



## A Thousand Ways to Pray

BY MANISH MISHRA-MARZETTI, SENIOR MINISTER, THE FIRST PARISH IN LINCOLN, MASSACHUSETTS

Early in my ministry career I interned as a religious studies teacher at Milton Academy, a prep school in New England. My supervisor and colleague in ministry, a Methodist minister, invited me to a Saturday afternoon football game with him. It was an idyllic fall afternoon. The leaves were yellow and orange and brown. A crisp breeze was in the air—not too cold, but just cool enough. It was such a perfect fall day that it was almost unreal.

Milton Academy was playing against one of its main rivals, and as the game was about to begin my colleague and I were called onto the field to lead our team in prayer. There, on that crisp fall day, we bowed our heads, and my Methodist colleague led the team in prayer.

As he did so, a rush of sarcastic comments, unbidden, went running through my head. Thoughts like: “Gee, does God really care whether one high school team beats another in football?” and “If The Lord is really willing to micro-manage things on that level, I’d like to offer some of my own prayers, too—like, God, *please, please, please* help me win the lottery.” But, also, on a more serious note, I found myself wondering, “What if they lose? Does that mean these teenagers have somehow fallen into disfavor with God?”

Questions and thoughts like these would likely have occurred to many Unitarian Universalists if they had been in my shoes that day. I think we, as a religious denomination, know exactly what type of prayer we’re *not* interested in, and for me the situation on Milton Academy’s football field exemplified it. We were praying to an anthropomorphic deity, one that looks and acts like a person, and we were asking this deity to intervene in human affairs for the sake of a local high school football team.

At the time, the whole thing struck me as not only silly, but also potentially unhealthy. It was a *dangerous* approach to prayer. The message unintentionally sent when such prayers are not answered is that those who prayed might somehow be unworthy or unfit for God’s favor.

My experience at Milton illustrated one way that we human beings relate to prayer, but the reality is that there are many, many ways to pray. Some may be healthy ways of thinking about and engaging in prayer, and others may not be. But the most important thing we can notice is that there is no one single way to pray; no individual and no denomination has a monopoly in defining what prayer is.

In order to be a prayerful people, we Unitarian Universalists might take some time to think about what the term *prayer* means for us. And that, in turn, leads to several closely linked questions: *Who are we praying to? Why are we praying? And what are we praying for?*—the Who, Why, and What of prayer, if you will. How we answer these questions describes the nature of what prayer means to us, and also determines if, in fact, we are willing to engage in this pursuit.

I have been working on these questions for a long time. As a young adult in my 20s I had a lot of difficulty with the concept of prayer because I felt burned by my understandings of it, burned because answers to the “Who, Why and What” questions didn’t mesh with my experience of the world.

I grew up in an orthodox Hindu household, and as such I was surrounded by prayer all the time. My parents prayed on a daily basis, and I heard prayers

In prayer it is better  
to have a heart  
without words  
than words  
without a heart.  
—Mahatma Gandhi

A monthly for religious liberals

### THINKING ABOUT PRAYER

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expressing gratitude, hopes, and fears. While prayer was all around me, we didn't really spend time talking about what the concept meant, so as a kid I arrived at my own conclusions. I came to believe that *some* deity (though being Hindu I didn't know which *one*, because there are so many) must hear these prayers.

And if prayers are heard, God must acknowledge and respond in some way. No response would mean that God didn't care about me, and I just didn't believe that was possible. God *did* care about me, therefore prayers were heard. And, of course, I believed that the more sincere, the more intense the prayer, the more likely God was to hear and respond in some fashion.

That's why, when in high school I began to perceive that I was gay, I didn't immediately panic. Instead, I prayed. Every day. In fact, I strove to become one of the most observant Hindus on the planet, thereby hoping to earn God's favor. As a teen of 16 or 17 years of age I routinely kept fasts, had a regular practice of prayer, and engaged in charitable acts—all in the hope that God would hear my prayer of simply wanting to be like everyone else, of not wanting to be different, of not wanting to be gay. If there was a God who could help football teams win games, then there was no reason why that same God couldn't help someone like me who was genuinely in pain and looking for help.

