



What is prayer & what affects does it have?

Prayer is an expression of a relationship between our creator and us. What is that relationship? God is our Father and we are His children. As children are dependent to their father, we are dependent to God. Consequently, it is a relationship of dependency.

If we convince ourselves that we are making it on our own, that God is not watching, not running the show. But if we desire to perform that way, sometimes God lets us.

The Almighty gave us free will, and He generally keeps out of our lives until we acknowledge the relationship. We learn this from the opening sentences of the Bible:

"This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, on the day the Lord God made earth and heaven. All the plants of the field were at this time in the ground and all the vegetation of the field had not yet sprouted for the Lord God had not brought rain upon the earth as there was no human being to work the soil". [Genesis 2:4-5]

One of the greatest Biblical commentators, from the 11th century the great Rashi, explains that God had not brought rain because He wanted the first human being to pray for it. Indeed, when Adam recognized the need for rain in the world, he prayed for it.

This is the first hint that the basic relationship between humanity and God is expressed through prayer.

When Adam prayed, he acknowledged that he created a relationship with God, he is dependent on God and he must ask God for what he needs. As soon as Adam prayed, God begins to relate to him directly and of course answers his prayer. Indeed, it rains and all the undergrowth begins to sprout.

The Bible says, what happens to us is a direct consequence of our relationship with our Creator, because it is God who is in charge of all that happens in the physical world.

As a result, what happens to me and how that which happens to me affects me is determined by my relationship to the Almighty. My relationship to the Almighty is monitored by my prayers, because that's how I interact with Him directly and immediately - it is how I speak to Him, it is how I hear Him, it is how I develop an emotional relationship with Him.

Any grown-up knows from life experience, for any relationship to stand a chance, it has to be real. One can choose to pray through the recitation of blessings and psalms - in fact, the Sages advise it - but prayer can never be a "formality." It is not dashing off a bunch of words in a prescribed sequence. It is speaking to God - to our Creator, to our Father, to the Almighty - from the innermost recesses of our being.

The shortest prayer recorded in the Bible is the prayer of Moses when he discovered that his beloved sister Miriam has been afflicted with leprosy. He cries out to God from the depths of his being: "Please, Lord, heal her now."

His prayer is as searing as it is simple, and it captures his anguish and his complete faith in God that his prayer can and will be answered. And it is.

Helen had such an experience when she learned that her son David had been diagnosed with a malignant tumor in his brain. The doctors advised that there wasn't much hope. Helen began praying for a miracle with all her strength.

But Helen refused to believe it. She said she began praying for a miracle with all her strength: "My intensity was of the highest degree there could be in this world. I sobbed my heart out not once but a hundred times a day. If I rolled over in bed, I prayed to God. If I sat up in bed, I prayed to God. I was praying every minute and I didn't stop praying."

Not only that she asked everyone she could think of to pray too.

And it paid off - God answered her heartfelt prayer. David underwent successful surgery and radiation treatment. He is well on the way to recovery now, but Helen hasn't stopped praying.

Of course, the emotions we pour into our prayers when we plead for the recovery of a loved one from a serious illness cannot be readily mustered on an every day basis. But we can go a long way to prepare ourselves, to create for ourselves an atmosphere of undisturbed concentration, to be aware of the words we speak and to whom we address them.

One of the most renowned of the Hassidic masters, Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, advocated finding a secluded place for prayer, and there trying to address God from the heart, not worrying too much about the words at first:

"As often as you can, take a trip out to the fields to pray. All the grasses will join you. They will enter your prayers and give you strength - when no words come, do not despair. Come back day after day to your secluded spot and wait. Just wanting to speak to God is in itself a very great thing. Even if all you can say to God is 'Help!' it is still good. Repeat this over and over again, until God opens your lips and words begin to flow from your heart."

Rabbi Nachman's message is as simple as it is powerful: Be real before God and He will always meet you halfway.

How does God answer our Prayers?

Many people are frustrated by prayer because they feel those prayers are not heard by God.
Five key tools for getting your prayers answered.

Let's clear up one thing: Our Creator wants to answer our prayers. He is our Father in Heaven, and we are His children. He loves us unconditionally. So why does it seem that God disregard so many prayers? And if He already knows what we want, why is prayer necessary in the first place?

The infinite love

Even those who stay far from a synagogue intuit the existence of God. As the saying goes, there are no atheists in a foxhole. When a guy is dug in and the enemy is coming, he will cry out:

What does he Really want to say?"Hello my Creator: Although I have disregarded You all these years, denied Your existence, and not appreciated all You have done for me, I'm in trouble now. And I know You're the only one Who can help." To pray properly, you have to understand that not only God loves you, but also His love for you is infinite.

Your Creator has given you eyes, ears, intelligence, life itself! Don't you think he loves you? Every morning, a Jew recites blessings of thanks to God for all the gifts He has bestowed upon us. These blessings remind us of how deeply God loves us. If we appreciate what God can do for us, it is crazy not to stay in touch.

Why do we need to pray

Whenever we pray, of course, we are not pointing out anything new to our Creator. The Almighty does not need us to remind Him of our needs. So why doesn't the Almighty just give without our asking?

