

Contemporary Mystic Christianity **Bible Self-Study Supplement**

The Art of Prayer

Among the first of the esoteric instructions given the neophyte who has proved his seriousness of purpose is the art of prayer. David, or the psalmist who writes in his name, says that the "words that come from the lips of the proved neophyte are not feigned." There is a vast difference between exoteric and esoteric prayer. The former consists largely of verbal petitions, whether silent or spoken; the latter is a definite spiritual current which puts the communicant en rapport with the divine Life and Law, "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him."

In the 4th Psalm, which was one of the evening psalms of the Temple, the singer voices his appreciation of the results obtainable by scientific prayer: "Thou hast set me at large when I was in distress. Jehovah hath set apart for himself him that is godly; ... in peace will I both lay me down and sleep; for thou, Jehovah, alone makest me dwell in safety."

In the 5th Psalm, which was chanted at the laying of the holy fires at sunrise, David sings of full and entire dedication, for no half measures are efficacious on the Path which leads to liberation. "In the abundance of thy loving kindness will I come into thy house, in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy Temple. Let all those that take

refuge in thee rejoice, for thou wilt bless the righteous, O Jehovah, thou wilt compass him with favor as with a shield."

One of the important key instructions in the Psalms is given to neophytes of every faith: "Commune with your own heart and learn to be still." The Supreme Teacher but paraphrased these words when He taught that "the Kingdom of heaven is within you."

The more spiritually advanced the disciple becomes, the fewer are the petitions he makes to the Deity, but the more constant are the communions and the songs of praise within the heart. When the lamp of the anointed flames within, there is born something of the true realization of the mystery of existence. One thus illumined is conscious of the unity of each with all, and the sacredness of life. He learns that God is in all, and that God is all. He can no longer think of himself as debased or dejected, for he has glimpsed the grandeur of that immortal glory which is within himself and within every other living being. He transcends all earthly desires. Surrounded and enveloped by the ever-burning light he proclaims, "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork!"

It is in this ecstasy of the spirit of praise that more than half of these exalted songs of the spirit are hymned, and by making them part of himself the neophyte may experience

the same ecstasy. It is not possible to consider the Psalms exactly in the order in which they occur in the King James text. We will take them in groups, according to their esoteric function, and as they illustrate various phases of the initiatory work.

As with every art known to man, inspiration plays an important part in prayer. Inspiration can be named, but it cannot be defined except as an "inbreathing," an inflow of spirit; both spirit and inspiration are derived from the same word, "spiro," "I breathe." The mystic knows that is exactly what prayer is, an inbreathing of Spirit and its outbreathing as Love. We need much help in raising the materialized vibration of the lower mind, and that is why the Psalms are given, so that by the inbreathing of their spiritual beauty the heart may be liberated from its bondage to the intellect and learn to radiate the celestial fire of joy and wisdom and power. For the various kinds of prayer are the airs which fed the fires of the heart.

Scientific prayer includes meditation: thus in Psalm 143, "I remember the days of old; I meditate on all thy doings; I muse on the work of thy hands." By meditation the mind is fused with Deity, forming one channel wherein ' the Divine inspiration may flow down into the personality and transmute its forces. In Greece such inspirations we find in the Psalms was spoken of as "being full of the god." In

Psalm 143 David is also "filled with God" when he cries: "I spread forth my hands (in adoration) unto thee; my soul thirsteth after thee." "Teach me to do thy will . . . for . . . thy Spirit is Good. Lead me in the land of uprightness."

No one who is not able to appreciate the Attributes of Deity through meditation can incorporate true virtue in his character. In Psalm 51 we have an exercise for reflecting the Divine Attributes, as follows:

Create in me a clean heart, O God: (Thou art Immaculacy.)

And renew a right spirit within me: (Thou art Righteousness.)

Cast me not away from thy Presence: (Thou art Omnipresence.)

And take not thy holy spirit from me: (Thou who art Wisdom.)

Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation: (Thou art Omnipotence.)

And uphold me with a willing spirit: (For Thou art Love.)

Even the darkness hideth not from thee: (Thou, who art Light.)

But the night shineth as the day; yea, (Thou art The Light.)

The darkness and the light are both alike to thee: (For Thou Art All.)

Here is no mere petition for material benefits. The neophyte who enters into the spirit of this Psalm will come to know the utter uselessness of petitioning, since "all that the Father hath is already mine." He will leave off all prayers having an ulterior motive, and consecrate himself to the prayer of adoration, for after one touch of its ecstasy nothing less will ever again satisfy, as shown in the 42nd and 43rd Psalms:

As the hart panteth after the water brooks
So panteth my soul after thee, O God.
Why art thou cast down, O my soul?
Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him,
Who is the help of my countenance, and my God.

Oh send out thy light and thy truth; let them lead me;
Let them bring me unto thy holy hill,
And to thy tabernacles,
Then will I go unto the altar of God,
Unto God, my exceeding joy.

The tabernacles here mentioned are the Mansions of which the Master said there are "many" in the Father's House.

By living the life and proving the promises of God — for they are capable of scientific demonstration — the neophyte at length gains that perfect faith requisite for one

approaching the Gates of Gold; thus in the 130th Psalm, the chant becomes, "I wait for Jehovah, my soul doth wait," and here we touch upon another important aspect of the art of prayer. The mental attitude of waiting is vastly important and exceedingly difficult. Simply to wait, without lapsing into a negative state of consciousness, and without loss of concentration, remaining mentally alert — this is one of the deep secrets of prayer. Watchfully the soul must wait: "More than watchmen wait for the morning; yea, more than watchmen for the morning," eagerly but calmly, lest the lotus on the waters of the mind be ruffled. This waiting is so simple that it is easy to overlook its great importance, yet without it, no progress is possible.

Nor is it sufficient to achieve this calm only in meditation, if one allows himself to be tormented by the activities of the world about him: When leaving the private chamber, which is as a house of prayer for the neophyte, let him carry on his heart the adjurations of the 139th Psalm, titled, "God's Omnipresence and Omniscience;" particularly these verses:

O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me.
Thou understandest my thought afar off.
And art acquainted with all my ways.
Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?
Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there.

Thou searchest out (compareth) my path.
If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, thou art there.

If I take the wings of the morning
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea
Even there shall thy hand lead me
And thy right hand shall hold me.
If I say, Surely the darkness shall overwhelm me,
And the light about me shall be night;
Even there shall thy hand lead me
But the night shineth as the day:
The darkness. and the light are both alike to thee.

It is in the meditative work that the subtle test of the pride of intellect — the besetting sin of our intellectual age — may do the most damage, but it is here that it must be transmuted into the spiritual humility which is always willing to learn new truths, and which never closes itself against new ideas because of prejudice and self-conceit.

The powers of darkness say, as in the 83rd Psalm, "Let us take to ourselves in possession the habitations of God." Again, these are the Mansions Christ spoke of, and the neophyte must be alert against the subtle forces of pride, bitterness, jealousy, discouragement and desire which constantly seek to take possession of his Mansion. "O my God, make them like the whirling dust (wheel), as stubble before the wind ... pursue them with thy tempest, and

terrify them with thy storm, that they may know that thou alone (whose name is J.H.V.H.) art the Most High over all the Earth."

David gives the true keynote of the spiritual life when he sings, "In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust." He teaches the power of the practice of prayer as he says, "O God, be not far from me."

— ***Corinne Heline***