

A
Special Report
from
The Institute for Hermetic Studies



The Practice of Prayer
In Western Esotericism

By
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Sincerely,

Mark Stavish
Director of Studies

The Practice of Prayer in Western Esotericism By Mark Stavish

“Jesus saith: ‘...and the Kingdom of Heaven is within you; and whosoever shall know himself shall find it. Strive therefore to know yourselves, and ye shall be aware that ye are sons of the ...Father; ...and ye shall know that ye are in the City of God, and ye are the City.’” - *Gnostic Fragment*

Report Overview

- What is Prayer and Why We Pray
- Prayer in Magical, Mystical, and Occult Practices
- How to Pray

Introduction

Prayer is humanity’s oldest form of communion with the Divine, and the single practice all people return to in times of trouble. Rituals, be they religious services or high magic set the context and inspire, but it is prayer, the heartfelt words within our being uttered to God that bring us the most comfort in support when all others practices, techniques, and vehicles seemingly fail.

Prayer is a unique way of communicating with, experiencing the presence of, and bringing into our lives, easily, quickly, and with practice, almost effortlessly, the Divine power that is the birthright of every person.

Johannes Kelpius¹, the famed Hermit of the Wissahickon (Fairmount Park, Philadelphia), referred to personal prayer as ‘inward prayer’ (as opposed to vocal and public prayer) as a universal devise in the following terms:

“Hence we may easily see that in all ages this inward prayer has been performed, since men have always prayed for the fulfilling of the Will of God; and that it is no new invention, as some will say, seeing Jesus Christ spent his whole life in inward prayer, and the Evangelist Luke tell us that He continued it whole nights.

Neither is this inward prayer a mater for the wise and learned only an not also for the simple and unlearned, as some imagine...Inward prayer is not less for every one than Faith, Hope, and Charity or Love, which are virtues belonging properly to true Christians: since, after the obtaining of them, their operations can be only inwardly performed; and this internal working or production is the performance of a very good prayer. And this is also the case with respect to the performance of other virtues which depend on or proceed from the aforesaid, and which belong to religion and the worship of God - that is, the work of adoration, praise, thanksgiving, and supplication.”²

Prayer is universal to all systems of spirituality, religion, and self-development. Ancient systems of magic, or theurgy, were practiced by the temple priesthoods of ancient Egypt and Persia, as well as by village 'saints' across the Middle East and North Africa. Alchemists are exhorted to begin each session with prayer, and to "pray, pray, pray, read, and work." Qabalists use prayer to communion with the Ain Soph Aur, as well as to communicate with and direct the invisible forces and intelligences of the various spheres of the Tree of Life. Traditional Astrologers even use prayer to guide them in their casting and interpretation of charts, and understanding of the cycles of nature.

Prayer generally consists of one or more of the following: confessions of sins or wrongdoing, adoration and praise, thanksgiving or gratitude, request for intercession for others, and supplications for oneself.

The Hermetic idea of prayer is similar to the New Age definition (finding its roots in earlier schools including *New Thought* and *Christian Science*); in that through prayer the petitioner brings themselves into harmony or attunement (sometimes called 'at-one-ment') with the fundamental principals of the universe. This approach has given rise to two schools of thought regarding prayer. One which is more personal, and seeks a scientific and psychological explanation of prayer, particularly in its similarity to meditation and self-hypnosis (autosuggestion), and at times often very secular; the other which is more mystical and seeks to understand prayer on a broader cosmological scale. In combining the two, we are able to understand the place of prayer within our lives, its fundamental principals, how it works, and its various uses.

Why We Pray

The following passage from an ancient Gnostic text, *The Pistis Sophia*, outlines the many spiritual experiences and material things that one can pray for, and states, that all are achievable, and will be given to us if we ask for them with the power of our heart.

Not only ye, but all men who shall achieve the Mystery of the resurrection of the dead, which healeth from demonian possessions, and sufferings, and every disease, {which also healeth} the blind, the lame, the halt, the dumb, and the deaf, [the mystery] which I gave unto you aforetime - who - soever shall receive of these Mysteries and achieve them, if he ask for anything whatever hereafter, poverty or riches, weakness or strength, disease of health, or the whole healing of the body, and the resurrection of the dead, the power of healing the lame, the blind, the deaf, and the dumb, of every disease and of every suffering - in a word, whosoever shall achieve this Mystery, if he ask if these things which I have just said unto you, they shall at once be granted unto him. - *The Pistis Sophia*

1. **For Stuff** - We pray that we might receive assistance or intercession in the acquisition of a home, car, better job, money.
2. **For Help** - We pray for the resolution to a personal problem, or to overcome obstacles, such as in AA and Twelve Step groups.
3. **For Health** - Similar to above, but more focused on conditions that appear very much beyond anything we can do, such as terminal illnesses, or immediate life threatening conditions.
4. **For Illumination** - Insight into the mysteries of creation, our place in it, and our relationship to all that is, was, and will be.

Prayer and Esoteric Practices

The function of prayer, meditation, and ritual are identical: to attune our individual consciousness to the consciousness of God, or more accurately our individual idea of God. With prayer there is the hope of having an experience that will expand our idea of God (illumination), provide material or emotional relief from suffering (petition), or simply to offer gratitude for Life. In traditional esotericism, this process is refined and structured in such a way that each student may seek either a general one-ness, often referred to as 'Cosmic Consciousness,' or attunement with a specific aspect, nature, or intelligence within the created universe - such as an ancient deity, angel, or even another human being believed to be holy or spiritual in nature (e.g. such as a Saint).

Prayer, meditation, and ritual are designed to reduce the friction between our daily or objective mind, and allow it to merge with first our subjective or subconscious, and through it, realize the attunement it seeks.

Suggestion is the principal tool for easing this transition of consciousness and for releasing the creative-spiritual power of the subconscious. Prayer is the most powerful form of suggestion we can use, as it connects us not only to untapped resources within our mind and body, but also to the creative forces of the Universe - to God.

