

Do UU's Believe in Prayer?

Before I begin let me say this talk developed in a different direction than the title represents. I do address my views on “Do UU’s believe in Prayer.” However, this talk developed into more how my views have developed on Prayer, especially at this stage of my life.

GOOD MORNING. My name is Liz Maloof. A bit about my background:

I have been a Unitarian Universalist close to 48 years. I have struggled with how to approach prayer during many of these years. I participated in “Building Your Own Theology” classes twice in two separate UU churches with two different ministers. However, my struggle with how and where prayer fit into my life has always been challenging and never satisfied me. My Christian up-bringing started me in a very different direction than where I am today.

Through Unitarian Universalism and “Building Your Own Theology” courses I developed an understanding that at the core my religion helps me develop meaning, honesty & values, out of which I try live my life, make decisions and prioritize my life when times get overwhelming.

Before I proceed, let me define 2 words from Merriam-Webster Definitions
(housekeeping so to speak)

PRAYER: An act of communication with a higher power / such as God / Gods / or supernatural powers. Prayer can be a personal or corporate act, and can take many forms and techniques. The act of prayer is intended to establish a **connection** with the object or worship through **communication**.

DOGMA: A set of beliefs or core assumptions that are considered to be true **without question**. / An established opinion, especially an **authoritative** tenet; or code of tenets; A point of view in a religious context, dogma is a set of beliefs about **faith** or morals that are established **by the church**. The word dogma comes from ancient Greek. A doctrine or body of doctrines concerning faith or morals formally stated and **authoritatively proclaimed** by a church. A few synonyms for dogma are canon, symbol, belief and tenet.

The main difference between dogma and prayer is that dogma is a set of beliefs, while prayer is a form of communication.

So back to this morning's title: "DO UU's Believe in Prayer?" I would say many, many do at some point in their lives. And, if true, some may need to put the time and effort into understanding what Prayer personally means to them. I see this as an individual undertaking, just like "Building your own Theology" was for me many years ago.

I welcome you to pick up a brochure I brought with me, which I found on the “UUA Bookstore site that is titled: “UU Views of Prayer”.

In it, Rev. Reinhold Niebuhr, American Theologian, who wrote the Serenity Prayer notes:

“Prayer does not change **things**; prayer changes **people**, and people change things...Prayer is not hearing voices, prayer is **acquiring a voice**. “

For Me ...Why is this so important Now...

This past fall I discovered a book written by Anne Lamott: ‘HELP THANKS WOW, the Three Essential Prayers. This book opened my eyes and inspired me to explore **Prayer** with enthusiasm and its importance to me at this stage of my life. The title:

HELP: (asking for assistance or seeking wisdom at a point in your life;)

THANKS: (appreciating the good we witness in people, family, situations or our environment surrounding us;) **and**

WOW: (feeling the awe in the world that gets us through the day or shows us a way forward.)

. These three words cried out to me the importance of finding a balance in **the** challenging times we all find ourselves in. For me especially, since the November 2024 election. No small task for sure.

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They also reinforced my personal need for quietness, solitude, meditation and prayer on my current life's journey. A centering so to speak!

Unitarianism Universalism suggests that human differences of opinion and lifestyle should be seen as potentially creative and enriching, rather than destructive. Keeping this in mind, I have come to realized that what was holding me back was the trigger word GOD from my Christian upbringing. How could I pray to GOD when I no longer believe in what this word represents to me?

Anne Lamott's book reframed what Prayer represents to me today,

HELP...THANKS.... WOW....

I looked around with new understanding / and opened my eyes and mind differently to the world around me. This has released me from being blocked by the word "GOD" when approaching praying. I have recently approach prayer with the words: "Spirit in My Life", personalizing my favorite hymn Spirit of Life, written by [Carolyn McDade](#), which most of us are familiar with.

Spirit in My Life **Help**; Spirit in My Life **Thanks**; Spirit in My Life **WOW**

KUUF MUSIC & Our KUUF Service

Unitarian Universalist spiritual music has a rich history, including our hymnal “Singing the Living Tradition” which we use each Sunday that was published 1993. And, “Singing the Journey” a small hymnal dedicated to the pioneers who have pushed the boundaries of congregational music which was introduced in 2005

I find myself centered at KUUF in person or on Zoom.

I am inspired to find communal prayers in the words we say when Lighting the Chalice, Affirmation of Fellowship and Extinguishing the Chalice.

The words to the songs we sing can most of the time be said without music and experienced as prayer. However, when put to the music Martha plays it explodes in my brain as something very meaningful.

