

From Heart Dweller

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Prayer

There are several ways that ego deals with reality. My particular way is knowing, through knowledge of what is happening. I am compulsively and constantly explaining reality to myself, interpreting what happens, fitting it to the map I have in my head. Knowledge is my security, my way of controlling reality, my way of feeling safe. As long as I know what is happening I feel on top of things. Not knowing what is happening to me, not being able to explain my experience is very threatening. This happens on many levels, some very subtle. It's like living in a certain atmosphere that is invisible to me. I always try to connect to reality through my head, through my intellect, through understanding. I keep on doing this *regardless of how many times I experience the connection happening through my heart*. Every time I connect to the source of Being it is through my heart. Still I persist in my habitual way, fixated on one direction. It's like forgetting what I know, and heedlessly going in the wrong direction.

And of course, I idealize my mechanical habitual way, feeling it is the superior way. This is the ego's most effective way of perpetuating its delusion: by making it its ideal. And because of this idealization, most of my life I disdained and rejected emotional pathways to self-realization. I saw them as inferior and below me. So I rejected and stayed away from prayer. It was very embarrassing for me to pray, to ask for forgiveness or mercy, to put myself in a vulnerable place.

But how can I ever be in touch with the deeper parts of me if I never allow myself to be vulnerable? It can never happen. Being able to be vulnerable is the greatest strength. And, in fact, God will not pour His grace if I stay solid, hard, pretending to be strong and invulnerable. I have to be totally open, totally vulnerable; my heart has to be extremely tender and soft to be worthy to receive the divine energy. Here lies the secret of prayer, the heart of the devotional way. By addressing myself to a greater reality, whatever name I call it, and by experiencing myself as small and vulnerable in relation to it, I open myself and allow room for surrender. That's why the attitude of awe and fear is sometimes cultivated. In this attitude I can let go of my coping mechanism, feeling myself weak and helpless in face of the great Reality. Such great awe and fear, that shakes my personality at its roots, allows space for ego to step out of the way, asking for divine help and guidance. At such times, when ego experiences itself shaking like a feather in the wind, the great energies of nature can flow and give life in abundance. That's why Sufis speak of fear as a noble attitude to cultivate towards Allah, the Supreme Reality. But it is fear of Him alone, and not of His creation. Fear of God, in this reverent attitude, creates the greatest security and courage when dealing with the world. But its greater value is the lowering of ego defenses, towards the aim of *fana*, dissolution into Him.

Prayer is a way of surrender, and human emotion serves as a bridge towards that end. At the beginning of a prayer I am usually in touch with one normal emotion or another, like fear, sadness, helplessness, or whatever. That is where I start. And utilizing this emotional energy, I open up to higher emotions and purer attitudes. Each emotion is a reflection of a higher one, and it is the connection to it. Even guilt is a reflection and a beckoning to the higher emotion of divine guilt, of feeling remorse and sorrow for transgressing the divine laws, for going against what I know is my essential and true nature. And it is good to feel remorse and sorrow for betraying my truest nature, for this can bring redemption, on levels deeper than the emotional.

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I am prostrating myself, praying and crying my heart out:

*Forgive me my sins
Have pity on me
O Lord
The most merciful.*

I repeat the prayer, more and more. I put my heart into it. I put my body into it. I drown my head in it. Crying and more crying. Tears, hot tears. Every time I say, "Have pity on me." I feel great anguish, great need for God's mercy. I feel helpless, hopeless to be on my own. I feel small, utterly small. The more I say, "Have pity on me," the smaller I get, the more insignificant and helpless I feel. My tears run in hot streams. My heart burns like a cauldron. I feel my anguish, my life-long suffering, my continual dissatisfaction. I see and feel with great pain how everything in my

life has suffering in it. Everything I do has tension in it. Everything I see has contraction in it. Every instant of my life has constriction in it. No real satisfaction. No total relief. Never complete peace. Even when I feel peaceful, it is still not complete. I feel so anguished. I feel so needy and needful for God's mercy, for His pity. It is painful to see that every instant of my life has pain and suffering and tension in it. It's so painful. I start seeing and feeling how I really want the pity, how much I need it.

