

Meditation

May I be filled with loving kindness.

May I be free from suffering.

May I be well.

May I be at peace. May I be joyful.

To those you love:

May you be filled with loving kindness.

May you be free from suffering.

May you be well.

May you be at peace. May you be joyful.

To those you find challenging:

May you be filled with loving kindness.

May you be free from suffering.

May you be well.

May you be at peace. May you be joyful.

To those who most need it in this moment:

May you be filled with loving kindness.

May you be free from suffering.

May you be well.

May you be at peace. May you be joyful.

To mother earth and all beings in creation:

May all beings be filled with loving kindness.

May all beings be held in loving kindness.

May all beings be free from suffering.

May all beings be well.

May all beings be at peace. May all beings be joyful.

Message:

Last winter I shared two quotes that I heard in a video clip of comedian Pete Holmes: *“My God is not an old man in the sky. It's a metaphor for a mystery that absolutely transcends all categories of human thought including being and non-being but that's too many words for the back of a quarter.”* That’s Joseph Campbell... Barry Taylor, the road manager for AC/DC said, *“God is the name of the blanket we put over the mystery to give it a shape.”*

Mystery. In the book ***99 Names of God***, a beautiful meditation on the names/attributes of the Holy One found in the Qur’an, Brother David Steindl-Rast writes:

“The word **God** stems from human history’s most consequential discovery. It is a prehistoric artifact, which even today, glows red-hot from the fires that smelted it in the forge of mystical experience. The insight that enlightened our ancient, only just human ancestors was that we stand in a personal relationship with the unfathomable mystery of life...And that we may call to that mystery because it calls to us. This word “call to” with its meaning of invocation, marks the etymological root of the word “God.” It is not a name, but rather a reference to our relationship to the nameless; it is not a term for some creature, but rather points to the origin by which all creatures originally sprang from non-being into being...It is a word with the momentous task of pointing to the mystery.”

In ***How to Pray without Talking to God***, Linda Martella Whitsett shares her journey from seeing God as a ‘superhuman in the sky’ to finding her foundation in Unity teachings. She writes:

“ Divine omnipresence means God is within us, we are within God, and God is everywhere. Moreover, God is everywhere-ness is not a being who is everywhere but the pervasive essence of all...With these realizations, God as a person ceased to exist to me... Instead, I began relating to the divine as Divine Life, Love and Wisdom.”

She quotes Myrtle Fillmore, “God is Principle.”... not a cold, senseless principle like that of mathematics, but the Principles of Life, Love and Intelligence.”

So, who or what are we talking to, listening to, when we pray? Do you remember learning how to pray? Was prayer a part of your growing up? In my Catholic family we said grace before meals (and still do!). We started out on trips to see my grandparents by first praying– at least the Our Father, Hail Mary and a Glory Be, if not the whole rosary! We said bedtime prayers, and mom often reminded us that we could/should talk often to Jesus, to God the Father, to Mary, to the Holy Spirit, or to our guardian angels if we were sad, angry, or worried.

Looking back on those young years, it’s hard to fully remember how I pictured “God” but my images/ memories are of loving entities that cared for me, *that my good actions mattered to them*. And that while they were *outside of me*, they somehow were also *inside of me*, Jesus and the Holy spirit especially.

In his book, ***The Many Faces of Prayer: How the Human Family Meets Its Spiritual Needs***, Unity author and columnist, Thomas Shepherd opens with a chapter asking is prayer *Communication or Reflection?*

Shepherd grounds this first chapter in a rich description of the many ways people from different backgrounds– geographically and theologically– connect with “God– or whatever you call the content of your pantheon.” He asks us to consider :

“Am I *communicating* with a Presence and Power beyond myself– engaging in an *I-Thou* relationship with my Higher Power– or *reflecting* upon something deep in my consciousness? Can prayer be both, or neither?...”

Every practice humans identify as *prayer* seems to fall into one of two categories, and the way a religious faith answers this question is in some ways more important than the shape of its God concept. Either we are addressing some kind of spiritual reality *beyond* ourselves , or we are contemplating the spiritual essence that dwells *within* us.

There's a lot of theology and psychology embedded in my young perspective and memories of prayer! Prayer— talking to God, and listening to the Holy Spirit of God— was common, daily, a personal AND a communal activity. My concept of God was loving, not *wrathful*— that is a blessing— but God loved me even more when I was good! (That's an unpacking for another day!)

Consider, though, how *you* picture the Mystery, the Divine today. Who or what are you *talking to*, or *accessing* when you pray? Is it a transcendent principle of Divine Life, Love, Intelligence, Wisdom? Is it a loving Father, as Jesus himself taught us? Is it the in-dwelling Christ Consciousness, Spirit, I AM? Can it be all of the above??

Thomas Shepherd reminds readers, “This book is not about the right way to pray; it's about the ways people pray, what they pray to, and what they pray for... A yawning chasm separates “*You got it wrong*” from “*I see it differently.*” ...How to approach God...is a metaphysical question with deeply personal implications.”

Over the next two weeks, I invite you to notice, to pay attention to— your spiritual practices and prayer life. What pulls you into them, and what pulls you out of them? Are there teachings that are so embedded in your imagination that they have become invisible to you? Can you tap into them and consider what might you have outgrown or what are you curious to explore now?

And importantly, consider ***WHY pray?*** *Why* have practices that feed our inner life? *Why* does our participation in the communication with or reflection of the Divine matter? *Why* does it matter that we feel our hearts, our souls, our love go deeper into God when we pray? What happens when we are still and know that God is? What is that Mystery that calls to us, and calls us to it, that helps us keep singing in the face of all the world shows us?

Here is a prayer to close...

A Prayer for the World

By Rabbi Harold Kushner

Let the rain come and wash away
the ancient grudges,
the bitter hatreds
held and nurtured over generations.

Let the rain wash away the memory
of the hurt, the neglect.

Then let the sun come out and
fill the sky with rainbows.

Let the warmth of the sun heal us
wherever we are broken.

Let it burn away the fog so that
we can see each other clearly.

Let the warmth and brightness
of the sun melt our selfishness.

So that we can share the joys and
feel the sorrows of our neighbors.

And let the light of the sun
be so strong that we will see all
people as our neighbors.

Let the earth, nourished by rain,
bring forth flowers
to surround us with beauty.

And let the mountains
teach our hearts to reach... to heaven. Amen

Be still. Be still and know. Be still and know that I am God. Peace, Be still and know.
And so it is. Amen.