

**LEARNING TO
PRAY:
A PATH TO
DIALOGUE WITH GOD**



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Learning to pray: a path in dialogue with God

1) - PRAYER

*In the beginning was prayer,
that streamed life into the present
and God is present in continuity.
And the present is Life,
and this Life is the ego of man
sustaining man himself.
Not only he, the Spirit in him.
When in conscious prayer
he accepts the Divine Life
the Christ is in his feeling.
And in this overflowing Life of the Present
Christ will pour out himself
Into every living soul.¹*

1.1) Introduction

All those who pursue a religious life recognize the importance of prayer - the communication or dialogue that the faithful have with God. This is a need of the soul, a necessity, as eating drinking and sleeping are necessary for the body.

It is not necessary to have special skills nor must one have special spiritual gifts to become "people of prayer". For prediction one must have a specific gift from the Spirit, and prophesy requires another specific gift, and committing oneself to a religious ministry requires definite attitudes, training and capacities – but prayer simply requires sincere good will.

To become a "person of prayer" one has to fight against laziness and develop an increasingly fine "conscious faith" in the constant and loving presence of God. The rest will follow as will the fruit from a tree that is tended and loved.

1.2) Prayer, Meditation and Contemplation

Prayer can be considered a particular moment of dialogue or of communion with the Divine and as such can only take place in the present, in the here and now. It is in this present, this moment in time, that the human soul might be one with the infinite spiritual, filled with light and love. Like a glove that is turned completely inside out, all our inner darkness becomes permeated by the life-giving light of Christ and so this love can radiate - through us - into the world. The bright space that is created in us (*here*) joins the infinite Divine (*now*) creating the conditions for the birth of our inner children.²

A dialogue-communion with the Divine is not only possible through prayer. There

¹ A prayer from the Trieste group of Arca della Vita.

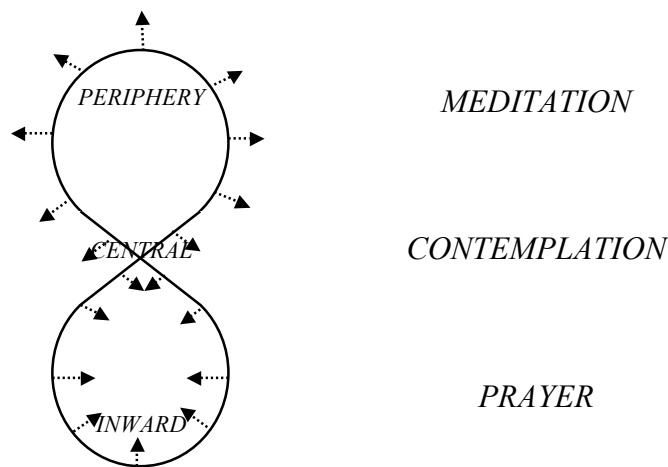
² The term "children" is taken from the gospels. Anthroposophical literature identifies these with the three higher spiritual aspects of man: the Spirit Self (the Holy Spirit principle in us), the Loving Life Spirit (the Son principle within us) and Spirit Man (the Father principle in us). These concepts will reoccur several times. (For more information, see "Spiritual-scientific Glossary" by the author).

is also meditation. We can say that prayer is very similar to meditation but that prayer has a predominant soul or heart character. By contrast meditation works mainly (but not exclusively) in the sphere of the consciousness soul, ie in that part of the soul that comes to ripeness in knowledge, in thoughts, in the spiritual ideals of Truth, Goodness and Justice.

It is interesting to note that the word "pray" comes from the Latin word "*precari*", meaning to invoke and commend the Divine, while the term "meditation" is derived from the greek "*medo-mai*" which means "to measure with the mind" or "measure and think". Therefore, this means to evaluate the hypothetical steps which gain us entrance to the spirit world. This capacity for complete inner evaluation requires certain forces that are aspects of the consciousness soul.³ In this context we could say that meditation is like the prayer of the Consciousness Soul whilst prayer is mainly an expression of the sentient or instinctive soul. This aspect of the soul is an aspect of the etheric body, and it is appropriate that humanity has developed repetitive prayers like the rosary from this part. Note the correspondence between the shape of the Rosary and the symbol of Venus, the planetary carrier of the forces of veneration and devotion.

In meditation, therefore, the proper order is important for each unfolding "step" towards the Spirit: the thoughts must be developed in the right order, in the sequence⁴ appropriate to the intrinsic law (Truth) that is the object of meditation.

Obviously, within everyone, both of these modes of dialogue with the Divine can be present simultaneously.



Relationship between meditation, contemplation and prayer

Besides meditation and prayer there is a third form of connection to the Divine: this is the world of contemplation, an activity through which man is connected both to the Divine in its peripheral "external" aspect (as in meditation) and its "internal" manifestation (as in prayer). In contemplation, the essence of man, full of devotion, stands as the center of everything, contemplating and embracing everything in its deeper aspects.

As we emphasized, the life of the soul, our inner life, is no less important than the

³ The Consciousness Soul is that part of the soul which is turned towards the spirit. It is physiologically centred in the cerebellum and became generally active in people from the 15th Century onwards.

⁴ In Anthroposophical terminology this is called sequential logic. For more on this see Dr Steiner's "Philosophical Essays".

life of our body and thus becomes essential to care for the life of the soul through prayer, meditation and contemplation. We need to address the health of our body and similarly we need to address the health, nourishment, and life of our soul.

For prayer the state of mind is essential, the basic attitude of the soul. What is important is not so much "what" we say, but how our soul expresses it, the tone, the devotion and warmth that pervades the soul in prayer. In this sense the 'pre-fab' prayers can be a real "trap" because they tend to deaden awareness. If this situation arises it is well to slow down the recital of a prayer in order to have time to weigh the various expressions in full consciousness or, better still, make up a freely rendered prayer.