Saying "Have pity," instead of "Have mercy," is more emotionally loaded. It gets me deeper into the feeling of how small I am, how helpless I am, how insignificant I am, how blind I am, how ignorant I am. I see how all through my life I have been struggling, fighting, trying to achieve peace, to have a moment of complete release, an instant of total freedom; but all in vain. I see how I always convinced myself that it is not so bad after all. I see how I have deceived myself by feeling important and big. All lies; I see it very clearly now when my heart is wide open and vulnerable. It is all so that I don't see my failure, so that I don't experience my disappointment and desperation, so that I don't feel the anguish of estrangement.

The more I see and the more I feel, the hotter and more copious the tears. A dam is removed, and I am flooded with emotions. My heart feels as if it is torn apart by gigantic hands. I cry and wail loudly for hours, lamenting my predicament and asking fervently for God's pity.

My heart opens more. I start seeing that everything I do, everything I say is really a game, part and parcel of my particular ego. This is the beginning of divine guilt. This brings more pain, more tears, and more intense praying: "Forgive me my sins." I start seeing that everything I have is really a sin, everything I feel is sinning against God; for it is ego wanting something for itself. I start seeing even my pain and crying are also sinning, for it is remembering myself, and feeling important, and not really remembering God, the only Reality. I see that I am remembering God so that He will help me, and not because I really love Him. This brings more remorse. I cry more. My heart starts spilling out all kinds of emotions, energies, tears. I feel as if I have a hole ten inches wide in my chest.

I become more centered in the present. And now, "Forgive me my sins," applies to what I think, feel and experience right here and now. I say, "Forgive me my sins, for what I am thinking." Then I see that by saying that, I am sinning again by even wanting forgiveness; for I am still self-centered, thinking of myself. Veils upon veils fall away every time I repeat "Forgive me my sins." Levels and levels of sins, of illusions, of delusions, of ego assertions and complaints, appear and fall away. I start repeating the prayer for seeing that I am really helpless; that I cannot but come from ego. That everything I think, feel, or do is to get something, or to complain, or to want satisfaction. It's all selfish.

I feel that everything I do, feel, think, or say is a sin if it is not the pure remembrance of Him, the only true Essence. A great deep, heaving desire for Him takes over me. My body goes through convulsions and contortions. Great desire, great love for Him pervade the whole of my body. He becomes the center of my being, my attention, my praying. I become smaller and smaller. The moment I assert myself, I say:

*Forgive me my sins
Have pity on me
O Lord
The most merciful.*

I feel as if I had never cried before. The crying comes as if from the center of the Earth. Huge heaves take over my body, starting from the belly. My heart is all spilling, all melting. I feel that all I want is God's pity, His mercy, and nothing else.

Slowly, a thick, syrupy, dense pity starts descending over me. It melts me away. It annihilates me, little by little. I am no more. I exist no longer. No more assertions; only God's syrupy, devastating pity.

Here I get scared. I am on the razor edge between sanity and insanity. I see one side is darkness, the other is light. I am afraid of going crazy. Right away I remember; I see that this fear is also sin, it's still ego thinking of itself, asserting itself. This brings a huge, wracking wave of tears and sobbing, and a plunging into:

*Forgive me my sins
Have pity on me
O Lord
The most merciful.*

The syrupy and most divinely ecstatic pity annihilates me thoroughly. There is no me left, nothing remains. There is only light, white and substantial light, light upon light, oceans and oceans of light. Light is bliss, is ecstasy. Oceans upon oceans of bliss, supreme and luminous bliss. Bliss and only bliss. Light is bliss, bliss is light.

