

# PRAYING with *Fire*

## PRAYER POINTS



### What is Prayer?

by [Rabbi Irwin Katsuf](#)

***Prayer is not a half-hearted ritual recitation of words; it is an outpouring of the heart.***

First and foremost, prayer is an expression of our relationship with God.

What is that relationship?

God is our Father and we are His children. As such we are dependent on Him. Therefore, it is a relationship of dependency.

We are deluding ourselves if we think we are making it on our own, that God is not watching, not running the show. But if we choose to act that way, sometimes God lets us.

God gave us free will, and He generally keeps out of our lives until we acknowledge the relationship. We learn this from the opening sentences of the Bible:

*This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, on the day the Lord God made earth and heaven. All the plants of the field were at this time in the ground and all the vegetation of the field had not yet sprouted for the Lord God had not brought rain upon the earth as there was no human being to work the soil. [Genesis 2:4-5]*

Rashi, the famed 11th century Biblical commentator, explains that God had not brought rain because He wanted the first human being to pray for it. Indeed, when Adam recognized the need for rain in the world, he prayed for it.

This is the first hint that the basic relationship between humanity and God is expressed through prayer.

When Adam prays, he acknowledges that he has a relationship with God, he is dependent on God, and he must ask God for what he needs. As soon as Adam prays, God begins to relate to him directly and, of course, answers his prayer. Indeed, it rains, and all the vegetation begins to sprout.

## **THE REAL REASON FOR PRAYER**

You see how it works?

We human beings don't really pray to have our needs met; we have needs in order that we pray. This is how we remind ourselves that God exists; this is how we build a relationship with Him.

The Bible teaches us that what happens to us is a direct consequence of our relationship with our Creator, because it is God who is in charge of all that happens in the physical world.

## **What happens to me is determined by my relationship to the Master of the Universe.**

Therefore, what happens to me -- and how that which happens to me affects me -- is determined by my relationship to this Master of the Universe. My relationship to this Master is monitored by my prayers, because that's how I interact with Him directly and immediately - it is how I speak to Him, it is how I hear Him, it is how I develop an emotional relationship with Him.

And as any adult knows from life experience, for any relationship to stand a chance, it has to be real.

One can choose to pray through the recitation of blessings and psalms - in fact, the Sages advise it - but prayer can never be a "formality." It is not dashing off a bunch of words in a prescribed sequence. It is speaking to God - to our Creator, to our Father, to the Almighty - from the innermost recesses of our being.

The shortest prayer recorded in the Bible is the prayer of Moses when he discovered that his beloved sister Miriam has been afflicted with leprosy. He cries out to God from the depths of his being: "Please, Lord, heal her now."

His prayer is as searing as it is simple, and it captures his anguish and his complete faith in God that his prayer can and will be answered. And it is.

My friend Helen had such an experience when she learned that her son David had been diagnosed with a malignant tumor in his brain. The doctors advised that there wasn't much hope.

### **Helen began praying for a miracle with all her strength.**

But Helen refused to believe it. She said she began praying for a miracle with all her strength: "My intensity was of the highest degree there could be in this world. I sobbed my heart out not once but a hundred times a day. If I rolled over in bed, I prayed to God. If I sat up in bed, I prayed to God. I was praying every minute and I didn't stop praying."

Not only that she asked everyone she could think of to pray too.

And it paid off - God answered her heartfelt prayer. David underwent successful surgery and radiation treatment. He is well on the way to recovery now, but Helen hasn't stopped praying.

Of course, the emotions we pour into our prayers when we plead for the recovery of a loved one from a serious illness cannot be readily mustered on an every day basis. But we can go a long way to prepare ourselves, to create for ourselves an atmosphere of undisturbed concentration, to be aware of the words we speak and to whom we address them.

One of the most renowned of the Hassidic masters, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, advocated finding a secluded place for prayer, and there trying to address God from the heart, not worrying too much about the words at first:

*"As often as you can, take a trip out to the fields to pray. All the grasses will join you. They will enter your prayers and give you strength - when no words come, do not despair. Come back day after day to your secluded spot and wait. Just wanting to speak to God is in itself a very great thing. Even if all you can say to God is 'Help!' it is still good. Repeat this over and over again, until God opens your lips and words begin to flow from your heart."*

***Rebbe Nachman's message is as simple as it is powerful: Be real before God and He will always meet you half-way.***