Those prayers were never answered, or at least not as I had hoped. Despite praying for heterosexuality, I remained gay. And as I faced that reality I decided, a bit angrily, that God could not exist. If there was a God, there was *no way* such devout and heartfelt prayers as mine could be ignored. So for me coming out of the closet, an act of survival and sanity, was twinned with a crisis of faith. God stopped existing for me, and prayer was a sham.

Here's where we might notice a pattern: my disillusionment with prayer

was rooted in a theology similar to our football team prayer, in which some divine power was supposed to intervene here on earth because a human being prayed.

I have come to arrive at a radically different way of understanding prayer. What if prayer has nothing to do with a divine being that dispenses favors? If that were possible, what would be the purpose of prayer? In response, I can offer you one Unitarian Universalist perspective, my own.

Prayer seems to me to be a fundamental recognition that there are forces in this world that are utterly beyond our control. As a minister, my most intense experiences of prayer have occurred working with families in crisis. Some years ago I served as a chaplain at a pediatric hospital, and the most sincere, heartfelt prayers I witnessed in that setting were offered by the family members of young patients facing life and death. Those prayers were a recognition of our finitude. Doctors can only do so much; our knowledge and technology has limits and imperfections. In such circumstances prayer may serve the purpose of putting us in touch with those limitations and with our deepest hopes and fears.

This leaves the question of *who* we're praying to. As a Unitarian Universalist, I don't believe that God is a divine being that looks and acts like us. But I do think we can understand the term "God" metaphorically. In the broadest sense, we can think of God as that "Spirit of Life," that universal mystery and/or energy that permeates everything. At the same time, I think we humans find it hard to conceptualize something so huge and ambiguous and abstract.

This may be why throughout the ages different traditions, including my own Hindu culture, have developed pantheons of gods, with one deity representing love, another destruction, another good fortune, another something else. These deities become concrete ways to

represent and think about aspects of love, destruction or good fortune. So in concrete terms, individuals might pray to a specific god because the mythology surrounding that god both symbolizes our hopes and also simultaneously acknowledges that we are not, ultimately, in control of everything that we experience.

As I've personally moved towards understanding human-like representations of God as metaphorical, I have found myself increasingly comfortable in using those metaphors as a way of focusing my prayers, focusing what's on my mind.

When I was in graduate school and worried about exams, I vocalized my fears by offering prayers to the Hindu goddess of education and the arts, Saraswati. I don't believe that there's a divine woman on a cloud somewhere listening to my plea, but I do believe I'm acknowledging to the universe in some fundamental and meaningful way my own recognition that I'm not really in control, that I'm afraid, and that I'm counting on a lot of external things to help get me where I want to go. Saraswati, for me, can symbolize and focus all of that in a moment of prayer.

If we can liberate ourselves from notions of prayer that don't work for us, a new question can emerge: what understandings of prayer might actually help us? This can be a challenging question, but taking on that challenge can yield a



rich and meaningful spiritual practice, one that can connect us to our shared dreams, struggles and values as human beings

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## The Call to Prayer

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*Allahu Akbar*, the voice calls four times: “God is the most great.”

And in the teeming streets below the people stop, life stops. Those who strive to climb ladders cease their efforts. Those who beg for coins put down their cups. Gossiping teenagers in sprawling shopping malls lay aside their bags of designer jeans, turn their backs on Macy’s, and face Mecca. Tyrants and children, hunched grandmothers and glittering celebrities, self-important magnates and the guy who pumps your gas—they all stop, lay out their prayer rugs, and put their heads to the ground in humble supplication to a God whose power to heal and to harm is nearly illimitable, whose name cannot be captured by any human tongue.

