

Prayer without words

If all the prayers we humans have made are answered, society as we know it would probably have been destroyed. The main problem here is not just about what we pray for, but that these prayers are done with words. We use words to negotiate with a deity, or bribe our Gods, asking for things to happen or not happen. If sex is the most selfish of human acts, then prayer is the most selfish of human thoughts.

This is not to advocate that prayer is bad in itself, or that we have to do away with it. We need to learn to pray the right way. But since there are many ways of prayer, let us examine what can be the best way to pray. This is the kind of prayer where no one and nothing (such as animals and the environment) get hurt. Above all, it is not about religion, as religious prayers tend to be self-centred, often materialistic, and even more so do not benefit the other party, especially non-believers.

It would generally do a lot of good for us to work on a natural prayer, to use a beautifully simple term. A natural prayer does not need words: it is a prayer without words. No negotiations, no thinking; only feelings, directly touching our hearts and the hearts of others.

Feeling is true to life, engaging with life joyfully and fully. When we are unable to feel, we use words, we play with ideas, we fabricate virtual realities, we create very privately limited worlds of our own. When we go to extremes to limit this mental privatization, it may end up as madness.

The more mentally healthy we are, the more we are able to communicate with others, and in a beneficial way. Ideally, we should communicate with others with our wholesome feelings, but this is not always easy.

That is why we study literature, and religion to some extent: to feel wholesomely. Science measures, and often messes up our lives and the environment. The humanities, such as literature, try to moderate science and its effects on us and our world, and also tries to remind us to enjoy life beyond the material. We prosper when there is this harmonious balance between science and humanity, between head and heart.

Man may be the measure of all things, but this is perhaps because man has forgotten to feel. We might try to measure the occurrences of happiness, but we can never measure happiness itself. For, happiness is gone before we know it. But unlike sexual pleasure (which, as a rule, knows no satiation), even a happy memory can elevate us.

And as we mature in body and spirit, it is such memories of happiness that multiply and magnify themselves. Often happy things happened to us some time ago, but we fail to remember them. We would rather keep on owning and collecting our pains. As we grow in wisdom, however, we are more likely to be able to look back in joy at these missed moments of happiness. Then we have indeed seized the moment, without living in the past.

True prayer begins when we stop measuring and harvesting. We are only truly happy when we rise above measuring. For, measuring is merely to have, but feeling is to be. We can only *have* what we measure, but we *are* what we feel.

One important ingredient of true prayer is remembering the goodness and joy that arise in us. We may start with recalling someone showing us kindness or joy. Or, we could recall a random act of kindness which we ourselves have done selflessly. This is better than “counting” our blessings. Why rub against the sharp edges of life when we can heal ourselves with life’s love songs?

Another piece of spice for the dish of true prayer is to be present in beautiful places. These are often our intimate moments with nature herself: spacious gardens, ancient trees, smiling flowers, flowing streams, dreamy breezes, eternal mists, living rocks and self-forgetting. What self is there, but only seeing the life-giving green, hearing the call of every creature, smelling the flowers and grass, tasting the cool waters, and feeling nature’s embrace?

These are the seeds of joy and peace. Tend them with our bright open hearts. Weed them of thinking and measuring. Water them with our full and loving attention. Smile at them, but cling not to them. For only in nature’s embrace and our breathing spaces, do joy and peace freely grow.

As we selflessly enjoy this vision, it turns into a blinding light that is only for our inner eye. Yet, even a sparkle of this inner sun-like radiance is enough to spring sweet joy in us. As we stay with this blissful stillness, time touches us not, and we emerge from it as if we have lived forever.

Only then we are truly blessed and ready to pray for others, that is, to accept people, animals, beings and nature just as they are, to wish them well unconditionally. This is not a prayer for faith (we already abound in it). This is not a prayer to harvest souls (for there are none).

Yet, it is with this gentle wordless prayer that we can truly heal ourselves and embrace others without measure, so that they too are able to hear the same joyful stillness and learn to pray without words.

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