The route from "formulaic" prayer to "free" prayer is individual for each man. The relationship with the Divine often begins within a tradition or practice⁵, and this is transformed in the warmth of feeling⁶, then to ascend to ever higher levels of consciousness⁷— a path that can be signposted as the prayers from the lips, "free" prayers, and conscious meditation.⁸

As evidence of the difference between the religious paths represented by prayer and by meditation, we can bring to mind that Rudolf Steiner urges us to avoid symbols with a strong religious character during meditation, since they too would be too active in the life of feeling, stimulating processes of sympathy and antipathy⁹ at the expense of objectification of content:

"Who wants to be an explorer of the spirit in the sense we have discussed, must always be able to think with the greatest self-criticism to find an objective approach to the spiritual world, and not rely on a religion that relies on emotional. Whoever uses images that create a strong emotion in their contemplation or meditation will be easily fooled. Therefore, these should be avoided as preparation. Religious impulses that excite and act strongly in our emotional life should be excluded "(R. Steiner," The Lord's Prayer").

This is not to deny the religious life *per se* (ie the relationship between us - understood as a spiritual entity - and other spiritual entities), but excludes anything in meditation that has not been initiated in full consciousness by ones self. The springs of religious life are present in every human being by the very fact that we connect with the spiritual world during sleep and the time between death and rebirth. In fact, when we are not aware (as in sleep) we really are immersed in spiritual realities which initially only reveal themselves in a chaotic way in our dreams. One of the requests that can be made through prayer, is for a greater nocturnal connection with the spiritual world to regenerate all our bodies (physical material, etheric-vital, astral-soul, and Divine-spiritual).

To avoid misunderstanding about the importance we give to religion, we affirm

⁵ Habitual practices are tied to our etheric bodies - being unable to overcome these reveals a weak soul contrasted to the state of inner "virginity"(see below).

⁶ Those feelings that enrich our inner life.

⁷ There are three levels of consciousness above the usual objective consciousness: These are known as the imaginative, inspirative and intuitive. These will be characterised further in the following pages.

⁸ "Conscious meditation" means, in contrast to Eastern meditation, one that retains ego-consciousness in the centre of the meditation process. The ego, the eternal individual principle, radiates into the sentient soul (strongly linked to the metabolism), through the rational-affective soul (related to the chest), lighting up the consciousness soul (linked to the area of the cerebellum). Eastern meditation is characterized by "diffusing into the Divine", in losing the self for which we have fought so hard.

⁹ These are soul processes typical of the extrovert and introvert dispositions.

that it acts fundamentally even into the physical body. Indeed it is a religious inclination - and thus a force of the soul - that acts to move and strengthen the vital processes of the etheric body, processes which then will act positively on the physical body. This is of primary importance especially in children. To promote a child's innate sense of the Spirit is a treasure that will accompany their soul throughout their life. This sense of religiosity is closely connected to prayer. We are substantiated due participating in religious ceremonies and in prayer. It is clear that the child should have this experience with his parents and thus it is fundamental that parents, when participating in a religious ceremony or in prayers, must strongly experience the experiences of the soul because the child lives in the soul (or heart) of those around him (mainly the parents).

1.3) The impulse to prayer

Once more referring to Rudolf Steiner - he said that there are two inner attitudes that spur people to prayer.

The first impulse to prayer arises from the fact that humans perceive themselves to be inwardly incomplete, lacking the strong spiritual centre that deserted us at the Garden of Eden after the fall. This sense of incompleteness is the offspring of something that weighs upon our soul from the "past." By developing this thought we find that what was "left" in the Garden of Eden is the so-called "uncorrupted Adam", our spiritual component that esoteric Christianity calls the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit "in us." These three spiritual aspects show their archetypal purity in Jesus, Mary and the Baptist¹⁰. They descended to Earth two thousand years ago to facilitate the redemption of the corrupted and fallen Adam. This has stimulated a 'natural' inclination to pray to these three entities¹¹.

According to R. Steiner, the second impulse to prayer arises from a presentiment of our future, the trials that we must overcome - the evil which we are called to transform into good, death that we must overthrow, the love of which we must become carriers - and these tests arouse in us both fear and hope, and so we seek, through invoking the Divine through prayer, to develop the inner strength needed to carry out the plan God has woven into our lives.

1.4) Faith

Reading the Gospel we see that Jesus frequently exhorts us to pray with faith. This "faith" is a real force that lives in the soul of man so that the soul itself can even be identified as a body of faith. Faith is a force of the soul and is the basis for the transformation of the soul into a sheath of the Spirit. St Paul characterized Faith *as the assurance of things hoped for*, but - even better - R. Steiner characterizes faith of people today as *"the capacity of the ego that allows it to strive beyond itself."*

We have the power of faith due to the fact that we have a soul and that this soul has various experiences between waking and sleeping and between life and death. Faith thus becomes a kind of "nostalgia" for the spiritual world with which we were initially connected in an unconscious way. This faith becomes veneration, veneration as a soul force with which we incessantly admire all that is already created and in which our consciousness is alternately immersed. Understood in this way, faith

¹⁰ See 'Mary-Sophia: An Enquiry Into The Being And Powers Of Mary In Nature And In The Cosmos' by the author.

¹¹ *Entity*; a rather clumsy term to refer to a being with the evolutionary history to be autonomous, creative, and self-directing. Otherwise there are *beings* which require direction from without to fulfill their allotted role, lacking the capacity for real initiative.