It seems rather like a fairy tale, this world where all the people change in an instant. Called out of the rush by some enchantment, they bow their heads to the ground and listen together to the words of invocation that ring out from the highest place in the city. It is, perhaps, the world’s most striking testament to the power of a uniform cultural and religious practice, and it’s no wonder that it feels like magic.

Yet the world of the Muslim faithful stops five times a day not for some magical enchantment, but for prayer. Five times a day, at moments roughly coinciding with times of rest and refreshment or mealtimes, the people turn to face a holy city and reflect together on a spiritual truth that they hold in common. Whatever they are doing, no matter how important, prayer is more important. No matter what they get out of the affairs of their lives, they get more from the ever-present practice of their devotions, from the persistent reminder of all they hold dear.

On the outside, to the world of CNN and western tourists, faithful Muslims the world over pray the same prayers at the same times in a pattern with the surety of sunrise and the certainty of sunset. What is called out from the lofty towers of the Mosque translates in English to: “God is the most great. I bear witness that there is no God but God. I bear witness that Muhammad is his messenger. Come to prayer. Come to God. God is most great.” And in the morning, a special line is added, “Prayer is more important than sleep.” So the people gather, out of bed, to pray together once again.

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### Sometimes the words of a prayer are the only honest words that can be said.

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To most non-Muslims it is the striking uniformity of practice that makes daily Muslim prayer so poetic and powerful, and at times uncanny. The words connect believers to a story that has been told for a millennium, to their parents and grandparents who prayed in the same way at the same times, each and every day. The prayers invite submission not only to God but to tradition, and the vision of an entire city praying together can be both immensely moving and profoundly disturbing.

After all, prayer is a way to gather power together, to name some deeper truths and to put words to the collective and personal yearnings of people. And when ten thousand voices pray together, the power of their invocations is enough to change them—and thus enough to change the world as well.

Whether or not those invocations ever make it all the way up to God, the power of that many people stating their hearts’ desires and praising with their whole bodies and souls—it does something. In a similar but much more modest vein, I truly do not care if a god or the God ever hears me when I pray, but I am here to tell you that praying

together with others is among the most transformative work that I do.

Because no matter how rational you are, no matter how removed you are from the daily practice of people half a world away bowing in submission to a God in which you do not believe, sometimes the words of a prayer are the only honest words that can be said.

Early in my ministry I remember a family whose baby was stillborn. Much too tiny for this world she was, and the mother couldn’t even bear to look at her. Her maternal heart was so broken that there were no words, but she called and asked me—the designated religious person in her life—to sit with that stillborn infant and pray over her.

The mother could not speak the words of blessing and none of us bothered to appeal to anything so trite as “God’s plan”—not here or there or then or later. But she knew somehow that some blessing must be spoken, some honest word said, to mark that moment instead of simply forging through it.

So I sat there and I said a prayer that simply held the holiness and heartbreak of that moment. I spoke to myself and the universe and the silent ears of a little life just lost. The substance of the prayer was the truth that even the briefest flame of her short existence changed things, that they loved her even though they never really met her, that nothing was the same because even for a moment she had moved and been and mattered. And it wasn’t a prayer for miracles, or even to change things, really, but to name things—to say the true names and send them out into the world with love.

And you can tell me with all of your rational mind in this rational tradition of ours that praying is pointless, especially if you don’t believe in a miracle-working god, but I will tell you that such an expression is nothing short of smug if you haven’t been there—at the cold dry center of your suffering—and reached out for any blessed water you

might find, even if it takes the form of a prayer you had given up on.

We pray when we must protect a precarious dream. We pray when the stakes are high. And sometimes we pray, not because we want to, but because the prayer escapes our lips unbidden when we are afraid.

One of the finest people I ever knew, a former congregant who was a World War II fighter pilot and a lifelong Unitarian, reminded me that when he found himself flying through enemy fire, the only thing he could think or say were the words of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil, for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.”