The objective, rational (ego) aspect of our sense of self directs and forms images and ideas; but it is the *unrational*³ forces inside our bodies in the form of nerve energy and endocrine secretions, coupled with the raw emotional force of instinct, that fulfill the wishes of the rational mind (ego) **and in doing so create the world.**

The subconscious aspects of our psyche, being areas that we are not normally aware of except under exceptional circumstances, are always in perfect attunement with the Cosmic, or the entirety of the visible and invisible worlds. The entire Qabalistic Tree of Life is focused in and through the subconscious, as can be seen by the central position of Yesod (the subconscious) at the base of the Tree, immediately above Malkuth (or the material world).

According to Hermetic doctrine, it is our daily objective consciousness that needs to be directed back towards its source. We say 'back,' because our sense of Self, or Will⁴, is central

to our being and Becoming. This sense of self, which feels itself to be the center of the universe, is actually completely absorbed for the majority of people in the daily concerns of incarnation. The mass of humanity is therefore ignorant of the Self's creative potential. Only in times of rest, sleep, or even chemical influence and illness, does it get a sense of something 'other' than the hard world of material life. When this happens, it can either continue this experience in the realm of 'other' or run towards material consciousness for a temporary respite from the inner realities that await it.

This is critical, because from the Hermetic perspective, consciousness is projected out into the material domain from a central inner point. The material world it is not our normal realm of consciousness, or at least not our only realm of potential realization. However, for a weak and fledgling conscious being, material life is safe, stable, and easy to work and identify with, and as such, preferred to the spiritual domain from which it came⁵.

Only when one become dissatisfied with material life does the conscious journey back into the Invisible begin. This is journey is the beginning of true Self awareness.

Prayer and Meditation

Meditation is focusing the mind, or consciousness, on a single idea. This is usually composed of an image, symbol, or word.

Prayer is a kind of dialog between the inner and outer parts of self, or a 'word bridge' that unites these seemingly separated parts of our awareness. In fact, it is false to even speak of 'parts of our awareness' as if we are fractured or broken beings. In truth, we become aware of whatever we focus our mind upon. By focusing our mind on psychic or spiritual matters we simply become more aware of them. In addition, there is no 'repair' or actual 'uniting'. These words reflect the limits of conventional vocabulary to reflect the experiences that esotericism offers. Closer to the truth is the idea of 'cleaning' or 'uncovering'. That is, we remove the obstacles - be they emotional or intellectual - that prevent us from experiencing the inner life.

It is no different than moving a chair that blocks a door so that we may go through. Nothing miraculous happens, only it feels that way as we enter into the new room and all it has to offer, or meet whoever is inside. By strengthening our mental muscles of concentration and visualization we are able to 'move the mountains' of fleeting thoughts, random emotions, indecisiveness, etc., that prevent us from experiencing the inner life.

Prayer and Ritual

Prayer is an important part of esoteric work, and like ritual, is a means of inducing a sympathetic resonance with the subtle dimensions of the Invisible. Where ritual emphasizes outer expression, and meditation inner stillness and focus, prayer is midway between the two. Prayer

combines verbal resonance with feeling over visual symbols or abstract meditations. In prayer, a 'conversation' is sought between one's self and a personal experience of God.

Oftentimes prayers can be made to Saints⁶, Angelic forces, or gods of various pantheons; however, as prayer has developed over the last 2,000 years in Western culture, emphasis is usually on a Supreme Being, or sense of One.

Within the Christian tradition, several schools of prayer have developed that reflect these various approaches. There is the Cult of the Virgin Mary within the Roman Catholic Church (in truth a holdover from early pre-Christian times), the Silent Prayer of Quaker Meeting Houses, and the general petitions to 'God' that one hears across most denominations. Many prayers are based on the Psalms, which themselves are based on earlier Egyptian prayers.

Prayers may consist of written words, such as the Psalms, the *Invocation of the Bornless One*; self composed writings, or simply a dialogue. Prayer can be mixed with visualizations as complex or simply as the petitioner wishes, but is not essential or universally used. Some esoteric schools teach that visualization is itself a *de facto* prayer.

What is God?

As we enter into a period of prayer, meditation, or ritual, we must remind ourselves, and create the distinct emotional context, that God, is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent, and that these very qualities flow in and through us.

1. **God is omnipresent** - This is critical to the success of prayer, for in it, we find the ability to talk to a plant, a bird, or even a running stream, and recognize the invisible powers that created and sustain it, as they have us. We can talk to it, and know that God hears us, and yet in doing so, not limit ourselves to thinking that this and this alone is God, for God is everywhere. God is present in each cell of our being, and it is through this presence that prayer is not a 'long distance phone call' but instead an intimate conversation with the deepest levels of our being.

Stop now, and allow this idea of God as universal, present everywhere, and at all times, to develop within you as a profound feeling.

2. **God is omnipotent** - Since all God is in all things, and all things have their seed, root, and sustenance in God, God is the ultimate energy in the universe, and unites all of creation, seen and unseen, into a seamless whole. Stop now and feel the divine presence, and power of God.

Stop now, and allow this idea of God as all-powerful to develop within you as a profound feeling.

3. **God is omniscient** - God is everywhere, sustains all of creation, and in doing so, knows all that is, has been, and might be. In this All-Seeing, All Knowing aspect of God, we come to trust

that all that happens happens for the best. It is here, that we must put our ultimate faith, trust, confidence, and optimism.

Now combine these three aspects of God into a single condition, or state of consciousness. Use any symbol you may need to help make it more concrete, but focus on the feelings and sensations these ideas create.

Stop now, and meditate on this point, imagine and develop the feeling that God is everywhere, throughout your entire body, in the deepest recesses of your being, and is all powerful, and finally all knowing.

It is important to sense God as a presence, even in concentrated into a focal point, such as an image of Christ, a sacred icon, or location, rather than limit God to the traditional 'Old Man in White' image portrayed by so many Medieval and Renaissance painters.

