascent.
- The Lord's Prayer alone provides *everything* for the seeker if he penetrates into it deeply and grasps it aright.It shows him the whole gospel in concentrated form.

Regarding how we pray, Abdrushin makes the following additional observations and advice:

- Man needs only to take note when he is praying to realize how often his attention wanders and how much the depth of his intuitive perception is weakened by repeating the separate petitions one after the other, even when he knows them fluently... It is impossible for him to pass from one petition to the other with the fervor necessary to a genuine prayer!
- Therefore, man should only pray for what is really necessary! All empty phrases should be avoided, as they are bound to fall to pieces and in time must foster hypocrisy!
- Prayer requires profound earnestness. Pray in quietness and purity, so that the power of the intuitive perception will be increased through quietness and receive through purity that luminous lightness which will enable the prayer to be carried upward to the heights of all that is light and pure!

¹ See detailed explanation are in Lecture 19 titled Prayer in Volume 2 of The Grail Message

- The “**power of a prayer**” is *not* able to impel or force it upward; *only purity* with its corresponding lightness can do so.

Furthermore, He comments on how prayers are answered.

- The fulfilment of a prayer will not necessarily always correspond to and harmonize with man’s *earthly* ideas and wishes.
- The fulfilment, in his best interests, reaches out far beyond these, leading towards what is best for *the whole*, not just for the earthly moment.
- If the prayer does not appear to be fulfilled, this will be recognized later as the only right and best fulfilment, and the person will then be happy that things did not go according to his wish of the moment.

Conclusion

Hopefully, from the foregoing, the astute reader and listener will see that prayer, as we have evolved it, has become constricted too narrowly to serve that deeper impulse that compelled man to wish to connect to something greater than themselves.

To help us reawaken that initial impulse, it is perhaps necessary to take ourselves, in spirit, back to those early beginnings, to try to conjure up some of the feelings that moved these early ancestors. As mentioned earlier, the drive for communion must have included a desire for knowledge about the activities in their environment. This desire gradually led to connections with the spirits of nature, who slowly taught them about the forces of nature that they could control. They also taught them about plants. They informed them too about the extra-material world beyond the Earth. With this, they helped them raise their gaze upwards, beyond just their material existence. In return, these early ancestors, who worked closely with nature, showed deep gratitude for the help that they received. Gratitude that sometimes extended beyond the seen helpers to the unseen Greater force behind everything.

From the Grail Message, we now know that the interactions, activities and the gratitude, shown and expressed by these early ancestors, reflect the true Spiritual meaning of Prayer. Abdrushin elaborates on this with this excerpt from the lecture “**Ask, and it shall be given unto you !**”²

“The man of today, however, needs the entire stock of words he has meantime created for himself, and the application of every conception arising therefrom, if he is to find a path out of the confusion of his intellectual sham wisdom.

Therefore, men of the present time, I must now grant you more extensive explanations, which in reality convey exactly the same again, only in your way! It is now your duty to learn this, for your knowledge of Creation has become greater! So long as with this knowledge you do not now fulfil the duties laid upon you by your spirit’s abilities, which have to be developed, so long have you no right to ask either!

² Volume 3 of the Grail Message

With the faithful fulfilment of your duty in Creation, however, you receive everything through the reciprocal effect, and there is no longer a reason for any petition. From within your soul, there then streams forth only gratitude to Him Who in His Omniscience and Love ever again loads you with gifts every day!

You men, could you but pray aright at last! Really pray! How rich would your existence then be! For in prayer lies the greatest happiness you can receive. It uplifts you to immeasurable heights so that supreme happiness streams through you blissfully. Could you but pray, men! That shall now be my wish for you!

In your small thinking you will then no longer ask to Whom you shall and may pray. There is but One to Whom you are allowed to dedicate your prayers, only One: GOD!

Approach Him in solemn moments with a sacred intuitive perception, and pour out before Him what your spirit can bring up in the way of gratitude! Turn only to Him when you pray; for it is to Him alone that gratitude is due and to Him alone you yourself belong, Oh Man, because only through His great Love were you able to come into existence!"

Closing Words

Old habits are very difficult to break. For those who may feel compelled to resort to praying, as we have become accustomed, perhaps a reminder of these words of Jesus, from Matthew 6:31 - 34, will help one to regain composure and to reflect more deeply on the true meaning of prayer, and how to harness the power it holds for us, if approached correctly:

"Therefore, do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear? For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble".