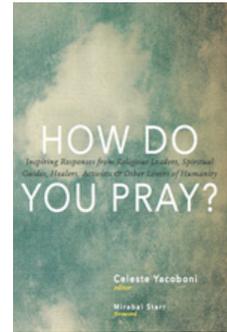


Selected excerpts from

How Do You Pray?: Inspiring Responses from Religious Leaders, Spiritual Guides, Healers, Activists and Other Lovers of Humanity

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Arun Gandhi

I was taught very early in my life that “A heart without prayer is better than a prayer without heart.” ... Sometimes my prayer takes the form of service of the poor in a constructive way. I don’t mean just feeding the poor and making them dependent but helping them rebuild their self-respect and self confidence so that they can stand on their own feet and fend for themselves.

Roshi Joan Halifax

At Upaya Zen Center we feed many people and some of what we offer our students and guests is food from our land. Before every meal, we make a food offering. This is a way of expressing our gratitude for the food before us, and as well to vow to return this gift by serving the world.

The prayer is thus:

Earth, water, fire, air, and space
combine to make this food.
Numberless beings gave their lives and labors
that we may eat.
May we be nourished,
that we may nourish life.

Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee

Whatever moment of the day, whatever outer activities, when I look within I see this mystery that is praying, the silence and wonder of how the heart is a place of prayer, an altar of love. I feel the tenderness, the sweetness, the power of this prayer. This prayer is the essence of my being, a covenant of love, a remembrance, a meeting and a merging. It is a living oneness within me that belongs to every moment of the day and night. This prayer is my practice, an offering of my self, my own most intimate way of being with my Beloved. What else can I do in this world but pray? We are love’s prayer.

Kim Rosen

I've never had a relationship to prayer. Until recently I couldn't fathom what people got out of reciting in Hebrew at dusk or bowing down to Allah five times a day, or repeating the Lord's Prayer or the rosary. Then, in a moment of extreme darkness, almost by accident, I discovered the power of speaking a poem that I love, and suddenly I understood . . . And, when you speak the poem aloud, the sound vibrates the crystals in your bones and fascia the way your voice vibrates in the nave of a Cathedral, creating a special resonance that invites revelation.

Peter Russell

The beauty of this approach is that I am not praying to some power beyond myself. I am praying to my own self for guidance. Below the surface thinking of my ego-mind, my inner being knows the truth. It sees where I have become caught in a particular mindset, and is ever-willing to help set me free.

Lama Surya Das

Praying almost always has an exquisitely salutary effect on my mind and nervous system; helping me relax, get straight, centered, attuned, and honest with myself and my circumstances. Now, in my mature years, sometimes I recite to myself prayers learned in my teens and twenties, while lying in bed at night or sitting in the many airports and planes, which take me around the world. Developing and strengthening your daily, as well as year-round, prayer life is an important part of many spiritual paths, on good days as well as when encountering difficulties. My Benedictine friend Brother David Steindl-Rast often says that "Gratefulness is the heart of prayer."

Dan Millman

The only prayers I know are "Thank you" and "Thy will be done." The odd thing is that I do not assume, or know, that there is anyone or any One to whom I am directing those prayers. A God? The universe? My own heart? Maybe it doesn't matter. Maybe that is the essence of faith. Like Socrates, the ancient Greek, I know nothing for certain. I don't know what happens to us when the body dies. I don't know where we came from or what destiny awaits. But I choose to believe that all that happens is for our highest good and learning. Meantime, I say "Thank you"—and "Thy will be done."

Chris Deckker

You have this collective, exponential power toward this intention of prayer, especially if everybody's focusing on the same thought at the same time, which is what we call a prayer for peace in Earth Dance. In the moment of movement, and through the kinetic movement of dance and energy, the joyful expression of coming together and dancing and celebrating, you create

this moment of stillness, which we call the prayer for peace, so all that great kinetic energy is focused and directed and as a community we get to affirm peace on the planet and the intention of that. We can actually live in unity together as a global tribe. That's the essence of how I've been using the technology of prayer to ignite this sense of global affirmation and global collective intention, which is a potent field.

Richard Packham

Those who do not believe in God use other methods—meditation, visualization, altered states of consciousness, whatever. They work for the believer, and because they sometimes work, the believer's faith is strengthened, because the prayers are answered. They work just as well for the non-believer.

ATHEIST PRAYER

Our Powers are within,
 Whatever be their name.
 What they have done, what still may come,
 This Earth can yet be as Heaven.
 Live then this day, and without dread,
 And forgive your own trespasses
 As you forgive those who trespass against you.
 And be not led into temptation,
 But flee away from evil,
 For Time is the Healer,
 With power to restore me,
 Forever and ever, Amen.

