

THE ROLE OF PRAYER

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The nature of the universe

- 1) Divine consciousness that cares about us, listens to prayers, intervenes in the world
- 2) Divine consciousness that cares and listens, but does not intervene -
- 3) no divine consciousness – not listening to prayer

Even if there is no divine consciousness that hears our prayers, God may still exist depending on your conception of God

Spinoza viewed God as all of nature

Others think of God as the spirit of love in the world

Defining prayer

Talking to God, but ---

Hindus pray to many Gods

Conservative Christians pray to Jesus

Catholics pray to God, Jesus, Mary and the Saints

Only the Jews and Muslims are really consistent in praying to a single God.

Leave aside complexities and mysteries of the Trinity

Form vs. substance – in form, prayer is talking to God, but in substance, there are many possible audiences

Consider the words to Rocky Mountain High – sounds more like communicating to nature, or even to the universe as a whole

Consider the possibility that the best definition of prayer is communicating to something beyond our everyday life – to God perhaps, to nature, to our community and to something within ourselves.

Categories of prayer

One way to categorize

- 1) Group or community prayer – can be as large as a football stadium or as small as dinner with our family
- 2) individual prayer – just us

Purposes of prayer

- 1) Praise – telling God how wonderful he is and how much we love and respect him
- 2) Meditation and spirituality – not really asking for something, but creates a feeling of spirituality, closeness to God, connection to the world around us
- 3) Statements of belief
- 4) Thanksgiving, joy
- 5) Grief
- 6) Prayers of petition for others and ourselves

Lord's Prayer in order of service

Go back to categories in more detail

- 1) Praise – ancient tradition – Greeks and Romans, Old Testament God

If any consciousness has a strong ego, it would be God

So why do we do it; go back to verse from Exodus; I am jealous God, these old conceptions of God mean that we have to praise them

- 2) Meditation and spirituality – Kumbayah, Hindu example in reading; perhaps the line in Rocky Mountain High as well

We don't want to be alone in the universe

We want to feel connected

- 3) Statements of belief – statements to our community make are more serious and solemn; way of teaching our children what we believe, reinforcing it by saying it regularly

- 4) Thanksgiving, joy – whole is greater than sum of parts, we multiply joy by sharing it with others – this is what we do in statement of joys during service

- 5) Statements of grief and concern – the other side of the coin statements; almost all statements are expressions of concern about others, not ourselves.

Why do we do this? We lift burden a little off shoulders of others; not entirely but a little; those who are suffering know that we care about them

- 6) Now turn to most significant – prayers of petition

Prayers of petition for others and ourselves

Perhaps most important of all

Prayers of petition for others –

Very old tradition -- someone sick, going to have surgery

Would God intervene, bend laws of science because we asked him?

We do it because we care and we don't know what else to do – our minds, emotions rebel against helplessness

Also, way for community to take on some of the burden of person suffering

Prayers of petition for ourselves

I'm talking about serious prayer not a trivial, selfish prayer

Crying out to God for help

Can be very general – fear of being alone in the universe, can lead to despair

Or can be very specific, help me survive this ordeal.

Can be attempt just to make sense of the problem

To whom are we speaking?

Go back to our view about the nature of the universe

We can be speaking to a divine consciousness – if you believe that and it is meaningful, not trying to talk you out of it

We can be speaking to the community

We can be speaking to the nature and the universe, in all its mystery

But at the very least we are speaking to our higher self, our stronger self

Because all of us do have a higher self, a stronger self

So, if the question is – does prayer change things? Yes.

Closing Words

A prayer to our higher self:

Give us the strength to do what is right,

The compassion to love those around us

The courage to face the human condition, and

The wisdom to find joy and peace in the lives we have.