

What Is Prayer?

“Prayer is the highest form, the supreme act of the Creative Imagination.” - Henri Corbin

What is Prayer? Prayer is a mode of being. True prayer isn't about receiving, it's about making you *fit for the Mystery* to empower you to offer something of insurmountable value to the world.

According to mystical theologian Henri Corbin, “....prayer does not consist in a request (the Sufis have always stood in horror of that kind of prayer) but in his actual mode of being.” Prayer is a modulation of our indigenous desire to love and serve. Prayer activates a receptivity, a willingness, an active passion, in *we who pray*.

Prayer does not complete itself in the receiving of an answer to our prayer. Rather, prayer *is the answer* because praying immediately orients us to a spiritual depth that is capable of disclosing our purpose. Analogously, one doesn't sit Zazen to become enlightened, rather, one sits Zazen to express one's enlightenment. Meditation (rightly understood) is what we are, not what we do. Prayer is not a petition that ego makes. Rather, it is the mode or expression of what you *are*: love for yourself and life. It is the separate self (ego-ing) that we *do*, it's not who we are. Prayer arises when ego stops doing itself and allows Soul to speak.

Prayer is not similar to ordering food at a cosmic diner (“I'll have the Grilled Cheese with a side order of purpose.”) Sufi Master Ibn Arabi declares, “Those to whom God remains veiled pray to the god who in their belief is their Lord to have compassion with them. But the mystics ask that divine compassion be fulfilled through them.” Divine compassion is tripartite: the love of creating, the love of the created (us) and the love of the evolutionary process of turning acorns into the oaks (where the acorn is the life we are given in potentia, and the oak is our life of purpose actualization.) We don't pray to receive an answer, we pray to allow our lives to *become* the answer to the prayer so that we may fulfill *Soul's prayer* through our lives.

On a Vision Quest we don't pray for *something*, rather, we pray to *be used* for a deep purpose. The Vision Quest is a ceremony of prayer, where prayer is an expression of our desire for personal fulfillment and our desire to serve. Theologian Frederick Buechner invites us to find the “place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.”

We pray because we are love, we want to be loved, and we want to love. We love *ourselves*: we desire the deep fulfillment that occurs exclusively when we occupy our purpose. We love *life*: we desire to preserve and enhance the mysterious universe we are born to. We pray to be evolutionarily potent, to bring more goodness, truth and beauty into the world.

Prayer is strongest when it is sourced in both our propensity for ecstatic spiritual joy AND our broken heartedness out of which we ache to perform Tikun Olam, what Jewish mysticism refers to as the *purpose of life*, to “heal and repair the world.” When we are alienated from our soul-level purpose (and thus fail to support the renewal and healing of the world), we are prone to feeling powerless, depressed or anxious. So, is the quest for purpose an expression of the

heart's desire for bliss/fulfillment or a response to suffering and the imperative of evolutionary spirituality? Both...of course!

To reiterate, prayer is not a petition for a thing or a result, but is instead the activation of a response: an ardor, a fervour for the experience of an *active* sacred fulfillment. Prayer doesn't instigate a change in a Soul residing outside of ourselves. Prayer actualizes Soul to itself (as Ibn Arabi says) "*through* and *for* him" who is praying. Prayer is the ardor of Soul, a mode of being whereby Soul itself cries out to be made real (through human action.) Put another way, it is I who pray to the Mystery to win the lottery, but it is Soul who prays with my lips to be of service.

We initiate prayer the way we turn on a radio to listen to music. While the willingness to click the "on" button (to pray) falls under our control, the music of our prayer is not "ours" (it is "soul radio"). Soul describes itself to us and experiences itself through ourselves. What is revealed is a bi-unity, a person-Soul, who is both manifest (person) and unmanifest (Soul.) These are not two co-arising separate entities, but two sides of a single coin of the Total Psyche.

It is our job to make space for our unique form of prayer. As the Quran affirms, "Every being has his own appropriate mode of prayer." When rightly understood, we can see that everything prays; it is the nature of creation to do so. A mystic sees the way a flower prays. Moreover, the mystic sees that an orchid and a rose each turn to the sun and pray in their own manner. Our job is to face the Sun and pray as uniquely, singularly, and idiosyncratically as possible.

"True prayer is the dissolution of the one who prays and the one who is prayed to, leaving the heart open, naked and melted." Rupert Spira



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