What can you do in the cockpit of a fighter plane—when you meet your fear and the confusion of uncertainty? What

can you do but speak out the only words of protection that spring to mind when the only talisman of holiness you’ve got are the words of a prayer?

So he said that prayer in that cockpit—not because there are no atheists in foxholes—there most certainly are atheists in foxholes and in all of the places where one’s body is most at risk. But he found in those ancient words an encapsulation of his yearning to be a part of something larger than his own fear, and some hope that would sustain him through the worst.

If you are thirsty, and there is water, why not let yourself drink? If you are grieving, and there are words to say that don’t come out in the form a handy twitter polemic or a well-reasoned argument, perhaps they will come out in a prayer. And perhaps, just perhaps—even if you don’t believe and don’t even wish you could believe—this bubbling up of your deepest hopes is a good and honest thing.



Like some of you, I do not believe in a supernatural miracle-working God separate from creation itself. But I pray. In my own life, I pray quite a lot. It’s how I start every morning when I walk into my office, because without it, it’s all just e-mail and phone calls and reports and I have a hard time remembering what all those e-mails and phone calls and reports point to.

Most of the time my own prayer life does not focus on asking for stuff or protection or safety, but rather on my deep desire to be better, kinder, gentler than I am. My prayers are like that of Eusebius, the stoic: “May I, to the extent of my power, give all needful help to my friends, and to all who are in need. May I never fail a friend in danger. When visiting those in grief, may I be able by gentle and healing words to soften their pain.”

In my faith life I do not often pray in order to comfort myself, but to agitate myself into being a better version of myself. I pray to remind myself that I have work to do, and it makes what work I do possible.

At its best, as a statement of heartfelt intention, prayer evokes the way we want the world to be. Whether it’s God who answers those prayers or some combination of our own effort and the grace of a willing universe, there is something about stating one’s aspirations that makes them rather more likely to come true.

When we speak our heartfelt intentions aloud or into the silence of our hearts, we can honor life or death, we can acknowledge hope or horror. Prayer is a way not just of naming what we yearn for, but also of harnessing our own power, including what we choose to do with it once we harness it.

Prayer is power. Yet in a world where a few Muslim radicals have used their prayers to bring about violence, and where a great many believers in the Christian tradition and beyond have confused prayer with patriotism, nationalism, and sectarianism, it might

seem easier just to write off the whole enterprise as something to fear.

But people are people, and they hunger all the same for a chance to speak their hopes out to a waiting universe. Their prayers are as varied as human hopes and dreams have always been—just as searing, and just as powerful.

In the final measure, it doesn’t matter whether your prayers are called out from a minaret or a pulpit, what color God’s robes are, or if God is even real outside of your own imagining. It doesn’t matter if god gets called Allah or the Great Nothingness. In the broadest sense, it doesn’t matter to whom you pray. It matters what you pray for; and prayers of people the world over, for better and for worse, are far more alike than they are different. ■

## Nominating Committee Seeks Leaders

FROM THE CLF NOMINATING COMMITTEE: **DENNY DAVIDOFF, KAY MONTGOMERY, JOSEPH SANTOS-LYONS, CHARLES DU MOND**

The CLF’s Nominating Committee seeks members to run for positions on the Board of Directors beginning June 2017:

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Board members set CLF policy and approve the budget. The Board meets in Boston or other US cities twice annually and periodically by conference calls.

For more information, visit [www.clfuu.org/boardofdirectors/nominating](http://www.clfuu.org/boardofdirectors/nominating). You may nominate yourself or another CLF member for any of these positions.

Please contact the CLF office at [nominating@clfuu.org](mailto:nominating@clfuu.org) or 617-948-6166 by **January 15, 2017**. ■

## Prayer

BY BRAD P., CLF PRISONER MEMBER

I pray every day—more than once most days. I'll be completely frank and admit that I am not quite sure who or what I direct these prayers to, but that's okay with me.