This presence is often felt as a distinct pressure, sometimes from above, but none the less, surrounding and sustaining us. This is why many prayers talk of resting in the arms of God, palm, or bosom of God. Developing this sense of God everywhere, in everything, deep inside us, and present at every moment of everyday is critical to the establishing of a fruitful and experiential use of prayer.

How to Pray

Prayer involves many of the same basic skills as meditation. In fact, we might consider it a form of 'verbal' meditation since the use of words to express an idea, desire, or aspiration form a core component of the process of prayer.

Since we are examining prayer in the light of Traditional Western Esotericism, it is important to emphasis the critical nature of our attitude in all of our undertakings, be they spiritually or materially directed. Intention is everything in esoteric work. It is the driving force that decides all outcomes.⁷ Intention is our deepest heartfelt desired outcome of the operation.

From a technical level we can analyze prayer, and realize it is an event, something we experience, with several distinct characteristics. By incorporating these characteristics into our own practice, we can increase the efficiency and emotional satisfaction we derive from our prayer life.

1. Prayer is a visualized event. Until two generations ago it was common in the Roman Catholic Church for both laity and ordained to visualize specific scenes when praying. This was true particularly of the Rosary, as well as the Exercises of Ignatius, practiced by the Jesuits, to involve visualizing images along with the reciting of words, coupled with the emotions of strong

devotion and confidence, or faith. In some instances it was suggested to not simply visualize scenes in the third person, like on television, but to be present in the scene, observing and participating in the events being mentioned in the prayer. With the loss of this critical piece of technology, prayer is reduced to rote, and as devoid of life as an empty husk.

2. Prayer is an emotional event. Prayers must be sincere, heartfelt verbalizations of our state of consciousness, or they are dead. Simply repeating words that we learned as a child, or rote memorization that requires no focus or concentration, are the outer shells of prayer. These are the cast-offs, but they are not prayer. While they contain the seeds of potential real prayer, these seeds are still dormant.

3. Prayer is a confident and optimistic event. Prayer, even in times of trouble, is an affirmation; it is a positive statement (verbal) in a positive state (emotion) of consciousness. Prayers said out of desperation or fear are little more than superstition. Prayer affirms the omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent power of God; that means, in this we ‘live, move, and have our being.’ *“The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?”* - Psalm 118:6

4. Prayer is a timeless event. Prayer transcends time, be it the words of Jesus when he said, “Do this in remembrance of me,” or when we look to find peace, success, and spiritual meaning in our life. Each prayer is like a brick in the Temple of our heart. Like the word Temple, we enter into our heart to transcend time, or *tempus*. To pray is to seek communion with Divinity. To achieve it is to experience Eternity.

5. Prayer is a personal event. Even if we pray for others, in the end, it is ourselves that we are praying for. When we pray for those who have injured us, strangers we do not know, or the demons of the abyss, in the end, even if no one else benefits, at least our heart is made broader, stronger, and more loving. *“But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”* - Matthew 6:6

6. Prayer is a unifying event. Prayer is Love. Love unifies, brings together, unites, and gives proper place to people, places, and possessions in our life. We know them for what they are: an aspect of the omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent power of God, even if we have failed to see them as such in the past. Just as we can become too attached to a particular aspect of the Cosmos, we can become too attached to a particular person, place, or possession. Crises and conflict can be useful in breaking those attachments and allowing us to put things in their proper perspective, in the same way a life changing crises can trigger a closer relationship to God. In the end, it is how we use what is put before us that decides what we will make of it, rather than the event itself. *“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made in perfect love.”* - 1 John 4:18

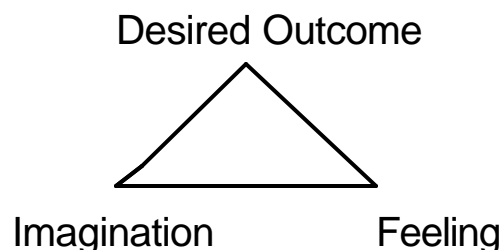
7. Prayer is a Selfless event. True prayer is selfless in that it unifies the individual will, or desires, with the Will of God. It brings our energies, our being, into harmony with the creative forces of the Universe. Selflessness becomes our natural state, not one of sentimentalized self-sacrifice. In the end this false self-sacrifice is still focused on the individual, thereby feeding the human ego and not transcending it. But, a self-sacrifice that recognizes the limits of self (ego) and joyfully accepts them, thereby pressing more earnestly into union with the Source of All.

A Simple Process of Petitionary Prayer

Based on the above characteristics, here is a simple method of prayer that incorporated traditional Psalms (also used in Qabalistic and folk magical practices) into a simple step by step method for praying.

1. Relax through slow deep breathing for two or three minutes. Imagine, feel, or sense the omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent power of God, the Cosmos, or Creation.
2. Feel this presence within yourself. Feel it moving in, and through you. It is in this idea of a Supreme Being that you 'live, move, and have your being.' Dwell in it for a few moments.
3. Imagine in detail the thing, condition, or desired outcome of the prayer. Imagine it in the present tense, as a reality. Keep it simple, direct, and easy to imagine, or better yet - to feel. Hold this for several minutes, allowing it to merge with your feelings of the presence of God.
4. Read the 91st and 23rd Psalms⁸ as a reminder of the power of God assisting you; or as a theurgic invocation. Read them in Hebrew or Latin if possible, as this will help move your consciousness on to subtler levels. Be clear of the meaning of each Psalm however. This can be done at the beginning of the session or at the end.
5. Be grateful for all that you are and have and all that you are becoming and will possess. Be thankful in advance for the success of this petition.
6. Be confident of the success, feel the reality of the imagined scene, to the exclusion of all else. Let it dominate your consciousness one last time.

Remember, this method (and all methods of prayer) requires simplicity, intense feelings of love, confidence, and desire either for Divine Union or a change in circumstances.