Once in a while I come out, I surface out of the ocean of light and bliss, and feel and see my whole body as part of it. My whole chest is bubbling with white luminous bliss. It's like being a fountain in the middle of the ocean. Then I disappear totally. Sometimes there is not even light or bliss, for there is no perception at all, or nobody to perceive. Naked being, which is light, which is bliss. I don't know how I remember, or who remembers. I am all drowned, all gone, all extinguished.

Insights spring up, deep precious insights into the nature of reality. Knowledge, deep experiential intuitive knowledge starts pouring into me. Yet I feel that I don't want all this wisdom. I don't want the knowledge and insight. I just want God's pity. I just want to vanish, disappear into the light. I just want to return to the source. And knowledge always brings separation, always wakes me up from annihilating bliss. Regardless of how deep and significant the knowledge, it always brings me out of the light, separates me from the ocean. And I feel that I want to drown in His pity.

Sin is creation
Which is knowledge.

Every time I have an insight, every time I know, I am separated from Him, I am created out as a separate entity. Even knowledge of Him, even experience of Him, is a separation, which is my creation. I plunge deeper into the prayer:

*Forgive me my sins
Have pity on me
O Lord
The most merciful.*

I don't want to know. I only ask for Your pity. That is all. I don't want to know, for knowledge is my sin, my separation, my creation, my estrangement. The moment I know, I have sinned; for I have separated myself from You, O Lord.

Forgive me my sins: past, present, and future, for I have only sins. I know only sins. My knowledge is my greatest sin. I am sin apart from Thee, O Beloved One.

Everything that is not You
O Lord
Is sin
Forgive me my sins
Have pity on me
The most Merciful.
Forgive me my sins
For I sin every moment
For I am sin
Only You
Is
Only Light
Is
Only
Only
Only . . .
Love is the surrender into the unknown.
Love is the quality of light when it's in union
with itself.
Love is light seeking light
Love is the desire of light for light
Love is the magnetism within light
that identifies it with light.
Love is the sweet honey that is the cohesive substance of the universe.
Love wants to vanish into light.

Love is light in union, a condensation of light
into the denser, more syrupy light.
Love is God's pity.
Love is pity.
Pity is dense, syrupy, devastating, annihilating.

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Prayer is devotion. Prayer is the language of the heart. The intellect cannot pray, for prayer is not just a repetition of words. If it is only a repetition of certain words then it will stay within the intellect, and this way it is mechanical, dry, vacuous, and ineffectual. So prayer must have words that are emotionally pregnant. That's why it is more effective to use "pity" instead of "mercy." That's why it is more efficient to use "sin" instead of "ego-game." Prayer appeals to the heart. The heart is the direct way to transcendence. Only the dove of love will fly straight back to the source. The heart is the direct channel to cosmic consciousness. Only through the Heart can we follow the ray of light all the way back to the Sun.

Some find it uncomfortable or upsetting to say such prayer. Of course. Ego defends itself, by feeling big, on top of it, not needy. To ask for pity ego must allow itself to feel small and vulnerable, to feel its helplessness and limitations. And at first it will be defensive, will feel it humiliating and degrading to ask for forgiveness, pity, or even mercy. Still it is a very effective and efficient way towards surrender. To see oneself as small, helpless, and vulnerable in the presence of the infinitude of the deity invokes humility and allows for surrender, allows for ego to step aside, or to diminish until it is all gone. And when one's ego is all gone there will be the splendor of the glorious Sun. And this has to happen emotionally, directly from the Heart.

Moreover, the more I surrender the more I see through the veils. Letting go emotionally of my entrenched ego position allows for greater clarity. And the more the clarity, the more I see of my illusions, the more my heart opens, and the more the desire for God, for truth for its own sake, grows and flowers. The Heart has its own eye, and it sees more directly than the intellect. And this eye is not other than love and devotion to God, the one Reality. Love for truth becomes truth, for from the beginning it is truth.

