

Integral Kabbalah V
Morning Practice

שחרית
SHAKHARIT



The Jewish Path of Presence

Introduction

What is Prayer?

In the plain sense, prayer is talking to God...

But if we want to understand the significance of prayer as an effective activity toward inner “alchemy” – that is, the transformation and blossoming of human consciousness...

“Transformation and blossoming” – meaning:

From confusion to Wisdom
From contraction to Openness
From melancholy to Joy
From negativity to Love
From bitterness to Bliss

And many other nuances of our inner potential...

If we want to understand the deepest significance of talking to God, we must first explore:

What is speech? And, what is God?

For this let's turn to the great giant of contemporary Jewish spirituality, Martin Buber...

For Buber, speech is not merely communication of thoughts. Rather, all speech emanates from what he calls *Primary Words*...

The *Primary Words* are at a level deeper than ordinary language; their purpose is to express not ideas, but rather the speaker's attitude and relationship...

From the opening of Buber's classic work, *I and Thou*:

To human beings, the world is twofold, in accordance with their twofold attitude...

The attitude of human beings is twofold, in accordance with the twofold nature of the primary words which they speak...

The primary words are not isolated words, but combined words.

The one primary word is the combination *I-Thou*.

The other primary word is the combination *I-It*; wherein, without a change in the primary word, one of the words *He* and *She* can replace *It*.

Hence the I of human beings is also twofold.

For the *I* of the primary word *I-Thou* is a different *I* from that of the primary word *I-It*...

Buber's central teaching is that we have two modes of relating to Existence...

The *I-Thou* mode means being *present* with another being (or beings, or situations, or anything). Being *present* means that our conscious connection with the other, in the present moment, is the point, rather than some goal or agenda...

An example would be a friendly conversation, an enjoyable activity with another such as a game, or listening to music, or just sitting together quietly.

In fact, even sitting quietly “alone” would be an example of the *I-Thou* mode, because in fact we are never alone. As Buber says, “To whatever point you turn, you come upon Being...”

The *I-It* mode means relating to another being (or beings, or situations, or anything) as a means to an end. In the *I-It* mode, the present relationship is not the point; the point is where we intend the relation to lead...

An example would be talking to a person on the phone for tech support; the point is getting your computer (or whatever) fixed, not the relationship with the person on the phone...

Buber goes on to explain that life is a constant intermingling of the two primary words. *I-Thou* and *I-It* are not “good” and “bad”; both are of course necessary...

What is bad, however, is when *I-Thou* becomes eclipsed by *I-It*. The overwhelming of *I-Thou* by *I-It* is the root of what we call evil...

Therefore, the fundamental teaching and practice for Buber is the same as ours: cultivation of Presence...

The spiritual significance of speech, in Buber's understanding, is not in the particular ideas communicated, but in the *primary words* from which the speech emanates. Speech can express both the *I-Thou* mode and the *I-It* mode; when we use speech to intentionally bring forth the *I-Thou* mode, then speech becomes an expression of Presence...

So far, this all has to do with speech and an expression of relationship in general. What about God?

From Buber's *I and Thou*:

In every sphere in its own way, from each process of becoming that is present to us, we look out toward the fringe of the Eternal *Thou*; in each we are aware of a breath from the Eternal *Thou*; in each *Thou* we address the Eternal *Thou*...

Buber's language is difficult, but he is trying to express the basic truth that all beings a part of Being; when we are present with any particular being (or beings, or situations, or anything), then we are present with Being. Every person that becomes our *Thou* is a window to the Eternal *Thou*...

Another way of putting it – to honor another is to honor God. Traditional, exoteric religion may explain this by saying that people are “God's creations,” or more specifically, that people are created *b'tzelem Elohim*, “in the image of God.”

But in the deeper sense, and even more simply, *everything* is an example of Being, an expression of the One Reality, as expressed by the Divine Name, ה-ו-ה-י, which simply means *Being...*

Yod-Hei-Vav-Hei comes from היה *Hei-Yod-Hei*, which is the verb “to be.” Hence a more literal translation of the Divine Name would be “Existence” or “Being” or “Reality”...

In Buber’s language, everyone and everything is potentially a window into the Eternal *Thou*. And, the implication is, the *I* that meets the *Thou* is a window to the Eternal *I*; in Presence, God meets God...

הוא תהלתך והוא אלהיך אשר עשה את הגדלת ואת הנוראת האלה אשר
ראו עיניך:

He is your praise and He is your God, who did for you these great and awesome deeds that your own eyes saw...

- *Devarim* (Deuteronomy) 21:10 *Parshat Eikev*

Rabbi Pinhas of Koretz said on this verse:

Hu Tehilatka v’Hu Eloheka – That which is “your praise” is also “your God.” Meaning, the prayer a person says, is *itself* God.