I pray for my family, that their lives are rich and fulfilling, that they are safe and feel my love even though I am away.

I pray for those who have been hurt by my irresponsible actions and carelessness, that their lives are happy and bountiful, and that maybe, just maybe, one day they will find it in their heart to forgive me.

I pray for the wisdom to recognize the right thing to do today, and the strength to carry it out in spite of my inherent weakness and tendency to stray.

I pray for my adversaries, and I pray to remove any and all hatred from my heart, as it poisons me.

Finally, I pray that I will be given the opportunity to help others, and make a difference for the better in people's lives when I am free from this place. I also pray for those who give of themselves unselfishly and bring these words of hope and dignity to my cell every month—*thank you, CLF!* ■

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## ACTS Prayer: A Unitarian- Universalist Guide



BY REV. ASHLEY HORAN;  
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Most religious traditions embrace some form of prayer as a part of meaningful spiritual practice. The forms, purposes and addressees of prayer vary greatly, but scholars in many traditions agree that there are four general categories: **Adoration, Confession/Contrition, Thanksgiving** and **Supplication**. Many people find some combination of these to be a meaningful practice that opens them up to new possibilities and attitudes both within themselves and beyond.

**ADORATION:** *Name and connect with whatever it is we understand to be sacred and worthy of love and reverence.*

As you consider this part of your prayer, you may find these questions helpful:

- What is sacred to you? What is most worthy of your love, allegiance, commitment, praise or veneration?
- Where do you perceive joy and beauty in yourself? In the world? How do you name and affirm the existence of that beauty and joy?

**CONFESSION/CONTRITION:** *See and claim responsibility for the fullness of ourselves, including the qualities or acts of which we are least proud.*

As you consider this part of your prayer, you may find these questions helpful:

- Where are your limits? Where do you feel “stuck”? What are the qualities you possess that are holding you back from acting as your most compassionate, joyful self?

- What are your greatest gifts? How have you fully brought those talents and strengths to the service of “the altar of humanity”? Where have you caused harm? In what aspects of your life are you out of right relationship with yourself, with others, with the earth? What do you regret, and what would you repair?

**THANKSGIVING:** *Acknowledge and celebrate the blessings and gifts of life.*

As you consider this part of your prayer, you may find these questions helpful:

- What small moments of beauty, joy, grace or connection have you unexpectedly experienced today? How did you experience the sacred in your own life today?
- What are the solid, constant gifts that make it possible for you to live your life? What things—relationships, resources, conditions—have you perhaps taken for granted?

**SUPPLICATION:** *Open in ourselves the ability to surrender control while courting creativity and cultivating hope as we seek to change circumstances in our lives and our world.*

As you consider this part of your prayer, you may find these questions helpful:

- What circumstances in your life seem beyond your control? What would make it possible for you to approach those circumstances with renewed energy, creativity, trust, or love?
- What are your deepest hopes and yearnings—for yourself, for your community, for the world? What are the things that seem most in need of movement, change, or healing?
- What are your wildest, least-rational dreams and aspirations? Your simplest wishes? ■





## From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY  
SENIOR MINISTER,  
CHURCH OF THE  
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

As I reflect on this month's theme of prayer, scraps of poems and songs I love dance before me. Often poetry and music form a bridge from what I know to what I can't say. They help me to hold this broken, hurting world and touch the world I long for; they give me a rhythm to dance my deepest joy and gratitude. That's also what prayer does for me. It's a bridge from me to the rest of the universe.

When I pray, I am both creator and participant. When I pray in my own words, quite often I pray out loud, so I can hear the words and find a rhythm. Sometimes I sing my prayers. When I put my prayers on the wings of someone else's music or words, it's because that person speaks my heart's language more eloquently than I can in a given moment. Sometimes when I pray out loud with my own language I hear words spoken as if someone else said them. Strange and surprising words. Sometimes when I am reading a piece of news that breaks my heart I begin to pray it out loud, letting my heartbreak transform the very pain of the words into prayer.