The object of prayer is not to have rewards and goodies from the deity; rather it is for the dissolution of the ego that wants those rewards and goodies. If my ego stays big and strong I am not really praying, or I am praying to the devil instead of God, praying for rewards and gratification. Ego is very tricky, and will attempt to take over even experiences of ego death, and make them its own experiences, its own possessions, and feel proud and vain for having them. After this experience, for instance, I start thinking: "I have made it. I am enlightened now. My ego has died, has drowned in the ocean of bliss." I feel big and proud. "I have made it finally." This automatically blocks my energy, and I dive all the way down to the pit of darkness. Ego's grasping, greed and pride are always a downer. It is the end of real devotion. It is the victory of the devil. It is the quintessence of spiritual materialism.

O Lord
Forgive me my sins
So corrupted I am
Even in Your presence
I turn to the devil
For a crumb of illusory gratification.
I am such a sinner my Lord,
And I am too weak to stop sinning.
I see myself,
Taking the light
And handing it to the deceiver.
O Lord
Forgive me my forgetfulness
Forgive me my heedlessness.
I seek for You
My Lord
All day and all night.
And when you give me a drop of Your grace,
I forgetfully exclaim:
"Look, I got it."
When will the day come

When I don't say,
"Look,"
Anymore.
When will the day come
When I say,
"I got it,"
No more!
Only Your mercy
My Lord
Will cleanse me
Of my sins
For evermore.

And the struggle goes on. The more ego the less devotion. The less ego the more devotion. Until humility catches me again, and I see how I use even devotion for the service of ego. How proud I am of my devotion. How I congratulate myself and pat myself on the back for being so devotional, for loving God so much. This puts me in touch with my limitations again, the limitation of even my devotion.

Weak in devotion,
How can I ever hope to reach the summit!
Desires consume the best of my heart
And distractions take care of the rest.
Plans to meditate abound,
And give fuel for compulsive fantasies.
Once in a while,
The guard is taken off guard,
And a drop of grace kindles my heart
And plucks its tenderer strings.
Then the eagle soars high,
Where the sky is clear,
The air crisp,
And the sun brightly naked.
Attachment to the dark depths is a powerful chain,
But even stronger yet
Is attachment to the mountain tops,
To the shining sun
And to the smiling rainbow.
Soon I am drunk with joy
And the eagle forgets to keep its balance
And the downward journey
Is not even felt.
As if blindfolded
And half asleep
It hurls even further down,
Where the river is dammed
And the earth dry
And the air is thick;
Where my heart is heavy
And bound by a belt of fire,
And a tight rope beneath the cage.
And I forget the face of the moon
And the dazzling light
That shines through the raindrop.
I stay half asleep,
Not knowing what has befallen me,
Until once again
The dark clouds
Into flowing rivers turn
And the sun shines through
Heralding the openness of space

And the freshness of the breeze.
The cycle never stops,
Forever a proof of impermanence
In this world of samsara.
When will I my devotions sustain
In the darkness of the night
And the brightness of the day!?
When will the door of my heart
Be finally unhinged
And burnt as a sacrifice!
When will emptiness prevail
And assertions fail!
When will the knots be totally untied,
And the blue river unhindered flow!
I pray
From behind the iron doors
In this iron age,
That my prayers be heard
And my wishes fulfilled,
And that the drunken eagle
Learn to balance its flight
And forever soar
Beyond sorrow and delight.

Devotion has to surpass the need to be close to "God." Devotion has to transcend love of "God." Devotion has to go beyond the duality of "God" and "Devil." Devotion has to reach the place of equanimity, so that there will be no favoring of this over that. Only then will there be balance. Only then will there be peace. And with that, the fervent desire for forgiveness and mercy turns into the glorification of God, not as light opposed to darkness, but as what is. Deficiency must turn into natural fullness. And in this fullness there can be only the appreciation and the glorification of what is, Reality as it is. And it is such a relief just to be, even if it is to be no more than a blade of grass.