

The Healing Power of Quiet Contemplation and Prayer

by

Hans-Werner Schroeder

Translated by Nina Kuettel

Questions concerning health and illness have played a large role in public discussions in the past few years now because of the enormous increase in healthcare costs. Today, it is often necessary to seek extraordinary medical interventions in order to get help and relief from illness. Cancer, heart and circulatory diseases, allergies of all kinds that have recently appeared, are just a few examples of the serious health problems that are increasingly threatening the physical well-being of human beings.

This applies not only to physical ailments. There are also diseases and ailments growing at an alarming rate that have their origins in the soul-spiritual aspect of human beings. It is not only that one has learned to more clearly recognize the soul aspect of many diseases such as where mental and spiritual behaviors and weaknesses work as catalysts for physical ailments or increase their severity (psychosomatic illnesses). Alcoholism, nicotine addiction, other drug addictions, physical-mental instability, depression, and angst, all the way to the more severe mental disorders (schizophrenia and schizoid disorders) have come like an ever-increasing avalanche that is breaking over us. We cannot deny its soul-spiritual origins.

Other articles in the Waldorf Journal Projects have already said much about the effectiveness of curative, healing help. Now, here is a special look at *The Healing Power of Prayer* to add to the list. In this article the word “prayer” is simply a general term for people’s efforts in searching out ways to harmonize and internalize their soul life. Of course, prayer is, in a special sense, the most important foundation of all religious life and it will be expressly discussed. But also, for those who have no special religious ties or are not searching for any, there will perhaps be times when the power of balance, the kingdom of inner tranquility, maybe even an upward gaze to something greater than one’s self will be sought. Here, we would like to discuss methods and means available that instill tranquility and balance, and thereby stimulate the forces within human beings that contribute to their mental and spiritual health.

Imbalance – losing the center

The phrase “losing the center” (Sedlmayr) coined decades ago, was already then a strikingly appropriate expression for our inner situation. Today one can hardly add anything except perhaps that this loss has become more radical. Today we see ourselves even more strongly pushed to the outside, and the power of tranquility, contemplation, and meditation have been torn further from us. But it does not make sense to merely complain about the situation. It is a fact and condition of life today, just like our daily bread and the air we breathe. It makes more sense to ask about the possibilities for achieving balance, a cure for the one-sidedness that has come about in our lives.

Therefore, let us rather speak of one-sidedness or the loss of our “inner balance.” There are two aspects present in this picture. Not only do we experience a strong pull to the outside in our lives, but through this the possibility is taken from us that we can *stand erect* internally. With the loss of inner “balance” we threaten to fall. We lose the ability to move ourselves forward just like it happens when someone physically loses their balance.

The second clear aspect in this picture is that in order to restore balance something can be put on the other end of the scale to add weight. “Losing the center” – certainly, but still no possibility of healing is visible in this phrase. “Threatened balance” – this picture presents us with the possibility of healing. It says to us: “*Pay attention to the other side of the scale, which always makes it possible to achieve balance again!*”

Conditions of life which rob us of our inner balance will generally not be so quickly removed. Many times stress, disquiet, and haste during our daily activities are unavoidable. Today, pictures and events in the world are delivered to our homes everyday via the media. Often enough, when we need some rest and relaxation at home, we are instead tense, worried, or even fearful. This is a part of our lives today and casual criticism is of no use and should not be pursued.¹

We *must* ask, when we wish to “hold ourselves erect” as human beings: What can I put on the other side of the scale? Must I not seriously and thoroughly inspect my mental/soul source of vitality and think what is possible and necessary for me to do to maintain the health of my inner self, the balance of my soul? This is the beginning point. We investigate the possibilities of creating moments of contemplation and quiet in the middle of the outer and inner restless circumstances of our lives. We attempt to fill those moments with meaningful content that gives us inner strength and support.

Caution: Do not want too much!

Immediately the first objection arises: “I have no time for such moments of quiet contemplation.” In most cases this objection is no more than an excuse to save ourselves from the inner effort required to create such meditative moments!

Think about the following: The approximately sixteen hours that we are normally awake contain about one-thousand minutes. We cannot spare about five minutes per day in order to put them on the opposite side of the scale containing the other nine-hundred-ninety-five minutes? Every day we spend hours, or perhaps only minutes, on many less important matters.

Naturally, in the beginning one will need energy and especially planning in order to create some free space every day. The first question is: “*When* during the day am I most likely able to make such quiet moments? For many people the evening is the only time available when the busyness of the day naturally winds down. Others may be too tired in the evening and will find the best time to be in the morning after a good night’s rest. For a mother it could be in the morning when the children have just left the house and some quiet time is possible. One has to find out for one’s self what is best.

One mistake often made with such attempts to take one’s inner life into one’s own hands is that one takes on too much all at once. This rule applies: After a thorough weighing of the possibilities, at first, take only short periods of time – three to five minutes per day – but these few minutes should be sacrosanct. It has also proven effective to limit the intention to a certain amount of time, for example: I will take three to five minutes (always at the same time of day when possible) for quiet contemplation and I will stick to it for two weeks. Then I will review these two weeks and ask: How did it go with me during this time? Was it a well-chosen time of day or should I change it? Did I get along all right with the trial and did I carry it out exactly as planned or in a changed form? Were the three to five minutes too long or long enough? (They can be very long if one is not used to it.) Or, do I feel the strength to ask more of myself? Should I add a second session in the morning or evening?

In short: When one has thoroughly reviewed the trial period, then one should set one’s self in *freedom* again and make the decision to begin *anew* but this time based upon experience. One continues for another limited period of time and does a similar review until finally experience and rhythm have been established which make such precautions unnecessary.

Success?

The second common objection that can be made to the suggestions here is: What could possibly be gained from only three to five minutes per day?! It is not even enough to overcome my daily cares and inner unrest, let alone that something meaningful can come alive in such a short time.

Do not be deceived. Such initial attempts might not result in immediate success. It is much more important that one gains inner strength by sticking to something over a period of time, even if it is not met with much success, than to begin with a powerful effort and then stop after a short time. The real, important, and essential success is that one is actually searching for tranquility and is learning to practice it. This is decisive for the inner growth of the soul.

One always meets people who have made many attempts and then have become discouraged and break it off after a short time because they wanted

to achieve too much too quickly. For this reason I repeat the advice: In the beginning, not too long, not too much, but stick to it! Secondly, always restore your own freedom through review and new impulse to prepare for the next leg of the journey! Through such efforts the power of the soul grows slowly and thereby the moments of contemplation are lengthened and deepened.

One should also consider the following: Usually in the beginning when everything is new and interesting, a certain feeling of satisfaction occurs which helps one to get through the first difficulties. However, it disappears after a time and the initial eagerness slackens. Then one needs more of one's *own* energy in order to continue. One must realize that it is not only one's own inner weakness that is responsible, but also that one has stumbled upon a spiritual law that is bound to every honest spiritual endeavor: To make the person who is earnestly striving must depend upon his own *self* and his *own* determination. There is a real chance in this more difficult challenge to find in one's self the necessary inner energy.

Tranquility

There is no mistaking the fact that with the first steps onto this path today we are met with challenges that are simply unfamiliar at first. There is the danger that we will become discouraged after a few failures. Nothing could be more wrong! When we are especially, intensively confronted with the challenges to our intention in the beginning, all the more important it is for us to continue. And continue we can when we can accept that there is no other way to regain the desired balance. Therefore, we continue our attempt just as someone continues taking a bitter medicine because they know it can only help.

The first challenge that arises is being able to actually enter into a state of inner tranquility. It can be a significant help if one can find a place free from outside noise. One begins in a relaxed, but not too-relaxed, posture. For many people the quality of light plays a role. Bright light from the sun or a lamp is not recommended. It is better to have the room somewhat dim. In the evening it is helpful to light a candle that shines on some object that imparts a feeling of tranquility such as a crystal, a flower, or a painting.

