

Text from the Tradition: The Monk Within by Beverly Lanzetta (text drawn from pp. 348-355)

Prayer and Life

All life is prayer. From the moment of birth, until death stills our breath, each human heart, each soul, recites a ceaseless prayer, the very existence of our spirit in physical form an invocation toward the divine... The practice of prayer is important because it trains us to carry the sacred into everything we do. In the midst of a tumultuous day, it is still possible to yoke our being to the divine being. It is often through life's trials that we are tested and turn to prayer. For many people, especially when they suffer through difficult times, the correlation between what is going on in their lives and their ability to pray is little understood, as if prayer and life events are two separate categories. It is here that our spiritual traditions can provide guidance and techniques to reconnect us with the soul's need.

The monk reminds us that daily existence is a form of prayer, and if our lives are disruptive or disassociated, our well-being on every level is affected. Awareness of the harmony or disharmony between one's prayer life and one's daily action is an important tool of discernment. If we live in such a way that our actions are out of sync with the deep self, we should realize that behavior is not separate from prayer. Life and prayer are integrated, and that is the great wisdom of the monastic traditions.

For the monk, the entire occupation of each day *is* prayer. Prayer is not an activity that competes with other activities; it is the basis of every activity. Work is prayer. Writing is prayer. Gardening is prayer. Since the intention of prayer or meditation practice is to come face to face with Mystery, the unity of prayer and action is essential. Prayer purifies intentions. With prayer, no other teacher is needed. Prayer is your teacher. The inner monastery of the heart protects the silence and solitude necessary to listen for God's direct speech. This is prayer: being led into the silence, where God speaks, filling you with love, unfiltered... In prayer your self is offered; your words are offered to God. Each syllable has power, as your being transfigures into the divine being and you become wholly engulfed, possessed, and impressed with prayer. An inner correlation between your words and your deep self takes place. Vocal or silent prayer raises the vibration of the cells of the body, and the entire mind-body-spirit complex, literally transforming structures of consciousness. In these special moments of divine communion, it is not just emotional and physical levels that are altered, but also the energy frequency of the whole person. Across religious traditions, the vibratory changes that lead to inner transformation are intrinsic to meditation and prayer practices...

The goal of monastic prayer is not to seek extraordinary experiences, but to bring you closer to the full experience of divine indwelling. In ceaseless prayer, your being is infused with radiant light. For the monk who submits to prayer throughout a lifetime, prayer itself is a divine teaching. The monk is transfigured into a living prayer. The spiritual power of prayer does not guarantee that you will achieve the outcome you desire, because Mystery is more comprehensive than the human mind can grasp. Nonetheless, prayer has the potential to lift the soul to higher levels. The result of prayer may not be what you wanted, but it will be what the Spirit gives, something that touches your heart and soul, and something that would not have happened without your prayer

reaching out to the cosmos. Prayer and the outcome of one's prayers are not causative. If you don't pray, that doesn't mean bad things will happen; and if you do pray, that doesn't mean things will go as you hope.

Prayer is the soul's mirror, reflecting inner harmony or disquiet. For example, in certain stages of spiritual growth, old prayer forms may be painful to recite, or no longer have meaning. The capacity to pray may be non-existent or weak, and you can feel abandoned and lost. Thus, your relationship to prayer can be a guide for understanding your inner experience. What is the quality of your life at this moment? Is praying easy for you, or do you struggle in prayer? Does your prayer feel fractured? Are you working frenetically, are you scattered, do you have little time for quiet? If you feel selfish, angry, rebellious, or irritable, each of these emotions relates to your capacity to release prayer from your heart. The idea of releasing prayer is important. Prayer is not an ideal outside the self; nor is it one more obligation that must be added to the pile of commitments already on your calendar. Prayer is released, uncovered, from within. Each person, when given time for silence, or the peace of a retreat, at some point finds prayer spontaneously flowing from the heart. The release may happen immediately, or it can take weeks, but prayer will overflow, whether it is heartfelt thanks for the day, an expression of wonder at a sunset, or long-held grief. If you are dissatisfied with your prayer life, use the feelings to uncover some of the conditions behind this present state.

Prayer is my language, the way I speak when I say what I truly feel. It gives permission for passion-to prostrate on the Earth and ask for guidance, to kneel in front of an icon or a majestic mountain and allow grace to work in the soul, to cry out in anguish, and to plead for the ability to remember God's gift. I believe that our prayers are heard, the cosmos listens to our vibrations, and God's ears are receptive to our words... Walking in the hills, I hear quail whispering peace prayers. I watch nature praying: the falcon making circles in the air, a heron strolling through a vineyard, and the song of the Blue Oak's leaves rustling in the wind. Prayer is everywhere. And, I bring it everywhere with me. Sometimes, I voice it; sometimes, I am content to watch it be. It is an energy that flows into and out of my soul with each breath, curling and somersaulting in spirals, until letters settle in my mind, and then, caught up in the torrential waters of spirit soon become a rain of words. I cling to these lofty sounds, riding the wave of awe, straight back into the Divine Heart. So, lie down on the Earth, feel the soil pulsing, the ants humming, the gophers digging. Are these not prayers? So, too, are the kettle on the stove, and the casserole in the oven, the dishes being washed, and the dog being fed. Give us all your prayers, O Holy Life! We want to absorb them into our souls, to unite with creation's extreme audacity of devotion. Even when we do not know we are praying, the universe is praying in us.

Teaching on Text from the Tradition: by Christine Luna Munger

Questions for Reflection:

- In general, what do you notice in your head, heart, and senses in response to the text?
- Recall a time when your whole being felt entirely wrapped up in a sense of prayer.
- What do you notice about daily life when your prayer life is disrupted?