Ralph Ellison said about the blues that they are "an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-cosmic lyricism." Sometimes this is how prayer works for me as well—the direct pathway from my tiny heart to my big heart is naming the truth, as awful as it may be. Sometimes prayer lifts me from the depths to a place of near-bliss. Prayer comes from the deepest depths and

highest heights of my being. And pretty much every place in between.

Sometimes in order to find my heart's language I go looking for new music or poetry. When the US was preparing to invade Iraq, I needed to speak poetry by Iraqi women to connect my heart to Iraq's. My own prayers didn't feel as if they could bridge where they needed to go. Reading those poems out loud became my affirmation of connection, claiming the power of love that I had to believe still mattered even with the bombs. Those personal prayers gave me stamina for marching for peace week after week with thousands of other people that cold winter, and the peace demonstrations themselves became a form of prayer.

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**[Prayer is] a bridge  
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the universe.**

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Sometimes words, or peace marches, or even the blues, simply don't help. I have a friend who is suddenly, at age 68, in physical agony, abruptly diagnosed with an obscure disease which renders her entire body so itchy that she doesn't want to wear clothes or go out of her house. She says, "I have spent my life with words—finding words, crafting words, using words. Now words cannot express this pain, nor is it of any help to describe it." The words the doctors have given her do not lead to healing.

My friend says she is so bored talking about this after six months that she can hardly stand to hear herself. Her body itself has become her prayer, a prayer of pain and longing for the end of pain. When I tell her, as I often do, that I am praying for her, what do I mean? I don't believe that holding her with love will ease her painful condition. But I do hope that, even in her misery, my love will be a source of solace—if not to her skin, than to her heart.



With and without words and harmonies, our lives can be lived as prayers. The longer I've been around, the more ways I have prayed, the more I see that my life itself, lived in dynamic relationship with all that is alive, is prayer. Prayer bridges between my smallest self and my largest self, my individual consciousness and my interdependence with all that is.

Recently, traveling in northern Minnesota, I stopped at a rest stop where a historical marker was titled, "A three way continental divide." It read, "A drop of rain water falling here... may flow either north into icy Hudson Bay, east into the Atlantic Ocean, or south into the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico." The marker goes on to detail which creeks and rivers that raindrop would travel in order to reach any of these far-off destinations, and then explains that this unusual continental divide is because this part of Minnesota is very near the center of the North American continent.

For me, prayer is like that. When I pray from my own center, I'm not sure which direction these currents of energy and longing will travel—whether they will end up in warm or icy waters. But it really doesn't matter. Prayer affirms that my own tiny self—that raindrop—is connected to interconnected currents. Prayer is the voice of my longing to know that I have a place



in this vast universe, that my life is an essential part of all that is. Prayer is my path to find my way back home. ■

## REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR, MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN LEARNING, CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP



I didn't learn a whole lot about prayer growing up in a UU church in the 60s and 70s. It just wasn't something you did in a humanist congregation—either with the adults in the service or with other kids in religious education. So what I knew about praying came from pretty scattered sources.

There were the prayers we said in Hebrew when we lit the Chanukah candles or celebrated the Passover Seder. Those were the same words every time, in a language that was utterly foreign to me. It was cool, like a magic spell: *Baruch ata adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam....* And there was a kind of magic in the candles that we lit, the bitter herbs we ate, the juice (wine for the adults) that we drank.

But those words, which start every Jewish blessing, were also something of a puzzle when we said them in English. *Praised be you, oh Lord our God, King of the Universe....* Who was this God, King of the Universe, who commanded us to light candles, who was the creator of the fruit of the vine?

Well, the other place where that God, and the notion of praying, showed up was in the books of Louisa May Alcott, who wrote *Little Women* and a bunch of other books I loved. The little women of the Alcott books prayed, as did their parents. They turned to God when they were lonely, or when they were trying to be good under hard circumstances. This God seemed a lot like their Marmee and Papa: kind and loving and trustworthy, but with very high standards.