Once everything is arranged, the decisive step has arrived. It is now much more important to quiet the *inside*, usually more difficult than one imagines because just when the *outer* situation has been quieted, then the *inner* disquiet that fills us comes forth all the stronger. We have not before now learned how to act when there is nothing stimulating us from the outside. The whole day long we are at the mercy of some demand or obligation beginning with the alarm clock that awakens us in the morning, then the traffic on the way to work, the noise that constantly surrounds us, all the way to evening when we have "homework" or perhaps a book has us "glued to the page," or we watch television. There is always something coming at us from outside, and our civilization has become great through this method of living with the world.

But what happens when the outer stimulation stops and we find ourselves completely alone? Everyone knows the driving force of thoughts and perceptions that then come about and we are hardly able to withstand them. This is the point of the first assignment; find real quiet, deep tranquility!

I will say once again that we are not used to this. No one has taught us and so this beginning turns out to be an adventure that we must survive. Experience shows that the worst way is to want to quasi “press out” tranquil quiet. That only leads to new stress. Perhaps a few deep breaths will help at first. Then one directs the mind to times when one has already experienced the sensation of deep peace; remember such experiences as well as one can. Perhaps it is a quiet sunny day in the mountains or on the seashore, a walk in the woods, or a peaceful evening of a warm summer’s day, lying in a meadow looking up at a cloudless sky, or the powerful serenity of the starry firmament at night.

The deeper and more concrete such experiences can become, the more deeply we can penetrate into their peacefulness. For some such serenity will stream out during contemplation of artwork or remembering a few bars of music. Even the word “quiet,” reflectively spoken a few times can call forth in us something like the word itself. An example of this is a poem by Christian Morgenstern which begins:

Quiet, quiet, deep quiet,
People, animals, silently sleep.

(Taken from “Wir fanden einen Pfad”)

One courageously tries again until one finds an appropriate starting point. The principle is the same: inwardly connect to an experience where one has experienced concentrated quiet. When such experiences have not been had, then they should be sought out at the next opportunity. They can really help to quiet us over and over again.

Here is one example of a place to start: The things around me are breathing quietness, the table in front of me, the walls surrounding me, the floor underneath me, the chair I sit upon – they are not filled with haste or nervousness but with a deep serenity. I can make myself conscious of this and allow the “embodied” quiet contained in these things to work in me.

I open my eyes and see the table before me and perceive its serenity. Then I close my eyes and “inhale” this serenity. As soon as the inner experience connected with this fades, open your eyes again, renew the perception and see the table – or another object of one’s choosing – take in its serenity again, close your eyes and let the quietness descend. This alternating between quiet experience in the sensory perceptions and internal quiet can be continued until the inner serenity becomes strong enough.

The *memory* of a strong experience of serenity or the *immediate sensory experience* can also help me to find the corresponding region of serenity in *myself*. It is almost always present within me even though I usually overlook it and it is not always easy to find. Searching out the experiences from the outside that serve as memories or the actual sense-perceptions of quiet allows

me to let this quiet stream flow into me, I can “inhale” it. Then I can also perceive the deeper layers of my mind where the quietness has really taken hold that I can then consciously reach for in this way. Some words of meditation by Rudolf Steiner begin with this state of mind that is important for us:

*I carry serenity within myself.
I carry within myself
The energy that will strengthen me!*

These words contain inspiration for the effort to find peaceful quietude. Naturally, the smallest amount of time in our day is spent living in this layer of our being that the above words address. But a human being is something akin to a “multi-storied building.” One usually spends most of one’s time in the upper floors, and it is not always easy to locate the “stairs” with which to “descend” into the deeper levels of one’s being. However, within these deeper levels sovereign quietude is master. To reach it is the first task of the moments of contemplation.²

Those who begin the meditative exercise in this way will have varying experiences day to day. Sometimes one will be quite successful in reaching the place of inner quiet. On other days one’s own restlessness will not be overcome even with the most intensive effort. One should remain unperturbed (not apathetic!) and not strain to accomplish something on *this* particular day that is perhaps just not possible. One calmly ceases the effort at that particular time in the sure knowledge that the next day is also a new beginning. When one is honest with one’s self it can be easily determined if one has given up because of inner laxness or because this time it really did not work even after an earnest effort.

By the way, a failed attempt in the evening is usually not dependent upon whether one is under tension or tired any more than if one is more or less well-rested in the morning after a night’s sleep. One can accomplish much more than one may think in the beginning when such outward difficulties and circumstances are not avoided but rather confronted with determination. That one sometimes does not achieve a state of quietude usually has deeper reasons – besides the difficulties experienced in the beginning – that vary greatly according to the individual and must sometimes simply be accepted.

The quiet can *increase*. When I have been really at peace something else can appear: Worry and anxiety that had plagued me retreats. In its place, deep *trust* in life, in destiny, in the powers dormant within me, can bloom. Many things can create worry and anxiety within me: What the day will bring, what the future holds, what connects me others, and much more. On the other side, trust lies in the deeper levels of the mind as quietude, to which we can now penetrate. Basically, this trust is always present within us. It lets us know that everything that happens, even the critical, the difficult, or

instances of failure, has a meaning or can be meaningfully integrated into the unfolding of my destiny.

It may sound very theoretical when we indicate the still deeper-lying experiences here. However, they can become increasingly clearer the deeper we penetrate into the experience of quietude. Yes, one could say: Quietude is enlivened in us at a deep enough level when these experiences can be embedded within us.

Now a second step is possible: *Love* for the tasks of our destiny can grow from quietude and trust. We learn to feel that there is wisdom in what destiny requires of us that will, in the end, lead us to ourselves even through the difficulties our life. We will revisit these last two themes: Trust in destiny and love of daily duties.

Constructive forces

We have gained a point of departure that should now revive the soul with peaceful prayer and meditation. The serene quiet is only the “outer covering” into which some other essential can be immersed.

It is not our intention in this article to speak about the significance and practice of *meditation*, which can also benefit from this point of departure. But before we get to the subject of prayer specifically, we will include some things that are of general human interest in content for those who have no religious presuppositions. The following text is an example of this:

Create for yourself moments of inner tranquility and learn in these moments to differentiate between the essential and the non-essential. One should withdraw from daily life for a short time in order to address something completely different than the things involved in daily activities! Those who search for such withdrawn moments in the right way will soon notice that only afterward have they come into their full strength to go about their daily activities! If someone really does not have much time available, then only five minutes per day is enough! One should let one's joys, sorrows, cares, experiences, and acts run through one's mind. And, one should take the attitude that everything that is otherwise experienced should be looked at from a higher viewpoint. The student must try to find the strength to stand before one's self at certain times as a stranger. One must approach one's self with the inner quiet of a judge. If one is successful, then some of the new experiences will show themselves in a new light! If one comes to the state of inner tranquility with a detached overview, then the essential will separate from the non-essential. Worry and joy, every thought, every decision appears different when one confronts one's self in this way.

This is how Steiner expressed himself on the subject of “inner tranquility” in his book *Knowledge of Higher Worlds* which can be described as a basic tutorial, even for those who are not striving for knowledge of higher worlds. Here, also, the gaining of inner quiet stands as the starting point.

Another possibility of filling the quiet mind is to allow a saying or a poem to become alive for a moment. It could perhaps be something that is already very familiar and to which one has already ascribed a certain uplifting or directional energy for one's own mind. Or, it could also be something sought specifically for this purpose and becomes the center of one's contemplation. There are many possibilities and the most effective will be that chosen yourself to be the content of your contemplation exercise.

Living in the words

Much will have been accomplished when we have successfully produced tranquility of mind and now simply speak our chosen words out loud, perhaps a few times in a row. Between times we allow a short pause in which the already attained quiet can flow. The deeper and more meaningful the words we use, the more lasting and concrete will the energy be that they produce in us. This shows that words contain their own inner liveliness that is much more than mere "information." They can have something that radiates. We come closer to this radiating energy through seeking quietude.

We can do more when we not only speak the words out loud, but also try to make every single word come alive within us, for example: "the light of the sun." Try to bring these words alive for a moment by imagining the awesome, flowing fullness of sunlight associated with the words that we never perceive concretely enough. We live for a moment in the inner outlook of light. We can do something similar with the words "the energy of the mind," so that here also we see something of the rich fullness and diversity of our mind. In this way one can make all the important contents of a text come alive and allow it to concretely affect the inner outlook.