Regina Sara Ryan

Prayer at specific times and in specific places is a part of daily practice. But prayer also spontaneously arises when, for instance, one hears in the news that there are fires raging in New Mexico, or wars in Afghanistan. What can I do from my desk in the office, or my post at the kitchen sink, except to hold my intention for those afflicted, and to breathe and to repeat an internal prayer in the Name of God to bless those who need courage in this particular time ... I generally don't find myself praying for things like, "Oh God, please make the fire stop." I've never been oriented toward praying to ask for some kind of divine intervention. That always seemed really presumptuous. However, just holding in compassion and blessing the whole situation—the situation of the Earth, the situation of the individuals involved—is important because we all need courage and strength and joy in any kind of challenging situation.

Hank Wesselman

Makua looked me over with satisfaction. My life has never been quite the same, and every breath is now a prayer ... and every moment of every day. The chief then shared this thought with me.

“Know that when you offer prayer, you find love within its pure form and you are no longer finite. In those moments, you have found your eternity. When we are able to let our love free to ride the wind of spirit, and this is our breath that carries our prayers, we are now following the blueprint we have laid out for our own growth. And it is precisely then that we may choose how we shall serve that mystery that created us and all that is...”

Katherine Woodward Thomas

I find that the moments we most need to be connected to a force and field of Life greater than ourselves, are the very ones we are apt to shut down and withhold prayer. As we often forget to breathe in a time of disappointment and despair, so too do we forget to pray. As though to say to God, “If you are not going to play on my terms, then I am just going to take all of my marbles and go home,” refusing to accept Life on its own terms. The holiest moments of our lives are when we make the choice to turn towards Life, rather than away, in the face of all of life’s topplings and shocking losses. To say a prayer that aligns us with all that is good, loving, beautiful and true in the midst of the rubble and despair, and rather than ask God to make this better for us, to declare instead who we will be in the face of it. It is in this sacred instant that we awaken to ourselves as the generators of life and love, and begin to understand prayer as the holy act of co-creation.

Andrew Harvey

“How do I pray?” How beautiful. It’s such an important thing to do, because I think many people are scared of prayer and frightened of prayer and don’t do it nearly enough. There should be an undercurrent of prayer in everything because everything is potentially a prayer, every reaction, every gesture, every movement, every inner thought.

Byron Katie

This very moment is when all prayers are already answered. There are no wants necessary in it, no needs, no shoulds or shouldn’ts, so of course we are perfectly fulfilled, though we may not know it. Prayers can only be answered in the moment. Nothing else is necessary; nothing else is possible, or ever has been, or ever will be. It’s where we always are. And how wonderful the moment is when the mind finally becomes still enough to recognize that!

Prayer evokes that power within us that is capable of everything ... I often say that if I had a prayer, it would be this: *God, spare me from the desire for love, approval, or appreciation. Amen.* I don't have a prayer, in fact, because I don't want anything but what I have. I know the benevolence of life. Why would I pray for something different, which would always be less than what comes? God is another name for reality. It's complete, it's perfect, it fills me with the utmost joy. The thought of asking for what isn't never even arises.

James O'Dea

A Rwandan woman sits in a circle telling her story of great family loss in the genocide. She is overcome with tears. Words fail. Her grief pulls her to lie face down on the ground. An African American woman who has dedicated her life to racial healing comes and lies down on the floor beside her, also face down. Then a third woman who has given most of her life to working with children of war and others who have endured great trauma, also lies down beside her. The spirits of so much hurt and wounding crowd around the three prostrate women. A Hopi elder, a grandmother, rises and prays over them with simple dignity. Light enters the story.

This is how I pray in circle after circle. I offer my heart's capacity to open. I allow the molten lava of suffering to flow through it. Then when it is ready, in silence, in stillness, this heart becomes witness to the incomparable beauty of healing. And everything within me becomes a song.

Oriah Mountain Dreamer

And sometimes in that ordinary day, as in the ceremonial dance, I come to my knees and struggle to rise. And where I am unable to get up, my prayer is in the curve of my back and the tears in my throat, in accepting the limits of what my small will can do. I ask for help, I surrender, and something lifts me, holds and carries me. Sometimes this happens all at once, taking my breath away with instantaneous transformation. And sometimes it is a slow and gentle lifting, almost imperceptible, until I find myself back on my feet once more, filled with gratitude and renewed faith.

This is how I pray. One day at a time. Dancing until I cannot and that which brought me here lifts me up and carries me forward. The prayer is in the life lived with awareness, in the intention and even in the forgetting so the remembering may come again. It is in the joy and the sorrow, the struggle and the surrendering, in the opening that comes as we move more deeply into life, over and over again.