It is not as if you were asking something of a friend. The friend is one thing, you are another, and the words are another.

It is not so in prayer, for in prayer all is united – the one who prays, the One to whom one prays, and the prayer itself, are all God...

From all of this we can understand that speech has the power to call forth and express Presence (*I-Thou*). When we extend that Presence to Being Itself, speech becomes prayer, and God meets God...

How do we do this?

There is not only one way, just as speaking to a person can take many forms. In Jewish prayer, there are three major modes of prayer, which we could call:

Praise, Petition, and Gratitude

“Praise” is an expression of awe; it is bringing oneself into sensitivity to the miracle of the moment.

“Petition” means asking God to bring something about. On the surface, this may seem like a primitive attempt to control our experience...

But keeping in mind the deeper meaning of prayer as Presence, the function of “petitioning” is actually to *admit* and *surrender*

our desires. Asking God for some fulfilment in a *prayerful* way is an admission of desire, an admission that we are not in control, and ultimately a surrender to the greater “Will” of Reality...

“Gratitude” means receiving the gifts that are already being bestowed upon us, rather than taking them for granted. Gratitude is arriving in this moment, rather than reaching for something not present...

The vastness and complexity of Jewish prayer can be understood in terms of these three basic categories. However, there is an even more simple way of entering the gate of prayer, and that is simple Presence with the vibrations of the words themselves, beyond their conceptual meaning...

...for in prayer all is united – the one who prays, the One to whom one prays, and the prayer itself, are all God...

- Reb Pinhas of Koretz

The practical significance of Reb Pinhas’ words are this: we can enter into communion with the Divine by simply being present with the words – with their sounds, the shapes of the letters, and their vibrations in the body. In this way, the forms of Jewish prayer serve as vehicles for consciousness, or “Palaces of Presence” in a sense – a daily journey of bringing forth our potential to commune with the Eternal...

This is confirmed by the word for prayer itself: תְּפִלָּה *tefilah*.

The root of תְּפִלָּה *tefilah* is פָּלַל – *to clarify, to differentiate, to decide...*

Furthermore, the verb *to pray* is מִתְפַּלֵּל *mitpalel* – a reflexive verb, meaning *to act upon oneself...*

In other words, prayer is the process by which we discover the *I* of the *I-Thou* – the *I* of Presence, the *I* which is not separate from the Eternal *I*, from God's *I*...

Thus, prayer is a practice for being our deepest self, our true identity. Let's give it a try...

THE ASHREI

The *Ashrei* is the most important of the Psalms in all Jewish prayer because its verses begin with each of the twenty-two Hebrew letters. Each letter represents a quality of Presence to be internalized and embodied...



Aleph is the quality of openness, meaning the willingness to feel whatever feelings arise. It is knowing ourselves as the one space of consciousness within which all experience happens...

ב

Bet means “house” and has to do with inner hospitality – meaning, welcoming the moment, welcoming the Divine *as* this moment...

ג

Gimel, which begins the word *gadol* meaning “great” or “vast” points to the experience of Wholeness, or Completeness, which is a quality of the field of awareness at the root our being...

ד

Dalet, which means “door” is the recognition that all we have, all we are, all we experience, is all *received*. Life comes to us as supreme Grace – both the positive and the negative – the experience of the Wholeness of *gimel* and the experience of pain and lack...

א

אַרומִמְךָ אֱלֹהֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאַבְרָכָה שְׁמֶךָ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד

*Aromimkha Elohai HaMelekh,
va'avarkha Shimkha le'olam va'ed*

*I will exalt You, my Divinity, the Sovereign,
and I will bless Your Name forever and ever.*

ב

בְּכָל־יּוֹם אֲבָרְכֶךָ וְאֶהְלֵלָהּ שְׁמֶךָ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד

*B'khol yom avarkhekha,
va'ahal'lah shimkha le'olam va'ed*

*Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your Name forever
and ever.*

ג

גָּדוֹל יְהוָה וּמְהֻלָּל מְאֹד וְלִגְדֻלָּתוֹ אֵין חֵקֶר:

Gadol Adonai um'hulal me'od v'lig'dulato ayn heker

Great is the Divine and exceedingly praised;

Its Greatness is beyond comprehension!

ד

דֹר לְדֹר יִשְׁבַּח מַעֲשֶׂיךָ וּגְבוּרֹתֶיךָ יִגִּידוּ

Dor l'dor y'shabakh ma'asekha, ug'vurotekha yagidu!
From generation to generation your works are praised,
and your mighty acts are proclaimed!

Now that we have a grasp of the why, let's begin the how!