At first this exercise leads to considerable *contemplation*. It can then be transitioned into *speaking* the words as we have indicated. Now, however, the speaking has become more lively and meaningful than it could have been before. In this way we gradually come to real living in the words.

Both of the previously described steps, entering into inner quietude and immersion into an appropriate meaningful content, require no more than three to five minutes in the beginning, as we have stated previously, in order to not overtax our power of concentration. However, if one feels that lengthening the time somewhat would not be problematic, there is no reason not to go ahead. One will have to observe this freshly day by day. There will also be days when outside circumstances will not allow even three minutes. On those days it is good if one does not completely forget about the exercise but tries to do a shortened version or at least think about it. With time one learns to correctly handle these fluctuations from day to day.

Prayer is no longer a common occurrence

Now we will transition into the actual focus of this article: Prayer. We hardly need to mention that prayer, which a short time ago (at least in Christianized West) was very common, is now rarely practiced. Even when

one still “learns” to pray as a child – which is also less and less the case today – this is given up for the most part when one reaches puberty because one can no longer see the sense in it. One no longer experiences that something really happens during prayer. One cannot imagine that someone hears the prayers or, going further, that they will be “answered.”

It is all very understandable. Since the beginning of the twentieth century we have fallen into a deep crisis in all our religious notions. The fundamentals of religious life have been called into question from any sides. Everything previously taken for granted is now unhinged. But, the advantage is that we now can freely work through those fundamentals ourselves and build upon them in our own way.

Today there are many things that can assist us. The new catholic and evangelical theology in many cases handles the question of God in a modern way that can open up new lines of communication. For those who wish to go beyond traditional theology, the living anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner contains knowledge and understanding of the spiritual world affecting humankind and can be a path to a new understanding of God. The Christian Community has given rise to much literature that also leads to the depths of Christianity in a new way without denying the modern person’s need for knowledge.

We point out such helps because we cannot discuss fundamental religious questions within the confines of this article, even though they form the foundation of prayer. Perhaps some readers have not lost contact with religion or have newly found it.

Prayer is a personal turning to a higher being. Prayer goes a definite step further than everything we have described up to this point, but this does not diminish what was discussed previously. We will come in contact with the creative power of the Divine when we begin to live in the certainty that the world is not depleting itself within a myriad of meaningless, materialistic configurations and events but rather that the world expresses much more than a purely materialistic existence in the grandiose beauty of nature, for example, in the wisdom-filled conformation of the human body, and in the great creations of the human spirit, just to name a few. By implementing the facilitators that have been previously discussed an image of the Divinity can also be enlivened within our critical faculties of consciousness today that is not only a wellspring and supporting foundation for the world, but also for myself since I am a part of the world.

Wellspring and supporting foundation of my life

The reason prayer has such important significance for human beings is because it leads us daily to the wellspring and supporting foundation of our lives. The certainty that God exists and that I have something to do with Him slowly forms within me. However, it will only become *real* and *effective* in one’s personal devotion to God in prayer. By praying, I *activate* this certitude. I step into the region of my inner self which brings me close to the

reality of the Divine, thus reinforcing the certainty and understanding that I have from God. So, in prayer I come in contact with the actual wellspring of my life, the foundation of my being.

Human beings can be diverted out of their natural existence only in part. Certainly, with our physical bodies the natural, physical existence protrudes into our being as if coming from “below,” a trait we partly or similarly share with animals. But the actual human part of human beings comes from “above.” It lives with idealistic and spiritual aims. Conscience and responsibility are innate within it. It strives for humaneness. It can feel selfless love. It senses and feels that there must be a purpose to existence. All of these human forces do not come from nature – but from where do they come? They come from “above, out of the Godhead.” As it says in the Bible, we are created in their image from the forces of their own Being.

The fact that such higher forces are “dormant” within human beings is proven by the great creations of the human spirit: great works of art, music, poetry, painting, sculpture, and architecture as well as the genius of acting or the talent of a dancer, to name only a few. It is also shown in the large and small acts of the human heart: selfless love, a willingness to help in acts of true brotherhood and sacrifice. It shines from the eyes of a small child. Sometimes it is visible in the eyes of a dying person. It lives in the comforting hand of a mother, in the gesture of love between a man and a woman, and in alleviating the suffering of the sick. It is often at work in the longing of our hearts for more humanity among humans, for real peace on Earth, and for healing of the world.

The Spanish poet, Juan Ramon Jimenez (1881-1958) spoke of this mystery in a very modern and original way in the following poem:

*I am not I.
I am the one
Who walks by my side,
Without a glance from me,
Who I often visit,
Who I often forget.
The one who is serenely silent, when I speak,
Who gently forgives, when I hate,
Who wanders to where I am not,
Who will stand tall when I die.*

The human in human beings: Friedrich Schiller touched on this mystery with words written in his *Letters on Esthetic Education of Mankind* (the fourth letter) which are perhaps no longer so familiar to us. He said: “Every individual person, one can say, carries within themselves the asset and disposition of a pure, idealistic person whose highest duty of existence is to come into harmony with the unchangeable oneness that is in everything transitory.”

And Steiner commented: “Because, next to his everyday self – we will call it that – every person carries within another *higher self*. This higher self stays hidden until it is awakened. And this higher self can only be awakened by one’s own self.”³

With that we have indicated something of the “higher aspect” in us that does not come from below but from above which we can use during prayer to contact the wellspring and foundation of our higher selves. For this reason there is something enormously tragic about the fact that many people today seem to be blocked from the way to prayer. It is as if they are cut off from the region of their own origin and are threatened with losing the foundation of their own existence. The “anchoring” of human existence is missing and every crisis threatens to put people completely off balance with nothing to hold onto for support, throwing them into inner chaos and driving them into frustration. It is often then late, but never too late, to search for the inner support and refuge of prayer.

“Distress teaches prayer.” This old saying certainly contains some truth. Emergency situations often point people toward the “last resort” which actually should not be the “last” resort but perhaps the “first.” Where is the true origin of my being? That is a question whose answer will determine all of my behavior. When I am in distress, turning to God in prayer must always contain an element of *egoism*, if I am at all able to bring about an inner connection. It should not be an inner or outer state of distress that makes us turn to prayer, but rather the voluntary understanding that with love and reverence we are drawing closer to the Highest in the World, connecting with Him, and allowing His strength to work in us.

Egoism in prayer

It is not only the impossibility of making a meaningful connection to religious concepts that keeps many people far from prayer today. Another reason may be that often one has the healthy feeling of just how much prayer is in danger of becoming egotistical.

“Distress teaches prayer.” That is right, but very quickly egoism comes into play. This danger underlies every personal supplication in prayer, i.e., when I pray in order to *get* this or that.

It is wonderful that in the “Lord’s Prayer,” the deepest prayer that we have, which comes from Christ himself, *before* the personal “supplication” the “Thy will be done” is spoken that counteracts all egoism. Not that which *I*, in my limited view, wish to occur but rather that which from a higher viewpoint and from a higher will wishes to occur in my life. With that the danger of egoism is mitigated as long as I endeavor to speak these words in their entire meaning and strength.

Also, the fact that I can never really pray the Lord’s Prayer with only myself in mind but must include at least one other person works against egoism: I do not say “my” but “our,” not “me” but “us,” and so forth. From the outset there is something thoroughly social that carries me beyond the

limitations of my own ego. And, on the other hand, this is often a special help in being able to actually devote one's self to prayer. It is much easier for many people to pray for another person than it is to pray for themselves. If I can have the conviction that forces are connected with every genuine prayer that can have a positive effect on the destiny of another person that I care about, then it is more likely that I will feel inclined to pray than if I were merely praying for myself.

Prayers of supplication

But is it not here that the dangers of egoism and, especially, subjectivism are lurking? How can I know, in praying for another person, what is good for that person?