Simply because prayer helps us refine and affirm what we want out of life. It's a process of maturity. If a billionaire handed over to his child unlimited cash on a silver platter, his child would grow up spoiled and irresponsible. So too, if God gave us everything automatically, we may never define for ourselves what we want in life. True, life would be easy. But we would not grow. Since our Creator has our best interests at heart, He wants us to earn it. Because that's what will make us great.

Why do we have problems?

God has all the right connections. He can find you the right spouse. He can solve your financial problems. So why in the world do we have all these problems?

Because no matter how brilliant or powerful you are, you will never be able to live your children's lives for them. In fact, part of genuine love your children is to allow them to branch out on their own, to be independent.

If we were just robots, mechanically following every instruction, the world might be neat and tidy. But life would have neither significance nor meaning. God wants us to be independent, to think and make our own choices.

We human beings have free will to make decisions that are eternally meaningful. We can choose to move away from God -- and He will let us do that. Not because He wants that to happen, but because He wants us to have independence -- even at the risk of it being misused. We may suffer the consequences, but it keeps our independence intact.

An answer to your prayers

Have you ever had a prayer answered? Stop for a moment and consider the implications...

You live in a small town in Midwestern America. There is an extremely large and unsightly pothole in front of your house. For the last four months the local municipality has ignored your insistent requests to have it fixed. Finally, in an act of frustration, you call the White House and ask for the president.

To your utter amazement, the president himself gets on the phone. You quickly explain your problem. The president listens for a minute and then hangs up. You don't really expect anything to be done about it. The next morning you look out your window and, lo and behold, the army corps of engineers is busy at work fixing your road. The President of the United States took your request seriously and sent in the troops to help! That is what it means to get your prayer answered.

Now who is the one person who can always get through to the president? The president's son, of course.

That is our relationship with God -- Father and child. Just as a parent fulfills a child's request, so too God answers prayers. The Infinite Genius Who created every molecule on this earth, can alter the course of existence in order to answer your prayer.

To really talk to God, you need to know He is willing and able to do it all. Otherwise, you're only talking to your finite concept of God -- and not to our true Father in Heaven.

The prayer of an atheist

Here is a true story about a young man who got his prayers answered:

Many people who visit Jerusalem are tourists who come to get a sense of Jewish culture and history. One day, a young tourist named Jeff came.

"What are you doing?" I asked him.

"I'm working for my MBA at Harvard University. And I'm an atheist."

"Fantastic! A real atheist! Whoever was able to convince an atheist like you to speak to a rabbi like me deserves a medal. "Nah," Jeff says, "he doesn't deserve anything. I'll tell you how I came..."

Jeff had been in Norway, visiting his Norwegian fiance. And he decided it was now or never: either he is going to come to Israel or he'll never make it.

So he headed for Jerusalem and the Western Wall. He figured he would stop by the Wall to see some old stones. Yet upon his arrival he was amazed. He felt something heavy. He was moved.

Jeff stood before the Wall, and made up an atheist's prayer. He looked at the stones and said:

"God, I don't believe in You. As far as I know, You don't exist. But I do feel something. So if I'm making a mistake, I want You to know, God, I have no quarrel against You. It's just that I don't know that You exist. But God, just in case You're really there and I'm making a mistake, get me an introduction."

Jeff finished his prayer, and a students who happened to be at the Wall, saw Jeff and thought, "Perhaps he'd be interested in learning some Torah."

Jeff whirled around and shouted, "What in the blankety-blank-dash-bang do you want?!"

He tapped Jeff on the shoulder, startling him so much that he jumped three feet in the air. Jeff whirled around and shouted,

"What in the blankety-blank-dash-bang do you want?!"

"I'm sorry. I just want to know if you'd like to learn about God."

That question hit Jeff like a two-by-four right between the eyes. He had just finished asking God for an introduction, and immediately someone was offering to introduce him to God.

Jeff studied in Israel for the next six weeks. He was a very serious student, and went back to the States with a commitment to continue learning. A year later, Jeff came back to Israel and told me the end of his story.

During that previous summer he had been meandering through the cobblestone alleyways of the Old City in Jerusalem, when he saw a pretty, sweet, religious girl walk by. He said to himself, "Look at the charm of this Jewish woman. May the Almighty help me meet someone like this."

One Sabbath morning during the next year, Jeff entered a synagogue in Boston for prayer services. Standing there was the same young woman he had seen in the Old City. He made his way over to her and said:

"Excuse me, but I believe I saw you last summer in Jerusalem."

She answered, "You're right. I saw you, too."

They are now married and living in New Jersey.

Remember Jeff's prayer. If you know any atheists, you can teach it to them. Because when you are sincere with God, your prayers are answered. The Almighty is near to all those who call unto Him in truth. (Psalms 145:18)

Nothing God does is by accident. If things don't go smoothly for you, your first reaction should be: "What's going on? Why is God doing this? Why is He trying to get my attention?"

God is not hurt when we ignore Him. We are. God has no needs and doesn't need a relationship with us. It is we who need a relationship with Him. Our greatest pleasure is being in touch with God. That's why at times he arranges small mishaps to get our attention. All for our own benefit.