I only learned as an adult that Alcott was herself a Unitarian, and that Papa in the books was modeled on her own father, Bronson Alcott. Bronson was part of the Transcendentalist circle that included Emerson and Thoreau, and these Transcendental-

ists believed in a God who could be found not just in the Bible, but also in nature, and in the quiet of your own heart.

Was this loving parent God of the little women the same as the King of the Universe God of the Hebrew prayers? Hard to say. I really didn't know how to go about praying in the way that Jo and her sisters seemed to do so naturally, and the incantations of the Hebrew prayers were something that my family only brought out for special occasions. I learned a little bit more about

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**Prayer is opening  
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prayer as I went along. I went to school in England for three months when I was nine, and every day started with an assembly at which we said the Lord's Prayer. Memorizing the central prayer of Christianity has turned out to be useful in a number of situations in my life as a minister, but saying it every morning with my schoolmates was really not much different than the experience of saying the Pledge of Allegiance back in the United States. It was just some words that you said to start the day.

I did take a class in prayer when I was in seminary in Berkeley, studying to be a minister. The woman who taught the class was a delightful UCC minister who would close out every class with a good 10-15 minutes of prayer. First she would dim the lights in the classroom and invite us to get comfortable, and then she would begin to pray in a soothing voice. And in spite of my best intentions, every single time our period of prayer turned into my period of napping.

So most of what I know about praying I've picked up on the job in the

course of my life as a minister. Here's some of what I know:

- It's fine to pray with a set of words you repeat every time, and it's fine to say a prayer that is whatever is in your heart at the moment. The set words give a sense of ritual and stability, and connect us with others who might be saying those same words. The prayer that comes out of your heart in the moment is your personal connection to the Holy, and a beautiful thing.
- You don't have to have a particular name or image for the Holy in order to want to connect to it.
- There is never a bad time to be grateful. It's good to say thank you to the people who do nice things for you, but most of what we enjoy in life comes from a source far beyond the people we know personally. Saying *thank you*



for sunsets and breezy mornings and giant trees and hummingbirds and the smell of cut grass is a good thing. We are better human beings when we remember that life is a gift.

- Praying is what you can do when there is nothing you can do. When people are gravely ill or suffering you can pray for them. When your life feels out of control or you don't know how to make a difficult decision, you can pray. Praying is a way to find a place of openness when things feel like they're closing in.

After all this time, the best description I have of what prayer is, and how you do it, is simply this: Prayer is opening a door in your heart, so that love can go both out and in. ■



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**Did You Know**

that the CLF is hoping to send holiday cards to our more than 700 prisoner members? You can help. Use this link for details: [worthynow.org/holiday-cards](http://worthynow.org/holiday-cards)

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## Prayer in a Time of Awe

BY MAUREEN KILLORAN, DEVELOPMENTAL MINISTER,  
UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST FELLOWSHIP OF GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA

Holy grandparents of the Universe...energies of creation...endless mysteries of life:  
You are the music that sounded before our world was born,  
sound and silence woven throughout the ages,  
far beyond the most profound wisdom humanity has been able to touch.

Be with us, deepen our willingness to live without certainty;  
to take the risks of living on the edges of our creativity;  
to step beyond the boundaries of possibility and hope.

Help us always to remember that we are in our essence the magic of star stuff:  
that we are kin to all that is and was and may yet come to be.

Teach us to temper our impatience,  
to retain our conviction that what we do makes a difference;  
that even our smallest act can contribute to the good of a greater whole.  
Be with me in my uncertainties. Rejoice with my small triumphs.

Comfort my losses. Remind me I am never alone, not in my joys nor in my tears.  
In the blessing of our silence, may I feel your presence,  
something greater than I have yet been able to comprehend. ■