Here also the phrase "Thy will be done" should be the basic thought behind the prayer. During World War I, Steiner formulated a prayer for those in combat that was addressed to the "genius," the angel of a man which takes up the love of the praying person and carries it to the other person with the hope of providing strengthening forces of destiny:

*Spirit of your soul,
Effective Guardian!
May your vibration
Carry my soul's
Suppliant love,
Your protection,
To those known to you.*

*That with your
Power combined,
My prayer
Helpfully radiates
To the soul
It lovingly seeks.*

In this case something is not being prayed for that someone wishes to "attain." Whether it is for another person or many other people (the prayer can also be used in the plural) the person is calling on "suppliant love" and, at the same time, appealing to the angel of the other person to transform this love into helpful, strengthening power according to what is important for the destiny of the other person.

This inner focus is exemplary: It avoids egoism and subjectivity in prayer. I really can not know if, for instance, a serious illness is exactly the right thing to happen in the destiny of another through which much can be learned and accomplished that is important for the other person. It would be completely wrong to pray for a quick recovery in this case. However, I can pray that the sick or distressed person be given strength to get through it and

experience the growth that destiny has in store. I can participate in bringing *supplementary* love and assistance into the situation of the suffering person. It may not be *physical* relief and healing, but there will be *internal* strengthening and comfort.

This is also the right and appropriate way for one's own situation. I should not pray for the fulfillment of my (egoistical) desires but for the strengthening of my inner connection to the Godhead. However, for the rest, I must desire that my destiny also brings me the difficulties and tests that I need so that I perhaps do not become lazy, complacent, or too soft, thus wasting the forces that have been given to me.

There is something in the prayer of supplication or in the Lord's Prayer with the words "Thy will be done" that leads us away from egoism in prayer. When that is successful then prayer becomes what it actually is and should be: devotion to God in love and freedom, encounters with the foundation and origin of my being and, conversations with that which supports me, envelops my initial existence in love and completes me. Friedrich Hoelderlin wrote something about this towards the end of his life:

The paths of life vary,
What they are like and how the mountains limit them.
What we are here, there a God can complete
With harmony and eternal comfort and peace.

The Lord's Prayer I

Those who wish to begin again with prayer that they perhaps learned earlier, or those who are beginning for the first time, the question of texts will arise. Of course, silent devotion to the Godhead is possible, wordless worship stemming from the inner quietude, as we have discussed. Another possibility is a wholly free formulation, spontaneously arising from the mood of the moment that puts into words what is in my heart at that moment. Everyone will find a way that suits them best.

However, there are prayers originating from deeper insight that are more than a random gathering of words. They are much more like a compendium of spiritual forces, a concentrate of spiritual energy in words. The foremost example is the Lord's Prayer. It comes from Christ himself. The disciples – as is reported in the Gospels – had experienced the special power of His prayers. They asked Him to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1). He gave them the Lord's Prayer. Let us turn a moment to the words without going into lengthy detail.

A fundamental remark been made already: Just the words of the Lord's Prayer, earnestly spoken, work against egoism in prayer. One can never say this prayer only for one's self. Something of that is already present in its construction, its sentence structure. It does not begin with our human interests that are so near and dear, but rather with the fundamental gesture of every

genuine prayer which is our devotion to the Godhead. Our concerns are not pushed to the forefront. First, a relationship to God is sought.

*Our Father, who art in Heaven*⁴

At the beginning of this prayer I call to mind the “Father.” I seek to imagine Him in His omnipresence, in His divine omnipotence, and also in His fatherly proximity to me. I quasi step into His presence. The word “heaven” does not point me to an unreachable other-worldliness, but rather to the Divine omnipresence – no place on Earth without Heaven! – but which is, at the same time, over and above everything earthly.

The Lord’s Prayer begins with an inner *upsurge*. Just that aspect alone can mean something healing for me, to take me for a moment away from my own limitedness and smallness, to free me from the pressures of daily life and allow me to look upward and in so doing to perceive that for me there really is something greater and higher than that which keeps me bound within my own limits. At that moment I begin to experience how I *belong* to this greater, higher, and eternal, how it is not unfamiliar, how there is an internal relationship to the eternal Divine, how I may call it “Father.”

It is possible that today for many people it is difficult to perceive it in this way. There are some hindrances that show themselves in us. That is quite understandable. It may not be possible to begin immediately with the Lord’s Prayer. One can begin with other texts and perhaps slowly work towards the Lord’s Prayer through deeper insight in general religious questions.

On the other hand, there is also the possibility of “jumping into the water” with the words of this prayer and gradually feeling how through the “rightness” of it a strengthening power unfolds in the soul and shores it up so that the hindrances become unimportant because the experiences slowly develop that are connected with this prayer. It is true that one learns to swim only when one decides to give one’s self over to the water. Dry land practices are of limited value. With prayer, it is the same.

A classic example

A classic example of experiences with prayer comes to us from Simone Weil (1909–1943). She was a French socialist, philosopher, and mystic. She was born to Jewish parents, raised in a humanistic atmosphere, and lived at first as a complete agnostic. Barbara Nordmeyer wrote the following about Simone Weil’s encounter with the world of prayer.⁵ “She met a young Englishman in Solesmes who gave her a poem by George Herbert (1593–1633) called “Love”⁶ Here is the text of the poem:

Love bade me welcome; yet my soul drew back,
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
If I lacked anything.

“A guest,” I answered, “Worthy to be here.”
Love said, “You shall be he.”
“I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
I cannot look on Thee.”

Love took my hand, and smiling did reply.

She learned it by heart so that she would always have it available within her when the terrible headaches overcame her. “I thought I was only saying a lovely poem. But this poem, without my knowing it, had the power of a prayer. One time, while I was saying it, Christ himself descended and clasped me. Through the malady I sensed throughout the presence of a love that was like that found in the smile of a loved one!”

It could not fail that Simone Weil, because she had experienced for herself the existence of a Divine World. M. Thibon, a landowner in Southern France and also an author for whom she worked for a while, was a Christian. He taught her the Lord’s Prayer in Greek. Partly because she adored the beauty of the language and partly because of a promise, she memorized it and said it every morning during the grape harvest and sometimes also while she worked. “Since then I have promised myself to say it once every morning with unconditional attention. If my attention wanders or becomes dulled during the prayer, then I begin again until I have reached the point of complete, pure mindfulness. Sometimes it happens that I say it once more just for the pleasure of it, but only if I feel the need. The power of this exercise is extraordinary and it surprises me every time because whether or not I experience it every time, it always exceeds my expectations! During the prayer, or at other moments, Christ is also present in person, but with an endlessly more real, clear, and loving presence than the first time.” These considerations about the Lord’s Prayer in Greek are among the most precious writings of Simone Weil.

Such an experience seems especially precious because it did not grow out of any religious tradition but completely uncoerced from first-hand experience of an awake, consciously-living person of our times, and because this experience was not a one-time occurrence but was ongoing and repetitive.

The Lord’s Prayer II

Let us now continue our consideration of the Lord’s Prayer. We have already brought up the fact that we start out with the upward gaze, the upswing in our inner devotion to the “Father in the Heavens” thereby releasing us from the pressure of our earthly existence. We also begin to *remember* our own eternal being, to become *intimately familiar* with it.

The next three sentences are likewise completely oriented to the Being of God:

Hallowed be *Thy* name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done
On Earth as it is in Heaven.

We see how in the Lord's Prayer the first thing is that we are consequently diverted from the human situation and, through this, the experience of the Divine can be that much more clearly sought. In prayer we do not seek the increase of our own *earthly*, egotistical personality, not the hallowing of *our* name (The problem of seeking personal honor and glory rings in here as the opposing motif), not the enlargement of *our* kingdom (Lust for power is the opposing motif here), and, not the implementing of *our* will. With the first sentences of the Lord's Prayer we learn to feel that in such devotion to God, in such release from our personal desires, we do not lose ourselves but rather find ourselves because we have been released from the clutches of egoism. By stepping into the viewpoint of the *eternal*, the *temporal* in which we live takes on the right "perspective." It is not rejected nor pushed away, but it is put in the right place. The inner "orientation" of the first sentences contains something extraordinarily curative for us. They form a counterbalance to much that we do, and often must do, in life. With them, we put something on the other side of the scale of our lives in order to achieve the *balance* we spoke of at the beginning of this article.