In the words of the great 19th century esotericist Eliphas Levi:

“Imagination is everything. In its own order it is supreme...facts, principles, and theories...are barren until they are vivified by the power of intelligence. Magical arts have esoteric powers and are spiritually illuminating only on the purified plane of intense and supreme imagination. The true plane of magic is the psychic and translucid...”

The imagination works with symbols to transform our consciousness. Through an application of imagination and the systematic use of symbols, we educate our thoughts, memory, and imagination itself. Symbols allow participation of the mind in Divine realizations, in preparation for direct contact with the Self.

Benefits of Prayer

One of the major hidden benefits of daily meditation and prayer sessions, even for a few minutes at a time, is what is known as the ‘Relaxation Response.’⁹ In addition to altering brainwaves, a measure of the degree of one’s relaxation, prayer and meditation both show the ability to measurably lower blood pressure and increase blood flow to the heart. However, prayer also creates several conditions within us that build character, improve human relations, and assist us in finding peace and meaning in life.

1) **Heroic Optimism** (True Courage) is experience based confidence that we can overcome any obstacle, situation, or frame of mind we are experiencing, through the reliance, request, and expectation of spiritual assistance in whatever form that might take. Heroic Optimism is a true opening to greater freedom and possibilities. It is true courage, or “power of the awakened heart.”

2) **Altruism** (True Generosity) is the healthy placing of others before ourselves. It is thinking of the impact of our actions on others before we act, and then acting in the best interest of all. Altruism is also knowing when and how to help others so that they may learn to help themselves. It is giving without expectation of reward or recognition.

3) **Gratitude** (True Humility) is being thankful for each day, for being alive, and knowing that we have an opportunity to experience and express Divinity in our life. To plan and act for the future and growth, while being content and happy with each day.

4) **Right Relations** (True Love) is to know our proper relationship to others, nature, and the Cosmos. This is Love. To love one another, to love each other is to know true courage, generosity, and humility, and to put them into action in daily life. Love is the powerful emotion of attraction that holds people together through the most difficult circumstances. Love is the power of attraction that pulls each of us out of limited views, and into the deeper level of mystical union

with the Cosmos. God is Love, to Love is to express your understanding of God. “*I give you one commandment, Love ye one another.*” The more we love, the greater is our optimism, courage, understanding and experience of the Divine, the greater our optimism and courage. Love knows no fear; love is supremely confident. Through love the cycle of growth continues in an every widening circle.

In Christian terms, we could say that prayer requires and promotes the three graces, of Faith, Hope, and Charity. Faith is our heroic optimism as applied to our spiritual life. Having faith means that even in our darkest moments and deepest despair, we hold fast to the *single idea* that God will hold true for us. Hope is our heroic optimism applied to the material world, and states that we are continually hopeful and even joyful of the *fact* that no matter what is happening at the moment, life is good and gets better. Charity is our heroic optimism applied to human relationships, and is a tangible expression of love. Charity is *love in action*; it is broad, tolerant, all embracing, and the single most important act we can undertake. It is the force of Divine Creation surging through us, connecting us to the rest of the universe.¹⁰

If we look at these words, we can see that prayer is the wholehearted, singular focus on the expression of love. Anything that reminds us of love or increases our feelings of love is prayer. To love is to pray.

In doing so, prayer also helps to develop and strengthen positive coping styles, which are shown to consist of: gratitude, optimism, and forgiveness.

The effects of prayer sessions are nearly immediate. Prayer is one of the few activities that can be done anywhere, anytime, that can give nearly instant results and positive benefits to body and mind. People who practice for at least three weeks, the minimum amount of time shown to develop a habit, report increased feelings of well being, greater energy, and few health problems during that period.

What is even more amazing is that these benefits are accumulative in nature! The more we do it, the better we get at it, and the more easily we experience and benefit from the physical and mental payback from praying regularly.

The Neuroscience of Prayer

When we experience deep relaxation, we go from being in normal aroused conscious thought (alpha waves) into theta waves. Our frontal lobe, responsible for reasoning, planning, and self-conscious awareness, shuts down and gets some needed rest. Other areas of the brain that reduce their activity include the parietal lobe, the reticular formation, and the thalamus. Information flow to the brain is controlled and reduced, thereby creating a feeling of greater ‘oneness’ and sense of ‘expansion’.

Research has also shown that people who are more enthusiastic, relaxed, and happier overall have more activity in their left-prefrontal lobes. Pessimists tend to have more activity in their right-prefrontal lobe. This suggests that by reducing the amount of activity in the frontal lobes through either meditation or prayer, we can bring our brain into better balance, and with it, our disposition and attitude towards life. We can, in fact, become masters of our personal happiness.

However, research has shown that these benefits are derived when in a state of deep relaxation, such as only prayer, meditation, and certain stages of sleep can provide. To fully benefit from the natural hardware our bodies are built with, we need to use the right software. Prayer and meditation form the core of “programs” that are rooted in ancient, time tested practices and traditions.¹¹ In Western Esotericism these programs of study and practice are found in Qabala, Alchemy, and some schools of Astrology.

The Chemistry of Prayer

Positive emotions have a beneficial effect on our body’s chemistry, and as a result, our health. Being healthy and feeling healthy are related; in few exceptions does someone have a significant health problem come out of the blue. The body takes time to breakdown and time to repair. We assist this process, or inhibit it, through our day to day, moment to moment, emotions and attitudes. This is not to make extraordinary claims that each of us at all times can ‘think ourselves well,’ but to point out that we, ourselves, are the most significant factor in our health, wellness, and longevity. We can take advantage of that power, or not; but the choice, responsibility, and consequences are all ours.

The Psychology of Prayer

Without the advances of modern medicine and technology it would be easy to see prayer as simply the placebo effect as a result of effective self-hypnosis. Even if we were to stop there, and accept this as true, consider the critical importance of what has just been suggested. The mind-body connection is so powerful and overwhelming, that given the right circumstances, emotional focus and confidence of a positive outcome (often through training), the mind can control the body in a manner that is startling to the point of being called miraculous.

