

Different Ways To Pray – offered by Reverend Jaganath Carrera

Prayer is a big subject with many subtleties.

Below are some thoughts regarding the different ways to pray. There is also a chapter on prayer in *Awaken: Inside Yoga Meditation*. You can find information about that book on our website, www.yogalifesociety.com

May you experience Peace and Joy; Love and Light always.

Love and Blessings

Yours,
jaganath

1. Prayers of petition: we ask when we feel lack or when we are afraid and feel the need to be assured of the future. The drawback of this attitude in prayer is that we may not be concerned about the common welfare. It can be a breeding ground for selfishness. Our prayers can take on the flavor of a two year old child; “I want this.” “I want that.” “Please don’t let that happen to me!” These attitudes are not wrong in and of themselves. But they are very limiting. We are not asking for wisdom, guidance, strength, but just for what we would like to see happen; a superimposing of our concept of reality of God’s.

The advantage of this type of prayer is that it puts us in touch with what our deeper wants are. By regular petition, if it is heartfelt and honest, we come to know ourselves better. It is also a good way to begin a relationship with God. It’s almost like going to the doctor. The first thing you do is give all your complaints, all the symptoms that are bothering you and that you would like to see go away. It can be an important first step towards a deep healing that includes lifestyle and attitude changes.

Prayers of petition also include praying for the welfare of others. In this case, it is a selfless act that not only helps those we pray for, but ourselves. We are loosening the bonds of self-centeredness. Our vision becomes refined and clear. We are opening ourselves to the Divine. Even in this type of prayer, we are better off not trying to manipulate God's will, but instead should ask that those we pray for experience all that is necessary for their continued growth and well being – even if it is temporarily difficult or unpleasant. It has actually been proven that this type of prayer is even more effective in healing others than, for example, asking for your aunt's ulcer to disappear. It turns out that, "Thy will be done" is the most powerful sentiment that prayer can have.

In a sense, praying for the welfare of others (not "sending" energy or thoughts) is an exercise in faith. We pray for whatever is best for the individual with the faith that whatever happens actually is best for them. That faith is akin to adoration.

2. Prayers of observation: there are times in prayer when we may feel like just simply telling God how we think or feel about what's happening in the universe. We may be unhappy about poverty or homelessness, or our observations may be more personal. We can express our displeasure over the weather, our health, our financial status or our relationships.

In this attitude, we are not asking for anything to necessarily be changed. There is the faith that whatever God allows to happen, is for the best ultimately. We are simply presenting our observations. It is for our benefit. It helps us clarify our thoughts and feelings. It also feels good to at least have the type of relationship with God that has room for personal expression.

There are no rules for what can or can't be included in this type of prayer. It's not like we are telling God something he doesn't already know. One of the great benefits of this type of prayer is when we discover that even when we criticize our Creator, even in strong terms, we are still accepted and loved. In other words, we begin to discover our intrinsic worth.

3. Forgiveness: we seek forgiveness in prayer when we recognize we've not only done wrong, but that the consequence of our wrong-doing is alienating us from God.

There is certainly still a strong element of personal wants in asking for forgiveness. However, we are not asking for help passing an exam, that it won't rain on the day of the picnic, or that we might find a good parking space. Instead, we are focusing on the loss of intimacy in a relationship with God that was lost due to our own wrong actions or shortcomings. It is a more fundamental want, a want that really spiritually speaking is a need. We need to have a close relationship with God.

Asking for forgiveness in prayer should contain four important steps. First we need to express how bad we feel for the wrong we have done. It is important that our feelings about the situation are expressed.

Second, we need to repeat, in our prayer exactly what we did wrong and why or how we came to it. This second step brings clarity to the process and is an important preparation for what comes next. There are times (both in Divine and human interactions) that our apologies do not bear good fruit because we are weak in this step.

Third, we need to clearly and formally ask for forgiveness. It is not enough to say that we are sorry, that is simply an expression of how we feel. We need to also communicate that we want the relationship to be reinstated to its former status – reconciliation. It requires humility on our part for we are completely dependent on the one from whom we are asking forgiveness. Fortunately, God always forgives. Yet, we cannot take this step lightly. The burden here is on our shoulders and in our hearts.

Fourth, reconciliation can only come to full fruition when we correct the attitudes and/or actions that made us go wrong in the first place.

4. Thanksgiving: we give thanks when we receive what we ask for (or in retrospect that have received what we needed even if at the time it seemed wrong or unpleasant), when we feel cared for in general, recognize that we are always given whatever we need and are always being cared for.

In some ways, prayers of thanksgiving can easily follow prayers for forgiveness. We feel a natural deep relief and comfort when we are forgiven. It is natural to be thankful.

However, to make the next giant step toward spiritual enlightenment, we need to be able to thank God, not only for what feels good to us, but what is beneficial for us, which can often be painful or unpleasant. Regular prayer can help us elevate and refine our vision that we can clearly see and experience that everything that happens to us is truly for our benefit.

5. Adoration: we express adoration first as a result of thanksgiving. It is natural that we tend to love God when we feel our prayers have been answered in the way we hoped. But a more deep and pure adoration comes from love of God for the joy of loving. When we are awed by the beauty of God – by Divine intelligence or love; or unity, or majesty.

Adoration always has an element of surrender to it. We give ourselves to the adored. It is not an act of receiving, but of giving. In this, we more closely come to resemble our Creator who gives without expectation of reward. This is why prayer of adoration is often considered the highest form of prayer. It is like telling our beloved mate that we love them and that they have so many wonderful qualities, not in response to something they have done for us, but because we simply see the beauty in them and it brings us joy. The fact that we have received such pure joy from our beloved makes us feel a sweet and pure gratitude, the most fertile ground for adoration.

The fruit of this attitude in prayer is that, when taken to its fulfillment, we lose ourselves in prayer and unite with God.

All four attitudes of prayer require humility. There is the recognition that we are just a spark in a universe of Light. Humility is best developed not from feelings of inadequacy or lack of self worth or self-esteem. Those qualities lead not to humility but to humiliation. It is an attitude that is characterized by feeling of alienation and fragmentation. It makes us lose sight of the fact that we are indeed children of god, and as such have the birthright to inherit divine peace and joy.