Then with the following sentences, our earthly destiny is brought completely into the picture:

Give us this day *our* daily bread,
And forgive us *our* trespasses
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead *us* not into temptation,
But deliver *us* from evil.

Here also we can not go into much detail. Every sentence points to fundamental questions of our earthly existence and brings them into connection with Divine working, quasi *lifting* them up to a higher level: The daily *bread* (by which more is meant than merely physical nutrition, also everything that nourishes our inner being as in the words: "Man does not live by bread alone"). The *trespass (or guilt)* that we can not avoid (not only that for which we are actively indebted, but also where we remain indebted to something or someone) and finally, *evil*, the abysmal threat we are all faced with in this earthly existence. We bring God everything that causes us concern, everything that is suffocating us so that in the fight for our daily bread – or in seeking enjoyment of earthly goods – we do not fall to the earthly, so that we are not destroyed by our debt but rather may have hope for forgiveness and balance through that which presides over every human destiny so that evil does not pull us in the abyss.

The sentence about "temptation" offers special difficulties in understanding. Should God lead us into temptation? The following seems to be especially enlightening: Turning to God brings temptation with it such as the temptation to practice religious devotion in a one-sided manner, for instance. We run the danger of neglecting our practical life, the daily

obligations, and our earthly duties. Basking in religious feelings or religious fanaticism and dogmatic self-importance are often the results of a one-sided religious life. Therefore, we pray that our devotion to the Divine will not lead to such one-sidedness that could be quasi released in the soul by the magnetism of God.

If we have turned to God with the most devotion of which we are capable in the first part and have “directed” our internal selves to the eternal, then we can feel in the second part that God will not leave us alone in our earthly cares and dangers. The conclusion of the Lord’s Prayer brings us back again to the Godhead:

*For Thine is the Kingdom,
And the Power,
And the Glory
Forever and ever.*

This conclusion was not given to us by Christ. It appeared in the first centuries after Christ as an answer of the gathered community to the Lord’s Prayer during a service. But, it is certainly a worthy ending to what precedes it.

Are our prayers heard?

This question indicates one of the most significant hindrances to prayer. It is hard to imagine that there is someone out there who *hears* our prayers and certainly very hard to imagine that those prayers will be *answered*.

Allow me to relate a personal experience. It is something that played a decisive role in my religious perceptions. At that time I was a student of perhaps fourteen or fifteen years of age. It was immediately after World War I and there was much school to catch up on because of the absences towards the end of the war. Some of the written work would be the deciding factor in the continuation of my education. I remember one time that I fervently prayed to God for the success of such a written assignment; I prayed for a good grade. The result was negative. That made a deep impression on me. I had really made an effort at that prayer and now it was all for nothing.

I know that such disappointments – at least in earnest, life-deciding questions – can signify the end of all trust in God. If God does not hear me when I seriously pray, why should I pay any more attention to Him? Does He even exist? Who could argue the validity of such a question!

I realized at that time that something was not right. Was the problem with God? Must I doubt His existence? Or was there something wrong with my prayer?

This personal example clearly shows that the approach to this prayer was wrong from the beginning. Where one can and must use one’s own power, one should not appeal to God. The saying, “God helps those who help themselves” is apropos. The prayer should not have been a replacement

for my own effort. It should have given me tranquility, trust, and strength in the sure knowledge that my destiny was being led by a higher power.

Here is the decisive point that we have already touched upon with the subject of egoism in prayer. Certainly, who would not understand that someone would pray for a loved one who is on the verge of death, or to save oneself from harm? That is understood. And yet, “Thy will be done” clears the way to a deeper trust in destiny. Perhaps it can not be easily spoken at all times, especially when we first begin to pray. A deeper trust in destiny can be the fruit of a longer experience with prayer. Especially at decisive points in my life, where my trust in the wisdom and love of the Divine leadership of my destiny is the most radically challenged, will I experience the power of prayer. That is “answering” of prayer.

The goal of my prayer is not the fulfillment of this or that wish, but rather that I find strength, trust, and love in and for my earthly destiny. And, for that the Lord’s Prayer offers the best guidance; yes, even more than that. It contains what I would liken to an energy center for “spiritual energy” in the form of thoughts and words that can arm us with the power we need on our inner path. We have seen something of this in the writing of Simone Weil. It has been the same experience throughout the centuries for those who pray.

When we become accustomed to and accept such considerations, the first question still remains: Is there really someone out there who *hears* our prayers? Should we seriously imagine that our voice penetrates to the consciousness of God, His “ear?” Is not that actually a completely impossible assumption? Such reservations are only too easily understood.

Now the question is if we can slowly work toward the reality of God with our conceptions. Certainly, at first, this reality lies outside, “above” our normal conceptual ability that is based upon the limited *earthly* reality. Just calling the eternal, unlimited Being of God into our inner vision is already going beyond our limitations. And yet, we can begin to look in this direction: The narrowness and limitations of earthly existence do not apply to the Godhead, not in consciousness or in the fullness and omnipresence of His Being. That is exactly the *essence* of the Divine Reality; it encompasses everything and penetrates everything. This is the defining element of the Divine Being.

Human beings have widely varied levels of consciousness beginning with those who think only of themselves, to a mother who has her family, with perhaps many children, fully in her consciousness and “instinctively” knows when one of her children is in trouble, or a teacher who gathers his or her whole class into perceptual consciousness. When we look to God we must think of this expansion of consciousness that is possible in increments in human beings as being infinitely increased in God. He encompasses and supports all living things come forth from Him. He is “close” to everything.

Let us think back once again to the fact that the Lord’s Prayer comes from Christ Himself. He taught the disciples to speak: “Our Father!” It

would have been a deception on the disciples if there was no one there to hear these words and answer them with His Being. The disciples, however, had just perceived the power of His prayer that came from his connection with the Father. This experience would have made them aware: God hears every earnest prayer.

And in this fact that God hears us, that we are lifted up with our cares, yes, even with our whole being, into the essence of God and may, for a moment, feel secure, in this lies the *actual* answer to our prayers that permeates our entire being with comfort, strength, and courage to live.

Tranquility – trust – love – gratitude

At this point let us return once more to themes that have already occupied us in this article. With *tranquility* we are speaking of the starting point for every spiritual deepening. It would also be good for prayer to implement it out of tranquility. As we have described, at first one will try to step into inner quietude, quasi dive into it, as well as can be done in the moment. Out of this tranquility prayers also can reach a greater depth.

Now one can pause after every sentence and renew one's quietude before one speaks further according to how it seems right for each individual. One can also be content with praying only one sentence or one word for a period of time. One can also experience more depth with the Lord's Prayer if one repeats the text one time or multiple times until one is "completely inside it," so to speak. Simone Weil described how this repetition of the text was a decisive help. One tries to gradually determine what is right for the individual and also to test from time to time what perhaps should be changed.

Now we can point out that inner tranquility can be expanded into *trust*, trust in destiny. This is something that will become more concrete in combination with prayer. We have often called trust one of the fruits of prayer.

Morning prayer, especially, when the events of the coming day are pressing in upon us and trying to worry us, is when the effect of prayer becomes important. Perhaps it will not always work, not right at the beginning, but with time the experience will not fail; out of prayerful quietude the "Thy will be done" can grow also in difficult moments in life.

Together with prayer coming from a place of quiet and trust, there is another step we can incorporate, that we develop *love* for our tasks upon the Earth, love for our obligations. As soon as we learn to feel trust in our destiny, the awareness that we are not subject to blind chance appears in our consciousness. We are not senselessly knocked about. Our destiny has a coherent leadership that will finally lead us to the good. Such a destiny can I not only trust, I can love it. This destiny also contains the tasks and daily obligations that sometimes make us sour but of which we can also think that they are leading us to our destiny and belong in our lives. In this way trust in destiny deepens into love, love for our daily activities.