For many this is enough to encourage engaging in regular prayer and meditation periods.

However, the idea of spiritual force is inherent in prayer, and is a life force that is supreme, unique, creative, and in whose image each of us is made. This takes the power of out the individual, and places it somewhere else. Or does it? God is love and love is prayer. To pray is to love; and as we are told by the spiritual Masters, be they Saints, Righteous Men (Zadekim), Unknown Superiors, or Bodhisattvas, the ideal is to love unceasingly, and in doing so, to pray without end.

The Metaphysics of Prayer

Regardless of one's metaphysical theory used to justify or explain the reasons prayer is good for us, in the end, prayer is about 'Being' and 'Becoming' not about 'having.' In the *Tanakh* (Old Testament), Moses sees God in the form of a burning bush, and asks, "Who are you?"; he hears the response, "I am, that I am." The Hebrew is *Ehieh Asher Ehieh*, and is often translated in one of three ways. Each implies an evolution or growth factor, that being is not static, or fixed, that God is not static or fixed. Whether it is God that evolves and changes, or it is our understanding and experiences of God that evolve and change is a matter of personal opinion. In the end, the Bible and many religious texts are clear on the point that each of us is made in the image and power of God and has the potential to fully express that creative essence in our life.

These energies exist for one reason: so that we can become more like the Divine Blueprint we each hold, and more perfect in our expression of the Divine powers of omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence.

On this, our long journey home, like the Prodigal Son, we must enjoy the life we are given, make it useful to others, and remember that it is just passing. The true fruits of our having lived will be in how closely we reflect the Divine Power within all of Creation.

Health, wealth, human love and relationships, status, fame, and everything of this world are passing, and are left at the door that opens to the Inner Kingdom.

Our character is what we are judged by. Be it by the Scales of Maat of Egyptian fame, the Book of Life and St. Peter, or our own Higher Self.

Use prayer first and foremost as a means of developing your inner strength, strength of Character, Virtue, and Illumination; and in the end, physical, emotional, mental, and even spiritual crises will take care of themselves.

Yet if God is all knowing why is it that our prayers fail? Why is it that we feel compelled to ask God for things, be they necessities or luxuries?

Why Do Prayers Fail?

1. Doubt

Doubt is caused by forgetting, or not really believing that God is All. We hold in the back of our mind doubts that God is everywhere, in everything, and knows all that is, was, or could ever be. We in fact, doubt the very existence, let alone nature of God.

This doubt is our undoing and the root of all failure. For prayer to be effectual, fear must be overcome.

2. False Ideas of God

Even if we do not doubt the existence of God, we hold false notions about God, which can all be traced to God's Triune attributes. Even here, we may believe them to be true, but is what we attach to these beliefs and how we qualify them, that limits our ability to experience God more fully.

We may pray for better health, but often it is not health we want but life. On closer examination we find it is not life that we want but that we are afraid of dying. This fear of death is our true motivator. It is created out of, and creates in return, false ideas of God, ourselves, and what physical life is all about.

True fear of death is caused by a fear of life, or true living. True living is being in the state of peace that comes from within and not from external supports, no matter how positive they may be. Yet most of our supports are negative or neutral at best. Only by the slow erosion of time, or the speedy destruction of disaster, war, or disease, do most of us come to realize how much value we placed on the external, transient, and impermanent things of life - acting all the time as if they were real, unchanging, and would be with us forever.

These false ideas about God are ultimately rooted in false ideas we have about ourselves, our relationship to God, each other, and the material world. These false ideas hold us in bondage, and the only way to free ourselves from them is to open up to the imminent presence of God in all things, experiences, and moments of time.

Opening to this Divine Presence is equivalent to opening ourselves up to the creative power of God, often referred to as the Holy Spirit in Christianity. Rooted in the Jewish belief of 'Shekinah' or the 'Divine Presence' of God, the Holy Spirit finds its origin in the period after the destruction of the First Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, when the Jews were taken into captivity in Babylon. Here they stayed for 70 years, and in the process incorporated many Babylonian ideas into Judaism. This was not that strange, since Abraham, the Patriarch of primitive Judaism was from a nearby land - the Ur of the Chaldeans. The Talmud finds its codification at this time.

Zoroastrianism influenced Judaism in this regard, with its complex angelic and demonic hierarchies, as well as the idea of 'The Holy (Creative) Spirit.' The Christian admonition about not having sinned in thought, word, and deed is identical to its Zoroastrian source.

This creative power of God can be experienced when we open up to it.

3. Why We Pray

It is a false idea that we pray for God. God doesn't need our prayers. We pray for ourselves. In doing so, if we pray with gratitude and thankfulness, and simply request a peaceful, happy, and harmonious life, we will find that many problems will 'mysteriously' and 'miraculously'

solve themselves, and others will simply fade away. If we pray that we might become more, rather than that we might have more, then we are beginning to understand the proper place of prayer - and in fact - the whole reason for our existence. When we root, or 'cleave' as the original Hebrew suggests, ourselves to this idea, and fix it firmly in our subconscious, then we can begin to place ourselves in a position of making requests of God.

The question is asked, though, "Why do we need to ask anything of God?" Why is it not simply handed to us? "Ask and you shall receive." In asking we grow, in asking we make decisions, in asking we are responsible for our life, actions, and consequences. In asking we grow in fullness of our Divine Nature.

The more we pray, the more we open ourselves up to Divine Truth revealed from within, and not from a teacher, book, or pulpit; we clear out the obstacles to our personal happiness. While teachers, books, and pulpits can be useful tools, they can only be guides to our realizing the truth, and cannot replace the force of direct experience and its transformative effect on our life.

"For it is possible, my son, that a man's soul should be made like to God, even while it still is in a body, if it doth contemplate the Beauty of the Good." - Thrice Great Hermes, Corpus Hermeticum

4. **Humility**

True prayer, the prayer of the heart, requires humility. We recognize how small we are in comparison to so many things, and yet how in potential, we can overcome all problems, and find peace in all situations. Humility is an attitude of right relationships; it is an act of love. It is openness and joyful receptivity to the wisdom, love, and power that God is constantly expressing everywhere, all the time, in all people, places, and things.