Martha playing the Gathering Music, The Prelude, The Offertory Music and the Postlude, tailoring these to the sermon topics when possible, I understand this as gift. This tone of the service for our time here and to send us off in a WOW moment of Prayer. I thrive in the meditative environment of a church service. At times I get / somewhat impatient /when chatter interrupts my feeling of one with the music and the service.

When a composer sets a prayer to music, they add color and emotion to the words and their personal impression of what prayer may mean. For

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example, in 1935 The Lord's Prayer was set to music by Albert Hay Malotte, who died in 1969. To me listening to this with or without words is a very spiritually moving experience. I first heard this in elementary school when a young black male fellow student, Alvin Askew, sang it as a solo at a school concert. I will never forget the impression it left and my memory of that student singing it. In retrospect, it certainly was a WOW moment for me.

Prayer and Meditative, New Age and Instrumental Music:

Most types of Meditative, New Age & Instrumental Music, and some Classical speak to me. Especially if it involves nature sounds: Birds, natural water sounds similar to running brooks over rocks or ocean waves over sand, rustling trees, purposeful rock grinding, Piano, Violin and some Classical music. Carmina Burana, composed by Carl Orff, in 1935 and 1936, comes to mind. Most of you are familiar with this great work. However, I didn't experience this until I was in my 40's. I was a late bloomer.

Poetry and Prayer:

Poetry and Prayer are often compared because they share many characteristics, including:

- Using words with care and deliberation, giving them a greater meaning;
- The silence around words in both poetry and prayer is as important as the words themselves;

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---Both Poetry and Prayer are honest and tell the truth and can give voice to the unsayable;

---Both Poetry and Prayer leave some things unsaid or has a way of speaking that cuts out extra, unnecessary language;

--Both can have a healing effect, and can offer a sense of belonging and hope,

It has been said that the distinction between poetry and prayer is blurred and irrelevant, and it doesn't matter if they are different. My thinking is what speaks to one person might not speak to another, and that is okay.

Art & Prayer

I am thankful for all the artists in this UU community where I learned a new appreciation for art in my life, going to a museum or experiencing an art show on a deeper level that once again brings out my meditative mood. The time and effort our KUUF community artists put into their journey and finished product, the colors, strokes and above all the love they convey is very special and something we should not take for granted. Again, I am a late bloomer and this joy and learning have come to me late in life.

However, it is here with me now. For all the artists among us I stumbled on an artist prayer in my reading, however no credit was given to the author. It was found in an article written in March 2024 ... This is for you:

“Grateful for the Universe that warms my being with creative energy. Grateful for five senses to discover the inspiration all

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around me. Grateful for the ability to release judgement so I can follow where my creativity leads me. Grateful for the calm I feel while making art”.

Holy Books:

The Bible, the Torah, the Koran and others are just a few books of different religions that guide their followers to make praying a central part of their communication with God. Unitarians Universalist are skeptical about any one or tradition possessing the whole truth. They are also increasingly aware of the inherent value of diversity for the well-being of the natural world. Therefore, we look to other religions for insight and knowledge in developing ourselves on what is important on our life’s journey that may include Prayer.

In Conclusion:

My journey and finding the importance of Prayer has been a very long one and at times difficult to balance with lots of twists and turns; as it has been with my whole life’s religious journey. My appreciation for this journey is still ongoing and may continue to change as my needs change. I now have the book: **Help, Thanks and Wow**, in my tool box to continue, encourage and follow whatever my future path looks like.

If you are seeking and looking may your path be easier to find.

Reading : Opening Words:

Words by Anne Lamott from her book” HELP, THANKS, WOW,

You may in fact be wondering /what I even mean when I use the word “prayer”. / It’s certainly is not what the **TV** Christian mean.

It is not for display purposes, /like plastic sushi or neon.

Prayer is private, / even when we pray with others. It is communication from the heart to that which **surpasses understanding.**

Let’s say it is communication from one’s heart to **GOD.** / Or if that is too triggering or ludicrous a concept for you, **to the Good,** the force that is beyond our comprehension /but that is our pain or supplication or relief we don’t need to define **OR** have proof of **OR** any established contact with.”

Reading words for reflection:

(Rub bin drah Nath Tuh gor

A great Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore wrote:

“I slept and dreamt that life was joy/

I woke and saw life was service/

I acted and behold, service was joy”.

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Closing words:

The Apache Blessing Prayer was written by Edward S. Curtis in 1903. Curtis, photographed American Indians and left his mark on the [history of photography](#) in his

20-volume life's work, ***The North American Indian***