Up to this point we have concentrated on the disposition to prayer in the morning which is essentially connected with the development of trust. The

evening also has its own mood for prayer. Perhaps it is even easier for us to create a tranquil atmosphere in the evening. The burdens of the day have already subsided somewhat, but the experiences of the past hours still linger. We now relax. The mood in the evening can be *gratitude* from which we then speak our prayer: Gratitude that our lives are preserved, that we have nourishment; gratitude for the good and beautiful things we have experienced which can be seen as nourishment for the soul, and, finally, gratitude that our trespasses can be taken away by Divine forgiveness and harmony and that we must not succumb to evil.

The first part of the Lord's Prayer is especially significant for the beginning of the day and the second part for the end of the day. Now, however, after we have developed a few basic motifs for the deepening of our prayer experience, it must be expressly added that one can also leave all of this aside. One should not have the impression that it is of the utmost importance that the indicated moods and perceptions must unfold in the soul at all times before one can correctly pray. What we have described here are only suggestions which may be helpful. Those who are able to pray without them should by all means do so. Above all, when one can not take the time to prepare the right mood and become tranquil, then just speaking the words of the prayer is helpful. It is better to pray as well as one can in the moment than to leave off praying altogether because of lack of time. If need be, it is enough to think one thought or say one word that connects us to the reality of prayer rather than letting the moment go by that would otherwise be devoted to prayer. The same goes for times of illness, or fatigue when we may not have the strength to pray.

The healing power of prayer

Our point of departure is the determination that illnesses and maladies that have soul-spiritual causes are accumulating. We have asked for help with this situation. First of all, we have spoken generally of bringing balance to the lopsidedness of our lives, of creating inner tranquility, and of filling this inner quietude with meaningful things. Then we looked at the energy that can radiate from the first, regular exercises in prayer.

Just finding tranquility of mind already has something of a healing effect on the disquiet that usually fills us and, in time, certainly carries over into our physical state of being, possibly causing illness. The effect is deeper still when trust and love can be created in the soul; when we are successful in momentarily putting aside worry, anxiety, dissatisfaction, and aggression and immersing ourselves in internal positive energy. The more this is possible the more intensely is the stress and deep-seated frustration released that we carry with us and is inherent to life today.

A further step is possible in prayer: Not only do tranquility, trust, and love grow in us, but we quasi lift ourselves up over our own self and encounter the higher, eternal, primordial reality from which our actual being comes. We not only extricate ourselves for a moment from the pressure and

narrowness of our normal lives, not only momentarily loosen the chains of egoism, but in the encounter with the Divine Reality, deeper healing forces stream into our soul.

To better understand this let me say: The word “heal” in German means not only “health” but also “whole” in the sense of unblemished, undamaged. Healing would then mean something that has kept its wholeness intact, something that is not broken. Healing is giving back the wholeness, reproducing it, for those who have lost the wholeness of their being.

Human beings do not stem from the earthly. We have previously spoken of how the best of their humanity can not be derived “from below” but comes “from above.” However, since we live in the earthly realm we lose the relationship to our actual, eternal origin. We quasi let go of the “anchor” with which we are “anchored” to God. We have lost our hold long before a stroke of fate outwardly robs us of it. We have lost our inner balance long before we actually realize it. We have lost the wholeness of our being. We are no longer healthy. We need healing.

It will certainly be clear to the reader that we are not speaking here of something for which people can be blamed; that could be counted as a failing or even a moral deficiency. That is certainly not the intention. We are speaking only of the basic, existential orientation of our earthly lives into which we are born and can not change, but must suffer through.

On the other hand, the actual cause of an endless amount of dissatisfaction, frustration, unspecific longing, and restless seeking of many (especially young people) is this “unwholesome” situation of our earthly existence. Being cut off from the roots of our human existence, the missing anchoring in the eternal must have the effect of causing doubt, frustration, anxiety, depression, lack of direction, and constant restlessness. It is obvious that there is a whole array of physical illnesses related to this, but the susceptibility of so many people to drugs and all kinds of sensations may also have their cause in this.

Religion is really nothing more than an attempt to bring people back into a relationship with the world from which they came. Religion means “reconnection.” Reconnection with areas that disconnection with would result in harm. A prayer, a church service, a sacrament; these things put us back into the reality that is our real home. For this reason, a *real* religious life is truly not an “imposed structure,” not an idealistic addition to the “actual” reality of life, but is a foundation, a basis upon which we can truly “stand” in our earthly existence.

It must be admitted that religious life as it is often practiced today has lost much genuineness, seriousness, and depth. It is perhaps permeated in sentimentality and subtle egoism. That should not prevent one from striving for truth, seriousness, and depth in one’s own religious life and perhaps look for other people who want the same thing. Then one will also see that the stream of healthy religious life is flowing along everywhere.⁷

Going to sleep – awakening

Naturally, we can pray at any time during the day. And yet, the moments before falling asleep and after waking up are especially suited to prayer.

What does it mean to sleep? Our soul detaches itself from the body. Outwardly we remain unconscious. Only in dreaming does sometimes something light up in us indicating that this unconsciousness is perhaps not complete; that also in sleep we “go through” something.

Steiner vividly portrayed the nightly experiences of the soul that we leave behind upon awakening and then often bring into consciousness only as a mood. He said:

For many people in our materialistic age it is very, very difficult to perceive what I would like to call “the holiness of sleep.” When it is experienced that the intelligences living in human form are the ones who have dispensed with all respect for the holiness of sleep, then that is a “savage cultural phenomenon.” Such things should not be criticized. They should also not be counted here in the sense that they lead to an asceticism that is impossible to carry through. We must live with the world, but we must live with it with our eyes open. That is the only way we will tear our physicality away from the base and lift it up. Just think how many people while away the evening hours in purely materialistic pursuits, then go to sleep without developing the perception (because they have not really come out of their materialistic disposition) that sleep unites us with the spiritual world. Sleep sends us over into the spiritual world. People should, at least, gradually develop that with which they can say the words: “I am going to sleep. Until I awaken my soul will be in the spiritual world. There my soul will encounter genius. And when I awaken I will have had an encounter with genius. The wings of my genius will have attached themselves to my soul.

Whether someone makes such a perception come alive in relationship to sleep or whether one does not depends very much on overcoming materialistic existence. This overcoming of materialistic life can happen only through the stimulation of intimate perceptions accordant with the spiritual world. Only if we make such perceptions very alive will the sleeping life become so intensive, and the contact with the spiritual world so strong, that gradually also our waking life can be energized and we will have not only the world of the senses around us, but also the spiritual world, which is the real, the truly real, world. This world that we normally call the real world is only an image of the real world. The real world is the world of spirit.⁸

If we can accept such notions, then further viewpoints about prayer in the evening and the morning become visible to us. I will be able to say to

myself: Evening prayer strengthens the force that leads me up into the regions that we are speaking of here. With prayer it is as if I were spreading the vibrations outward that lead me to encounters with my “genius,” with the angel that accompanies my destiny. And, in encountering my angel I become strengthened with the energy that I need in my daily life in the form of tranquility, trust, and love. On the other hand, an encounter with the angel is also a living guarantee that my relationship to the Godhead does not completely disappear when I must be active during the day in a completely different area of existence. The angel “stands,” so to say, “before God.” It “anchors” my existence in the Divine Being.

In 1917 Steiner spoke about “the holiness of sleep” no longer being perceived as a matter of course. Today that is much more the case than it was at the time he said it. It is all the more important for us to pay attention to the realities that have been indicated here and, when possible, lead our lives with those realities in mind. Much can be done that can be very significant.

The rising up of the soul during the night is endangered in many ways today. This is said without any moralizing sentiment. The “vibrations” of the soul no longer develop. They no longer carry human beings upward when during the day they live only in earthly circumstances and will not direct any thoughts to a higher world. However, evening prayer gives us vibratory power allowing us an encounter with the genius of our destiny.

With such considerations we gain stimulation and impulse not only for evening prayer but it is also significant in the morning for the transition from sleep. Our inner attitude and bearing determine if the energy that has permeated us during sleep will be carried over into our daily lives or if it will disappear upon awakening. We can certainly do something about it. The “vibrations” of our soul are now “folded together” again, but they have something like the “dew” of divine life within them. It is not only the plants that are covered with dew in the morning and therefore refreshed. Our soul also brings energy and refreshment over from the spiritual world. We can see to it that it is not immediately darkened by the “dust” of the Earth but rather learns to maintain some of its original energy.