Humility is an act of egolessness, while still retaining a fullness of whom and what we are. Humility is the stripping away of appearances and standing naked in the full light of cosmic reality. Only by willingly undoing ourselves, our false notions, ideas, and beliefs, can we move forward on the Path of Illumination, the Path of true growth, of Becoming.

Scriptures and practices throughout the various esoteric traditions suggest that prayer be done in silence, in secret, and in private. Public exhibitions of prayer,¹² especially by an individual who draws attention to the fact that they are praying, are to be shunned. Enter into your 'closet' or personal place of worship be it an oratory or sanctum and pray there. Find the Divine powers in your breath as it meets the sunrise and the moon in the open field, or your backyard. Pray in secret, not letting the 'right hand know what the left hand is doing' and find this peace within yourself.

Prayer is different than other practices. Meditation is similar, yet it can easily become a head game, and dry out the heart rather than nourish it. Rituals can easily degenerate into

superstition, mere formalism; they become an end in themselves, devoid of deep meaning and mystical participation. Reading and studying holy books if not coupled to an active prayer or meditative life, is simply intellectual study. Prayer requires an inward orientation, coupled with complete humility in the presence of an all powerful, all knowing, and all universal intelligence.

Active Principal Behind Prayer

If we are made in the image, power, and likeness of God, then it is our duty to come to experience this divine-seed potential inside ourselves, through an understanding of the spiritual principals that decide success and failure.

While prayer will always be an art and science, in which ‘Man proposes, and God disposes,’ or in which other factors unknown to us will come into play and be considered in any decision making by God, a careful study of prayer reveals several important points.

Point One - Most people’s prayers are childish in nature thereby defeating the very purpose for what they are praying. We are to be independent, decision making beings, who know from experience what is right, wrong, and to make the effort to align ourselves with Love. Our reasoning power is as much a divine attribute as our power to make new bodies for life, or commune with the Divine in prayer and meditation. If the purpose of our prayers is something other than Divine Communion and Illumination, then we are obliged to use our reasoning power to assess the worthiness of our request prior to our practice session.

Point Two - Reason out your request, just as you would a business plan. God is not a vending machine. Ask for what you need - what is the BIG PICTURE? We can go into ourselves for Divine assistance as often as is needed, but it is best to spend our time praying for wisdom rather than bread. If you need something material, ask for what will serve you best long term.

Point Three - Be succinct. Use as few words as possible. Use a clear, concise, inspirational picture or visualization to assist in your prayer, and to inspire you while building confidence.

Point Four - Asking for help is not a sign of failure. Eradicate the ‘I am a bug oh Lord’ mentality from your prayers. Prayer is similar to going to a more knowledgeable person for advice and assistance. Remember, Jesus says that God is your Father too! You must develop the feeling that you are a child of God and it is your right to go to your ‘source’ for assistance, comfort, and wisdom, so that you can lead a more productive, healthy, and happy life.

Point Five - Prayer must be followed up by action. “God helps those who help themselves”. The material universe is known as *Assiah* in Jewish mysticism. *Assiah* is ‘the World of Action’. We are here to do, to act, to create.

Point Six - Wisdom Triumphs All. Pray for Wisdom, for Illumination, for insight into the nature of

creation, and everything else will be made clear to you. Jesus said, “Seek ye first the Kingdom of Heaven...” If we have wisdom, we find solutions to our own problems. If we increase our wisdom, we increase our knowledge and *direct experience of God in us*. This brings harmony into our life.

Point Seven - The best prayer is silence. While we may utilize small rituals, such as lighting candles, visualize scenes from Scripture, such as is recommended with the Rosary, or count on beads, true prayer happens when all of these preliminaries are complete, and we enter into the Silence.

Silence is prayer, and prayer is silence, for in silence we listen to what God, our Higher Self, Holy Guardian Angel, etc., has to say to us. When God speaks to us, we must listen, and know that we are not special. That this message is for us, and us alone, and that each has the ability to enter into a similar state of ‘conversation’ if they desire. Just as each speaks their own language, so too, God speaks to us in a language we understand. For this reason each of us must find our own method of stilling the mind, and listening to the Word within us.

Some churches and religious rites involve shouting, yelling, ecstatic movements and trances that bring the individual or group to a frenzy. While this may be seen as a celebration of God, it is not prayer. While one may exclaim the glory, power, and love of God while in these states, they are not prayer as is classically understood. Prayer is silence, and in silence we pray. Prayer is not loud, boastful, or extremely verbal. Prayer is being relaxed, possibly swaying gently as the inner rhythm of the body takes over, and the spirit begins to free itself, such as Hassidim are seen to do.

Prayer is calm and peaceful and peace producing. Prayer is not eyes clenched tight, with voices raised in ‘Hallelujah!’ Swinging in mass convulsions to the screaming tempo of a pulpit being pounded cannot bring peace. While such forms of worship impart a powerful emotional and cathartic release of tension and anxiety, and from that release a sense of peace, they cannot bring the inner peace of silence. Remember, “Be still, and know that I am God.”

Johannes Kelpius wrote that the true prayer is a prayer that never ceases, can never be interrupted by external distractions except our own human weaknesses, is the prayer of the heart; and that this prayer would lead us to the Prayer of Silence.

The Inward Prayer that Never Ends¹³

“Now remains only to show that there is a prayer which may be performed at all times and in all places, which by nothing can be interrupted but by sin and unfaithfulness.

This inward prayer is performed in the spirit of the inward man through faith and love, and therefore is justly called the Prayer of Faith and Love.

This Prayer of Faith and Love is simple, pure, universal, and obscure, without observing or distinguishing plainly the affections, words, or what one prays for; and, as nothing can but bounds to its vast extent, so is nothing able to interrupt it or make it cease. And so this Prayer of the Will, or the Prayer of Divine Love, which consists in the entire inclination of the hear towards the Supreme Good, which is God, can be as little or rather less interrupted, since the hear is never weary of loving.”

