

Pray in a Natural Way

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Anyone seeking the liberation of the soul will at some time feel an inner urge to pray. How they fulfill that calling depends on circumstances such as culture, personality, and place. But there are certain principles that adhere regardless. Whether another person is actually praying or not is occluded to the perception of the senses. It occurs in the interior of the heart and cannot be seen by anyone's eyes. However, we can observe whether our own activities constitute authentic prayer. We must be honest with ourselves at all times.

What I learned about this matter came from being in the presence of Bawa Muhaiyaddeen with whom I also lived and studied for over a decade. Simply being in his presence stimulated a sense of the sacred and prayerfulness. Here are some points he taught me.

An important aspect of a healthy inner life is living prayer. It honors the mystery that gives us all breath, heartbeats, and each other. It reminds us that we depend upon a power of life that we did not create but creates us. The remembrance of the gift of each breath brings gratitude and peace. It opens the heart to living prayer.

The evidence of real prayer is whether it opens the heart to love, regardless of whether we pray quietly, out loud, within a tradition, out of a tradition, facing the east, the west, up or down. If it's prayer, it opens the heart to selfless pure powerful love. If it doesn't, it's not prayer.

The evidence of prayer is loving kindness and compassion and the evidence of loving kindness and compassion is caring for other lives. The evidence of that caring and that compassion is service. And the evidence, experientially, of service is a clear conscience. The evidence of a clear conscience is inner peace. Inner peace gives us the capacity to receive wisdom. Wisdom further reinforces our humility as we realize it is a gift, not something we can achieve through egocentric willful effort.

Gratitude follows, and with that gratitude, openness and illuminated love.

Wisdom tells us that we are connected to the source of life and that all other lives are also connected. All lives, all objects, all things are relational and have a beginning and end. Source, the mysterious power that sustains and gives life, does not depend on anything with a beginning and end. It is sovereign, absolute and demonstrates generosity, grace, love, and being itself. It demonstrates it through the human heart that is pure and awake. A consequence of that realization is a deep tranquility of heart, a profound appreciation for the miracle of consciousness and knowing and clarity of purpose. This brings love, beauty and harmony – coherence and profound meaning – into every moment of life. This is an aspect of plenitude and fulfillment.

This is everyone's birthright regardless of historical circumstances, regardless of joy and sorrow. It must exist independently of attraction and repulsion. It must exist independently of identification with

race, tribe, religion, gender, and class. It sets us on a journey. We travel in upward spirals. We move in inspiration.

In that journey we can be sanctuaries of peace. That's what the world needs more than anything: examples of what it is to be a peaceful secure human being. It means that regardless of circumstances and what governments do, and what the person sitting next to us does, and what our spouse does, and what our children do, and what our parents did, and what our neighbor does, we know there is no excuse for not doing this. This is the work that we have to do and it's a personal secret work.

The world needs peacemakers in a state of peace.

Make no mistake, we are responsible for doing this work. If we don't do this work and we do everything else, we will not be saying "thank you" at the end of our lives and we won't be ready for the next part of the journey.

Do this work, begin this work now and you will not have fear.

If that love is alive in a heart it is like a magnet for grace. That heart is electrified and illuminated because that heart has the appropriate humility to serve. Politics informed by such qualities guide toward policies of compassion and justice exercised with the humility that affirms our capacity to work together. Such policies alone bring peace and security to a family, to a community and to the world.

We can't get angry. We can't give up. We can't answer real questions about complex issues with slogans. We have work to do. The opposite of fear is love. The politics of love affirms human unity. Yet, there is a deeper unity: God lives in us and we live in God.

There is an ocean of love that is our birthright. It is more powerful than the energy in the atom which when harnessed with weapons can destroy the earth. The same Power that put the capacity of a nuclear holocaust in subatomic particles has put a great power in the core of each of our beings. We come from that Power and that Power has also gives us the wisdom and the abilities to meet all challenges, even those that nuclear weapons pose. We do have the resources to find peace and security for all peoples. We do have the audacity to assert that all people have a right to peace and security. We do have a duty to work to help all obtain this right.

May That Power make us sanctuaries of peace, inspired and guided by loving kindness and compassion. For a journey a compass is needed. Prayer sets the compass.

These are but a few reasons we should pray.