Healing of the soul – healing of the body

We have not previously spoken of the fact that prayer can also lead to *physical* healing. This is a possibility, not always, but still under certain circumstances. Some religious communities have made this a central point in their religious services.

However, we will not go into that here. This way too easily turns religious striving and perception onto an egoistical path which should rather be avoided as we have stated previously. It does not seem advisable to permeate one’s devotion to God with these kinds of personal wishes.⁹

The effectiveness of prayer lies foremost in the healing energy that it unfolds in our soul. It pertains to the large field of mental-spiritual causes of illness that we are more and more up against today in the form of physical

illness. In this respect, we are dealing with real healing forces when we open our soul, in the way described, to tranquility, trust, love, and, above all, prayer. Such healing forces have a healthful effect on that area from which otherwise additional causes of illness must flow into our body.

Whether or not these healing forces also have a direct, healthful effect on our physical body must be left up to destiny.¹⁰ We need not discount such effects from the outset. Putting them into our prayers would allow us to fall back into egotism. That would be the opposite of what we are striving toward. Perhaps we would experience physical healing and relief but suffer that much more harm to our soul.

Something else can be said: Fortunately we have physicians who can many times effect healing for us. Even very serious illnesses, deathly illnesses, can often be turned around and the person brought back to life. But here the question often arises: What does the person do with the new life he has been given? He was close to death, life was given back to him, does he live on as before or does he understand that the illness was a call from destiny to change something in his life?

For a doctor it is often bitter to observe how he or she has perhaps given their all to help someone back to health only to see that person continue to senselessly waste that life. Not only the illness itself, but also the convalescence is a challenge of our destiny to think about our continued life and to newly arrange it in accordance with the idea of “balance” in our soul. Here is where the steps we have discussed take on an importance that can not be overestimated.

So our prayers should not be directly linked to our wish for health and healing from physical ailments. And yet, during the most difficult hours of our life, including illness, prayer can be *the* decisive support. I will most often not experience physical healing through prayer; but strength, courage, and comfort will grow in the soul so that we can bear our destiny. Patience will show itself as a fruit of prayer.

Those who have a lot to do with the ill and the dying know that how people bear their suffering does not depend upon the degree of that suffering. Whether or not strength and patience is there during the suffering of the unavoidable depends alone upon the person’s strength of soul. Quite difficult things can be miraculously born when our soul has inner strength. Even a small burden will lead to inner collapse then there is no internal support. We will now speak about how inner support and strength can be built.

Faithfulness

At the beginning of this article we pointed out the special difficulty, often seen today, that the inner strength of perseverance usually wanes after a shorter or longer period of time. The first thing we can do against it is care and thoughtfulness in making the decision. That means not too much at the beginning, not too long, not committing for one’s entire life but, at first, just for a short period time. On the other hand, it should be understood that the

inner efforts release their strength when they are carried out not only for weeks and months, but for years and decades. However, since the necessary perseverance usually must be gained, one goes step by step according to plan.

In spite of this, after some time, the feeling that one is no longer really connected to the endeavor will appear. Many people experience this with prayer. One experiences that the words are “empty” or too formulated so that one can no longer completely live in them. That is no reason to discontinue praying. One eats at intervals, even though it may not taste good at the moment, because one knows that it is necessary to keep up one’s physical strength. In a similar way one turns to prayer even if sometimes one does not find satisfaction in it. In any case, substance and energy are connected with the words, just as they are connected with food even if we sometimes only eat because we must.

Of course, a remedy can be necessary. It could consist of taking time outside of prayer, time to rethink single words or sentences in the prayer, to deepen oneself in it. There is a lot of literature written for this purpose. One must not necessarily even read through a whole book. Oftentimes it is enough to read one or two pages to become inspired to look at old things in a new way, thereby enlivening them so that new energy is infused into prayer. This process must be repeated from time to time, just as one must water a plant from time to time in order to give it new strength for life.

Also, the Lord’s Prayer can be infused with more energy when it is devoutly repeated over and over again as we saw with the example of Simone Weil. One can do the same thing with single sentences.

Finally, I would like repeated once again something that can be of key importance to us today in gaining a relationship to prayer. All right prayer is, at the same time, prayer of supplication for others. This thought can help us through many “dry spells” in our prayer life.

If we can demonstrate faithfulness in this innermost aspect of our life, then we are co-workers in building the foundation of our existence. Steiner said it like this:

A person needs inner faithfulness,
Faithfulness to the leadership of the spiritual being.
Upon this faithfulness one’s eternal being and essence,
Can be established,
And, through it, the sense-being,
Can be permeated and energized,
With eternal light.

Special forms of prayer

1. For the Dead

It is especially important to think of the dead and to pray for them. This thought may seem strange at first. One either is not able to imagine that there

is a conscious life on the other side of death and that our thoughts have an effect there, or wants to believe that in “Heaven” all problems are at an end and one must think of the souls that have died as being in a “higher” state, away from all of life’s difficulties.

Neither idea reflects the truth of the matter. We will speak candidly here even though space does not allow for a comprehensive substantiation for our opinion. There is ample literature available on this subject.¹¹ It is not just coincidence that in Christianity praying for the dead has been a continuous practice. The deceased continues to live consciously on the other side of death. It is in no way true that the inner bands that tie them to Earth’s destiny are immediately severed when the outer bands are cut by death. All of the deeper human relationships will not simply stop after death. Quite the opposite is true. Since everything physical has fallen away, the soul-spiritual aspects step up with even more force. And this is, most of all, the desire for human sympathy, that inner warmth and the spiritual light that can live within loving human devotion.

From this viewpoint, there are countless people who have died who are experiencing terrible, deeply painful deprivation, as if pushed out of the human community because those left behind to whom they were connected have practically forgotten them. Every loving thought is like a light in the darkness and warmth in the cold loneliness of existence after death. Every heartfelt prayer forms something like a life center, an “oasis in the desert,” that otherwise woefully surrounds the human soul in the death experience.

For this reason anyone who can pray should pray for the dead. One can combine it with the Lord’s Prayer by thinking of the people who have passed in ways that they become alive in one’s consciousness and by including them in the “our” of the prayer. One can also use another prayer. In our experience the following prayer by Steiner is especially appropriate:

My love is the covering
That now encloses you,
Cooling the heat,
Warming the cold,
Sacrificially interwoven!
Carried by love,
Gifted with light,
Life above!

2. For the Sick

During a serious illness the soul activity of the sick person usually lapses. Perhaps they are still able to think or speak a few words of prayer. In any case, it is of great benefit when another is there to not only lovingly care for the sick person, but also pray for and with him or her. It must be said here that those close to sick people are failing in perhaps the most important act they could do if they fail to pray.

Of course, the condition is that the sick person also wants this. One can ask and will perhaps be amazed that often even people who otherwise have no religious trappings in their lives (or at least have not shown any) come near to the deeper layers of their soul in these situations and suddenly can feel that prayer is right and necessary. The biography of Simone Weil indicates this. Perhaps, if we muster the courage to ask, we can help a person rediscover the path to prayer.

Again, the Lord's Prayer would be right in this situation. However, one can also turn to texts that are familiar to the sick person such as something they knew in childhood, a verse from a church songbook, or the Twenty-Third Psalm. Steiner wrote the following:

Oh, Spirit of God, fill me,
Fill me in my soul,
Lend my soul powerful strength,
Powerful strength also my heart,
My heart that seeks for You,
Seeks through deep yearning,
Deep yearning for health,
For health and strong courage,
Strong courage that flows in my limbs,
Flows like a precious gift of God,
A gift of God from You, oh Spirit of God,
Oh, Spirit of God, fill me.

3. For Children

Parents have a special responsibility for the religious life of their children, most especially for their children learning to pray. Children have a natural, although usually completely unsentimental, relationship to prayer, for they are closer to Heaven. Some parents learn to pray together with their children even though they would hesitate to pray on their own.