The culmination for all prayer for Kelpius, and similar mystical streams, is in the experience of Inward Silence.

“For our parts, we should and can do much as to refrain from all thoughts and words (those excepted to which the circumstances of our conditions, business and office oblige us) and to avoid all rational cogitations, all forms and figures, not only during the time of our prayer but also all day long, that as soon as they appear we suppress them without admittance.

I have long ago very well conceived how necessary it is not to suffer any thought to enter into the mind, neither good nor bad, and to be free from all figures and images in order to perform inward prayer.

We ought not to believe that such a state of inward Silence is indolence or a loss of time. By no means: on the contrary, the soul is then more active than ever, since she¹⁴ is practicing faith, hope, and love:...Let this then henceforth be our prayer: because in such a reverential Silence the great virtues are so nobly practiced, but chiefly for the sake of pure Love.”¹⁵

Path of Illumination

We must seek to become more, that we might experience and do more, rather than ‘have’ more. This doing is not a doing for its own sake, but a natural expression of our Inner Light, of our interior state, of Illumination. It is the tangible material fruit of our efforts at the inward way.

Just as we are told that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are within us, we must go within to experience them, and then bring this discovery into the world. Prayer is the principal practice on the Path of Illumination. We seek ‘light,’ knowledge and wisdom; and not the knowledge of books, sermons, or ancient philosophies. These may be our starting points, and our guides along the way, but cannot substitute for the experience of the inner light. This Divine Light within bring a certitude that lasts forever, and for this reason has been sought by Gnostics, Qabalists, Alchemists, and mystics across the eons to the present day.

The Practice of Prayer starts with a simple, yet startling and profound reality, that each of us has the capacity to say, “I am.” As conscious beings we can say this, and yet, we do not

understand what it means. It is this search for understanding of being, of 'am-ness', that we seek to understand both our 'Becoming' and the ultimate state of being.

Obstacles on the Path

The Practice of Prayer is, as we have stated, the most direct method of entering into communion with the Divine. In alchemical terms it is the 'Short Path' or the 'Dry Way,' in some respects; and despite its many advantages, it is also fraught with obstacles as well.

1. **The Danger of Delusion** - The most obvious of these dangers is in thinking we have experienced a divine revelation, when in fact, we have not. This may be a simple error, or a profound distraction from our practice depending on our continued reaction.

2. **The Danger of Ego** - The second danger is in having genuine insights and experiences and thinking that we are now God's chosen messenger to the world. As a result of our glimpsing of the inner light, our sense of self-importance is inflated, and we feel that we now know 'It,' and that we are 'It's' vehicle for spreading 'The Light' to others. In doing so, we may create a new movement, or tap into an already existing one. In either case, the Light we seek to share is singular and dogmatic; in doing so we fail to understand that each person responsible for their own illumination. We can only suggest, show by example, and guide, because we cannot do for others what they must do for themselves.

3. **The Danger of Dogma** - Coupled with this is the possibility of creating a new dogma, or reinforcing old ones, that seek to restrain others, hold them back, and keep them from being responsible for their Becoming.

It is important when undertaking the practice of prayer, the Path of Illumination, that we keep ourselves firmly rooted to the ground. The final obstacle is that we retreat into our inner world, and in comfort, real or imagined, to escape from the realities of material life. This creates a false dualism, for life is meant to be lived here and now. We enter into ourselves that we may do as the Lord's Prayer says, "Thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven."

We must express our light in the world, and experience the ever present power of God around, in, and through us. The practice of prayer on the Path of Illumination is not a retreat from the world, but full and utter engagement in it, with confidence in the divine root of all things seen and unseen.

Simplicity in technique, simplicity in interpretation of experiences, simplicity in daily living, are the keys to maintaining a steady and balanced center on the Path of Illumination.

The practice of prayer is a contradiction, in that the *Illumination* prayer gives destroys our world and gives it life. To truly enter into the Path is to be willing to give up all of your ideas of God, creation, and yourself that may have brought you there. The ideas of one age, epoch, or time in our life may no longer suit us as we progress on the Inner Way. The resulting conflict of this is well documented in what mystics have called the *Noca Obscura*, or 'Dark Night of the Soul.'

It is only when we have experienced and passed through this period of aloneness and doubt, that we find our true root and expression in God and that God is everywhere. We then see, feel, and know through experience that we, too, are everywhere.

Guidelines for Developing a Prayer Practice

1. Be regular in your prayer practice. Twice a day for 10 to 20 minutes is a good starting point.
2. Be consistent in your opening and closing rituals.
3. Spend at least half of your prayer time in spiritual attunement, and half or less seeking assistance with mundane matters.
4. The best attitude is gratitude. Be thankful for what you have and who you are *right now*, as an expression of Divinity.
5. Note any emotions, feelings, or ideas that may come to mind while praying, as they may be insightful into areas of your life that need further exploration.
6. Study scripture as a part of prayer. Texts such as the *Tanakh* (Old Testament), *New Testament*, *Sepher Yetzirah*, *Sepher Bahir*, *Sepher Zohar*, *The Gnostic Fragments*, *Pistis Sophia*, *Egyptian Book of the Dead*, and *Corpus Hermeticum* lend themselves well to prayerful study.
7. Keep a notebook or prayer diary of your practice and any insights that arise as a result.

Negative Reactions to Prayer

In prayer, as in meditation, the body as well as the mind may revolt against the discipline of prayer. The ego, or false sense of self concerned only with material realities, is threatened by esoteric work and will find many ways to keep its hold on power. Physical symptoms and side-effects are the most common. They include twitching, mild pain, cramps, or simply being restless. These physical symptoms are expressions of deeper emotional knots and other somatic repressions that the body and psyche are beginning to clear out. Simply let them pass, and continue with your practice. We may notice slight pains, itches, or twitches in various parts of the body or a generalized restlessness. These are usually due to the untying of emotional knots in the body.

