

The True Dynamics of Prayer

The beginning of prayer is not knowing what to say. If one is coming to stand before God, what is there to say? What can we tell God that God does not already know? Faced with the realization of how vast the universe is, we are often overwhelmed and speechless. How much more so, are we overcome with awe when we approach the Creator of the universe? The distance between God and man can often appear to be so vast that God seems unapproachable or nonexistent. Prayer would then seem to be of no value nor of any purpose. You cannot get close to God if God is either not around or does not exist. If one clings to this perception, there is really nowhere to go. Prayer is best understood in different terms. Prayer in Jewish tradition, is not meant to be recited, per se. Rather, they are meant to be expressed. Prayer is not verbal explanation nor the reciting of doctrine. True prayer is the meditation of the heart. Prayer, in its essence, is affirmation.

In the days when the Temple existed in Jerusalem, worship was the act of sacrifice. In acknowledgement for what God had provided, or in acceptance of God's Will, or in admission of a mistake, one would give something back to God. This could be part of the bounty received. It could be the first fruits of the field, or one's most prized possession. One gave something of himself or herself. The prayers recited were supplemental. Sacrifices were prescribed. God set down quite a number of Mitzvot regarding the exact nature of each of the sacrifices. Prayer however, was left up to the individual to express. King David wrote prayers and psalms to God from his own personal experience. The Levites in the Temple composed the liturgy themselves. The prophets and seers created songs and poems to God, throughout the Biblical period. As the occasions arose, and the people were overcome by joy and thanksgiving, prayer was created spontaneously. This tradition extends all the way back to Moses and Miriam. True prayer is the expression of heartfelt emotion. It is our dialogue with God. Whether we choose to put our hearts and souls into the prayers of the traditional liturgy, or whether we create our own, whether we meditate on the words of others or put our feelings into the wordless melodies of Niggunim, the same objective is being accomplished. We are reconnecting with God, through emotional reaffirmation.

We are affirming our essence as created beings by allowing ourselves to express our sense of self, our sense of thanksgiving and our sense of joy. We are open to communicating our exhilaration as created essences, directly to the Creator. By opening our hearts we sing, we articulate, we rejoice and we connect with the heart of all existence, God's Love and God's Presence in the World. To pray is to allow the soul to open up and to reaffirm its connection with God, by honoring the experiences of one's life.

It is in the day to day world that we learn about ourselves. It is in the mundane realm of everyday life, that we experience joy and sadness, hope and disappointment, success and failure. What exalts these events and makes them important, are two factors; how we understand them and how we express them. By expressing our feelings and our perceptions to God directly and personally, we spiritualize our experience and elevate it to the level of holiness. We exalt our life, by elevating our life experience to the level of communication with God.

That is why prayer followed sacrifice. From the doing, came the understanding. From the understanding came the joy. From the joy came the exaltation and the gratitude. The root of the Hebrew word for prayer, "tefilah", is NaFaL, meaning

"to fall", also "to drop". Prayer is in a very real sense is just that, the act of submission. When we can drop the ego, and fall back to the point of true humility, when we are not too proud or too stubborn to talk to God heart to heart, then we give real meaning to our lives. We spiritualize our earthly existence, and transcend to the higher realms of being, when we choose to live our lives as a process of active interchange with God. When we engage God emotionally, cognitively and purposefully in mindful active interchange, we experience a deeper understanding of our relationship to the Divine as well as greater intimacy. In this, true prayer is the key. When we choose to understand prayer in its truest form, as emotional affirmation, we open a dialogue with God.

May we then, structure our lives as perpetual expressions of that interaction, thereby elevating the experiential content and spiritual awareness of our earthly existence. Let our prayers be like rivers, that well up from deep beneath the surface and create their own paths as they grow and extend toward the sea.

Rabbi Fisdell