

We have been taught that we begin life with emptiness, and that we go forth into life to seek fulfillment. This is one of the great errors that must be unlearned. Were we to accept this, all our lives we would be seeking that which would fill our emptiness. We seek in relationships, in education, in experience, even in thrills. We seek in pleasures, in food and drink, in acquisition of things--we go on and on, seeking, yearning, but all in vain.

That basic ingredient that we are looking for is the understanding that we are spiritual beings; that we come into life with the dynamic to unfold, power to release, love to express, a veritable Kingdom of Heaven to outpicture. It would be thought that we would have found this key in religion because man has for ages been a religious creature, but religion too has been missing an ingredient. The history of man on his eternal quest has indeed been a strange odyssey. In his search for the Holy Grail man has looked everywhere and in vain, but he has failed to look within himself.

On occasion a prophet has appeared telling of the world within, but instead of following him into the deeper experience, man invariably has made a god of the prophet, worshiped him, built monuments to him. Thus he has been trapped in religious practice that contains no within. The missing link in traditional religion has been inner prayer. Man has built shrines and temples, has orchestrated lavish ceremonies employing ornate accoutrements for worship, but this has but fulfilled the human longing for pageantry and his prayer has merely satisfied a sense of duty to pray, which seems, however, without life and ineffective in healing life's problems.

Man lives so much of his life at the circumference of his being that he needs to get apart, to experience a time of renewal, of refreshment. Sometimes we are desperate in this need. We then take the route of diversion, and for many religion is an escape; indeed, the practice of religion itself is a diversion. If our prayer consists of a performance at the circumference, then God becomes little more than a word, and our prayer little more than a verbal performance. As long as religion is an intellectual teaching, dealing with an outside power and implying contact with God in some outside location, the person can never quite become one with God and can never experience vital power for health or guidance. Religion should be more than just a program that deals with another world and a set of observances that have little relevance to this one. It is intended to help man to know and use his inner power.

Prayer must be an effort to harness the depth potential in man in meeting life's experiences at the circumference. Prayer should not be simply a formal act that requires a sacred place or a special sacrament. How free is the person when he realizes that at any time he can get still and find an inner place of quiet and oneness. Charles Fillmore used to say, "There is a place within us where there is a church service going on all the time; we need but to enter in and listen." In this place, the still, small voice within comes forth easily.

We need to attempt to get away from belief in prayer as being something magical or mystical, as a sort of last-ditch effort to solve impossible difficulties. It is not intended for prayer to deal in miracles, but in the fulfillment of the spiritual and natural law. The results of prayer may be humanly astounding, but they merely demonstrate that which is divinely natural. When we feel that only a miracle can save us we limit the power of prayer. No miracle is needed to bring health or guidance or prosperity into our frustrated lives. These desirable things are at the very nature and the plan of God. They are meant for his ideal creation, man.

True power is inner power, the true man is the inner man; thus, the true way of prayer is inner prayer. Listen to what Jesus says of this, "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father

who is in secret; and thy Father who seest in secret shall recompense thee." This is Jesus' ideal of inner prayer. It is not so much words as it is realization. It might be described as communion, stillness, oneness. Man can live out his life second-handed, leaning on others for inspiration and creativity, at the mercy of the continuous stream of outer problems, or he can live from within out. He can thereby find his own inner guide, having a first-hand and immediate experience of God. We are told that there is a spirit of man. There is that within you that knows, because there is that in you which knows itself to be the very individualization of the Infinite.

Man must start to realize that spirituality is not something to be acquired by outer search or worship, but something to be released by quiet meditation and soul reflection and self-realization. So often prayer is expressed in words that indicate an effort to influence, to bend God who is out there, somewhere. But we do not have to tell electricity to be electricity, or gravity to hold objects in their places--we simply use these, and change our position in relation to them. Neither can we tell God anything.

The buttercup, the sunset, the morning dew in the petal of the rose, all this is God. Love and laughter is God...He is the thing we seek and the inner urge by which we seek it. God is in the music that is played and in the mind of the one who composed it and in the skill of him who performs it, and in the appreciation of him who listens to it. Prayer is not an attempt to locate God, to find God; God cannot be found because God is not lost, never has been lost. Prayer is rather an effort on our part to find ourselves consciously in spiritual unity with the allness which God is. This can never be severed because we can never have existence outside of God.

Prayer is the key to realizing and releasing our inner potential; it is the key to finding inner peace and spiritual security. It is a means of perceiving ourselves as we really are. Thus it may be said to be the key to embarking on the role of acting the part of our divinity. Prayer is listening. Any speaking of words is simply a prelude to prayer. If we speak words but fail to listen then we are like a student arriving in the classroom, telling the teacher a thing or two, and then departing before the instruction begins. This does not mean that God tells us to do this or to do that; the voice of God is a wordless voice. We receive it through feeling and then we interpret the feeling in the words and thoughts and images of our own consciousness.

A man who does not engage in inner prayer is but half a person. He can never be more than half effective, because there is an inner as well as an outer side of him. The inner opens out into infinite mind. Man may have hopes and aspirations; he may have hunches or flashes of insight, but when he knows the dynamics of inner prayer he realizes that these showings reveal the inner power to produce them. The key to inner prayer is that we are not trying to change things or to do anything; we are simply trying to release, to let things be done. So we meditate on the truth, realizing that which is changeless and beyond appearance. Reflect on your depth potential, on your spiritual reality. Then, use the great formula of divine creation...Let there be...Not there must be, or there shall be, or make there be, dear God, please--but only Let There Be. No suggestion of effort, no strain, no hurry or force, no anxiety or doubt. Just simply, Let there be light, and there was light. Let the dry land appear, and it appeared. This is the dynamics of inner prayer in its most effective use.