Psychic Centers and Prayer

There is no direct mention of psychic centers in prayer literature; however, prayer seems to focus on the heart as a universal symbol of devotion in traditional religious and esoteric practices, as well as a location for concentration. This is particularly true in Qabala, Alchemy, Christian esotericism, and Hermetic Theosophy. In the Greek Orthodox tradition, the famous “Jesus Prayer” more closely resembles a meditation, or even yogic practice, than what we often think of as prayer. Here, concentrating on the navel or solar plexus is often utilized to stimulate mystical visions. Oriental practices place a great deal of emphasis on this psychic center for developing psychic abilities. Extended meditation on the heart, solar plexus, or naval has shown to have a reflexive response in the brain, stimulating the pituitary and pineal glands. Certain esoteric groups place a great deal of emphasis on meditating, and visualizing images in the area of the medulla oblongata, near the nape of the neck at the base of the skull. This seems to dramatically enhance inward focus, stability, and receptivity to inner impulses and messages.

Conclusion

The practice of prayer is each person’s personal and unique path towards Illumination. Through regular practice, with careful attention to the suggestions given by generations of seekers of all traditions, prayer can be a tool that brings us into attunement with our Inner Self, and in doing so, brings peace, harmony, and success into our life.

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Summary

1. Prayer is the most common form of spiritual expression for all people, and all traditions.
2. Prayer is part of a set of practices within Traditional Western Esotericism, ritual and meditation being the other two.
3. Prayer is utilized in the three main Paths of Traditional Western Esotericism: Magic, Mysticism, and Occult study.
4. Prayer can be viewed as a form of psychological, or even psychic phenomena, or as a religious expression.
5. We pray for many reasons, material concerns and health are the most common, and spiritual concerns following.
6. True prayer is concerned with spiritual concerns first, and then material.
7. Prayer shares some similarities with meditation and autosuggestion (self-hypnosis), but is distinct from them.
8. Visualization is a key component of prayer and helps communicate our wishes to our subconscious.
9. Confidence, or faith, emotional focus, and a distinct sense of worthiness are the keys to successful prayer.
10. If we wish to receive a Divine Blessing or support, it is important that we genuinely pray for others, share our benefits, and forgive those who have transgressed us.
11. A regular practice of prayer, including a notebook, is important.
12. There are several forms of prayer, with Inward Prayer, and Silent Prayer being the most profound.

¹ Keplius is alleged to have had connections to the early Rosicrucian movements in Europe. See: *The Ephrata Commune: An Early American Counter Culture* by E.G. Alderfer. University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, Pa. 1985; and, "Chapter Six - Johannes Kelpies and Pennsylvania Theosophy" in *Wisdom's Children - A Christian Esoteric Tradition* by Arthur Versluis, SUNY Press, Albany, New York. 1999.

² *A Method of Prayer by Johannes Kelpius*, Edited with and Introduction by E. Gordon Alderfer. Harper & Brothers Publishers, New York. 1951. P. 77-78.

³ We strongly recommend that students read: *First Steps in Ritual* by Dolores Ashcroft-Nowicki, and *The Magician His Training and Work* by W.E. Butler for examples of very simple and extremely efficient rituals.

⁴ Tiphareth on the Tree of Life is the central sphere, with all other forces, save the material world, under its influence. Only when the objective and subjective aspects of our psyche are united in Tiphareth (known as the 'Alchemical Marriage') do we become spiritual 'adults' in the universe.

⁵ The Tarot Card, The Tower, also called The Tower of Fire, or The Tower of God, in some decks, represents a premature attempt of the Path of Return by still very immature beings. See the Biblical story of the Tower of Babel for an allegorical interpretation of this concept.

⁶ Cornelius Agrippa, the most famous magician of the 16th century, suggested that it is better to make prayers to Saints than to angels, as Saints are closer to us, and understand the human condition, since they were once human. See: *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, Chapter XXXIV.

⁷ *The Ritual Magic Workbook* by Dolores Ashcroft-Nowicki, Samuel Weiser, Inc., York Beach Maine. 1998. P. 19.

⁸ In Medieval and Renaissance magical systems the Psalms are given magnetic power, and treated as a Divine invocation. This is found in the survival of these systems, particularly German folk magic, and among the Pennsylvania Germans ('Dutch') pow-wow practitioners. A listing of their uses can be found in *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* and appended to some editions of *A Long Lost Friend*, magical staples of German folk magic.

⁹ See: *Timeless Healing - The Power and Biology of Belief* by Herbert Benson, MD, with Marg Stark. Simon & Schuster, Inc., New York, NY. 1996.

¹⁰ From a Qabalistic perspective, charity is an expression of Chesed, Faith and expression of Tiphareth, and Hope an expression of Geburah.

¹¹ A perfect example of this is the Roman Catholic Novena, or prayers said over a period of nine days., which many believe give near miraculous results, particularly when asking for healing or assistance in material affairs. Nine relates to the forces of the subconscious via Yesod on the Tree of Life, and the gateway into and out of material existence. The extended period of prayer, coupled with repetition, can be seen as 'seeding' the subconscious so that additional cosmic or spiritual forces can be brought to bear through singular focus of the petitioner's intent. To assist in this, the use of Prayer Beads, Rosary, or Chotki, can be added to keep a regular count on the specific prayers and visualizations being used.

¹² A tiled lodge or properly prepared group ritual setting for worship would be an exception as long as an individual's private petitions do not become a focal point or public matter, thereby disrupting other participants.

¹³ Kelpius, page 86.

¹⁴ Kelpius describes several kinds of prayer, all of which focus on the needs of the soul, or consciousness, to unite with the Divine. The language used is distinctly marital, in that the soul is termed 'she', indicating a strong influence of Jewish mysticism (Qabala) and Gnosticism (Sophia).

¹⁵ Kelpius, page 86.