Even before birth, during pregnancy, parents should include the child in their prayers. Just as we can say of the dead that the threshold of death is no hindrance to thoughts and perceptions that we send to them, the same applies to the unborn. The threshold of birth does not hinder a child's soul from perceiving the thoughts and feelings coming from the parents. Prayer builds a bridge, a beneficent access, to the people to which the child will be entrusted.

After birth the parents will pray for and about the child until he or she has grown enough to all can pray together. It is important that the Lord's Prayer also become familiar to the child in his early years. It is one of the most important things we can give to our children for their later lives.

4. Mealtime Prayers

Praying before a meal has gone out of fashion because most people can no longer feel a connection to it. Here we can likewise learn from children to take up this form of prayer again. Children ask for it when they have once

learned it. Space does not permit a comprehensive discussion of the subject, but suffice it to say that with nourishment, the strengthening and upkeep of our physical bodies, we are dealing with known material, physiological processes. However, how the food and drink is transformed in our body and blood remains somewhat a mystery. Mealtime prayer is an accompaniment to this process that forms the foundation of our earthly existence and infuses it with the perceptions of reverence and gratitude. The following prayer is by Rudolf Steiner:

The Wessobrunn Prayer

That I was told among men as the most wondrous,
There was neither earth nor heaven above,
There was no tree nor mountain nor any thing.
The sun did not shine,
The moon did not light,
The mighty sea had no end and no wend,
But there was the one almighty God, man mildest
And there were with man many godly ghosts
And God the holy.

God Almighty,
Thou hast created Heaven and Earth,
And hath given so much good to the people.
Give me, in Your mercy,
Faith and good will,
Wisdom, insight, and strength,
To withstand the Devil,
Defend against evil,
And effectively do Your will.

The Prayer of St. Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace,
That where there is hatred, I may bring love;
That where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of forgiveness;
That where there is discord, I may bring harmony;
That where there is error, I may bring truth;
That where there is doubt, I may bring faith;
That where there is despair, I may bring hope;
That where there are shadows, I may bring light;
That where there is sadness, I may bring joy.
Lord, grant that I may seek rather to comfort than to be comforted;
To understand, than to be understood;
To love, than to be loved.

For it is by forgetting oneself that one finds.
It is by forgiving that one is forgiven.
It is by dying that one awakens to Eternal Life.

The Twenty-Third Psalm

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside still waters,
He restores my soul.
He guides me in paths of righteousness for
His name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for You are with me,
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me,
In the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil.
My cup overflows.
Surely goodness and love will follow me,
All the days of my life,
And I will dwell in the House of the Lord forever.

– Book of Psalms in the *Old Testament Bible*

Grace

Plants germinate in the earthly night,
Buds leave through the sparkling air,
Fruit ripens by the power of the Sun.

So the soul germinates in the shrine of the heart,
The spirit buds in the light of the world,
Human strength matures in the glow of God.

5. During Times of Distress

It seems perfectly justified to call out to God for help in times of distress. If one already has a strong connection to the Lord's Prayer then its power will also prove effective in these situations. If there is not time for the entire prayer then single words or sentences can also be used.

Some people today, for instance, awaken in the middle of the night with deep feelings of anxiety. Speaking the Lord's Prayer in these situations, out loud, perhaps several times over, can ease the feeling of anxiety. The Lord's Prayer spoken out loud also offers protection when one feels spiritually threatened in any way.

Conclusion

It should be mentioned once again that *nothing* in this article is intended to be conclusive or dogmatic in any way. I have tried to express my viewpoints clearly, although space considerations have limited expression of much justification and reasons. This material should be looked upon as suggestions that may help the reader to find his or her *own* way.

I would like to close with some words by Rudolf Steiner which have been helpful on my own path and for which I am especially grateful. This excerpt is taken from his lecture titled “Vom Wesen des Gebetes”:

Such considerations as this one about prayer are not well-liked today. For instance, one hears it said today: “What is prayer supposed to be able to change in the world when we just pray for this or that? The world goes on adhering to requisite laws that we can not change!” Whoever wishes to really get to know a power must search for it where it is to be found. Today, we have searched for the power of prayer in the human soul and have found that it is something that brings the soul forward. And those who know that it is the spirit that works in the world (not the fantastical or abstract, but the concrete spirit) and that the human soul belongs to the kingdom of spirit, they will also know that not only do physical forces work in the world according to outer, inherent laws, but also everything that is of a spiritual nature also works in the world when the effects of these forces are not visible to the outward eye and outward science. Therefore, let us strengthen the spiritual life through prayer and we will need only to await the effects. They will appear. However, those who first seek the effects of prayer in the outer world will be the first ones to have an awareness of the reality of the power of prayer.

Whoever has realized this should try the following experiment: After having experienced the power of prayer for ten years of one’s life, look back on the previous ten years that went by without being aware of the power of prayer and compare the two decades. One will see how one’s life was changed under the influence of a force that poured strength into the soul through prayer. Forces show themselves by their effects. It is easy to deny the existence of powers when one has not even called upon their effects. Why should one have the right to deny the power of prayer who has not even tried to let prayer become effective within them? A power that is supposed to work in and through the soul can only be known through the exercise thereof.

Poems – Verses - Prayers

You, Who are above us,
You, who are one of us,
You, who are also in us,
That all would see you – also in me,
That I prepare the way for You,
That I am grateful for everything that befalls me,
That I do not forget the other's need:
Keep me in Your love,
As you will, so that others stay in mine.
Let everything in my being
Turn in reverence to You,
And may I never doubt.
I am under Your hand,
And all power and goodness is in You.
Give me a pure mind – that I look at You,
A humble mind – that I hear You,
A loving mind – that I serve You,
A faithful mind – that I stay in You.
– Dag Hammarskjöld

Out of the deep night,
I am awakened
To me.
Out of the deep night,
I am awakened
To You.
In the light of day
I feel Your guiding presence –
For me.
In the light of day
I may create –
For You!

– Johannes Hemleben

The Disciple

I do not know, has it a meaning,
And is it worth anything, that I live,
Only because my heart still beats?
I know only that I am a vine,
Full of late wine.
I do not know, shall I be?
I know only, that the Earth
Puts grain in my lap,
So that I become bread.
God speaks from bread and wine.

– Jochen Klepper

The Long Exercise

Perhaps through long practice you will gradually,
Learn the first lines of the prayer.
When you know it, it will then release you,
From the realm of the lightly-spoken word.

And these first lines of the prayer,
Are everything that you need take with you on the journey.
They remain the never-depleted nourishment
For you at the place of His determining.

The first lines of the prayer you will
Bring with you when you return from over there,
And you will continue saying them with conviction –
And sometimes there will be prayer without words.

– Ina Seidel

Endnotes:

1. Today's life conditions should not be criticized without thought. Better to strive for a conscious relationship with one's self and the environment and not simply "go along" with everything.
2. By "deeper layers" we do not mean what is usually referred to today in a psychoanalytical sense as the "subconscious."
3. *Knowledge of Higher Worlds* by Rudolf Steiner.
4. In the Greek text it is actually plural, "in the Heavens."
5. Barbara Nordmeyer, *Meister ihres Schicksals – biographische Skizzen, (Masters of Their Destinies – Biographical Sketches)* Stuttgart, 1989.
 "Who made the eyes but I?"
 "Truth, Lord; but I have marred them: Let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve."
 "And know you not," says Love,
 "Who bore the blame?"
 "My dear, then I will serve."
 "You must sit down," says Love,
 "And taste my meat."
 So I did sit and eat.
7. Today there are large and small groups everywhere within churches bringing alive an earnest searching in religious life.
8. Rudolf Steiner: *Bausteine zu einer Erkenntnis des Mysteriums von Golgatha (The Mystery of Golgotha)*.
9. Christ also did not heal every sick person of his time, not by a long shot. The Gospel reports make clear that the right moment of destiny always played a role in these healings.
10. Whether healing can and should occur is, above all, a question of destiny. Every healing effects and stimulates something in a human being.
11. *Das Leben nach dem Tode (Life after Death)* by Rudolf Steiner; *Wiederholte Erdenleben (Repeated Earth Lives)* by Emil Bock; *Vom Schicksal der Toten (The Destiny of the Dead)* by Rudolf Meyer.

