

## **Foundations of Unity**

### **Lesson 9**

#### **Finding the Secret Place**

In the previous two lessons, we have discussed denials and affirmations, which are the beginning tools to use in the process of tuning ourselves to a new way of life. This lesson begins our discussion of the third step in this process -- prayer. And the Secret Place is where prayer becomes effective.

In the concepts taught by Unity and all New Thought movements, the idea of prayer is one that is totally divergent from traditional religion, for the basis of these concepts is the art of scientific prayer. We believe that prayer is, first of all, a science, and one that can be learned and applied in everyday life. Second, prayer is an art that goes beyond the scientific principles, and third, prayer is something that can be practiced every day, by anyone, at any time and in any place, all the time.

#### **The Science of Prayer**

The science of prayer presupposes that we can discover and apply certain workable principles. In the scientific method applied to physics, chemistry, biology, and other sciences, there is first discovery of the idea, then research to explore that idea, and then the development of a theory. Just as there is a theory of nuclear physics, there must be a theory about prayer. Why apply scientific methods to prayer? Because we must make our own discoveries and conduct our own research, not merely depend upon what we have been taught in the traditional sense. To discover what prayer truly is, we must eliminate the preconceived ideas we may have. Many of the ideas about prayer with which each of us grew up will no longer suffice for us; we will find them wanting and they will sometimes be erroneous and unworkable in our search for what we believe to be effective prayer. So, having already discovered the idea of prayer, we must take the

next steps, which are to conduct research and develop a theory. Let us, then, begin our research by asking questions.

### Can God Be Approached Directly?

Can you and I go within and directly experience God, or must we go through an organization, a book, a guru, priest, or minister? Is God directly available to each and every person on this planet? Unity says "Yes." This is in direct conflict with much traditional religious thinking, because we are led to believe that unless we approach God through the structure of an organization, or through a member of the clergy, our prayers cannot be truly effective. We are taught by traditional religions to give our first loyalty to that organization. Unity says "No!" We say that our first loyalty must be a direct communication or communion between the self and our Maker. Once we have attained that communion, then we can be true to an organization that meets our needs, one whose beliefs coincide most closely with our own.

A very high percentage of people today do not understand or comprehend that God can and must be approached directly. Any time, in any place, by anyone. This is a most important concept. Many people conceive God as residing in the heavens, upon a throne, and believe that God is available to them only through a specific hierarchy. Yet in all religions, the great mystics have claimed the ability to "go direct." They talk about God as being within them. And for hundreds of years, they have in many instances been persecuted by their own religious organizations, because these mystics speak with authority, as Jesus spoke. Why did Jesus speak with authority? Because he "went direct;" he knew whereof he was speaking.

The concept of approaching God direct is one that gives each of us importance. Each of us has the ability and the capacity to reach within ourselves for all the strength we need -- it is available to anyone, at any time, anywhere, no matter that we may be judged by others as being "spiritual" or "unspiritual" or whatever. The results of this direct approach are far quicker and much more lasting than other routes.

Why, then, is it so easy to accept the traditional, indirect approach? Because it is frightening sometimes to think that we can approach God ourselves. We have been conditioned otherwise, and it is far easier to repeat the words of a memorized prayer or accept a "pre-digested" dogma. Yet, somehow, in doing this, we go away empty-handed.

### Must We Approach God Through Jesus?

This is another area in which Unity and New Thought are divergent from traditional Christianity. Do we have to go through Jesus to get to the Father-Mother God? Is that the message of Jesus? Are all those who are not Christians outside of God? Unity says "No." We say that nothing can be outside of God. Jesus' message was that he was a means for us to reach God; we do not have to go through him -- he is a Way-Shower. Yes, Jesus did say, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." He said, "I am the door and by me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved." Fundamentalists, whose beliefs are almost polar opposites of New Thought, take the word "saved" literally, believing that we must approach God only through Jesus. A truly great mystic would never say to anyone, "You must go through me to reach God."

Every one of the great mystics of every religion has told us that we already have that which he possesses. All they have tried to do is to show us the way, so that we can understand and apply their ideas to our own lives. The "Way" represents the road that one must travel to fulfill our destiny, our plan. The "means" are only the resources one must use to do this. Jesus the man is not the means of our reaching God, nor is he the Way. The Christ Spirit within us is the Way, our Hope of Glory.

This concept may make some persons uncomfortable, but it is a very significant observation. What does it do? It frees you and me from having to use a certain method, a certain sequence, from having to go through hierarchies, clergy, churches, organizations. We can be "spiritual" without any of them. The God-ness we talk about is actually a living Spirit within us, awaiting our discovery, our application, our use, our reaching out for this Source of power. It is an entirely new way of looking at life.

## Must We Beseech God?

So often in traditional churches, we are taught to beseech God; we have all heard this thousands of times -- to beseech God to supply our needs or to perform what we wish. But when we beseech God, what are we actually doing? Are we not begging God? Why must we beg? We are a part of God already; what are we begging for? Why should prayer be a form of begging?

Is prayer a way to bargain with God? Everyone has made a bargain with God at one time or another in his life. We say, "God, I won't do thus-and-so anymore if you will only do this or that for me." Yet we eventually realize that there is something inherently wrong with this approach. Are we to assume that God is going to set aside natural law to give us what we wish? Many times, we experience this bargaining approach when we are going through difficult times. But such experiences can make us reevaluate our thinking; the critical times in our lives can awaken us to our own capabilities and possibilities.

As we awaken to the possibilities that lie within our own individual communion with the God who made us and everything else in the universe, we are awed. We are never alone, literally. We are never powerless. We are always connected to the Source of all being. Even in death, how can we be unconnected to the universe? We may go through a transition, we may change our cellular structure, but there is no disconnection -- it is impossible. We already have that connection to our Source.

## Is the Purpose of Prayer to Change God, or to Change Ourselves?

When we beseech God, when we beg, when we bargain, we are actually saying, "God, why don't you change this situation so it will be the way I want it to be?" We do not like to think of such an approach in this way, because it seems selfish and rather manipulative. So we rationalize. Yet, we must think about this -- when we pray, are we actually trying to change God? Or are we trying to change ourselves? Are we truly trying to gain a better understanding of our relationship with God, our relationships with others?

The length of time we may spend has no relationship to the quality of our prayer. Some years ago, it was fashionable to become involved in Eastern religions, and many people secluded themselves at an ashram to attain the solitude they felt they required to become "spiritual." Traditional Christianity has also taken this approach, and it is believed by many that the longer one suffered, the longer one stayed away from "the world," the longer one spent on his knees, the holier and more spiritual he would become. But it is not the quantity of time that is important -- but the quality of your communication.

### What Is the Ultimate Goal of Prayer?

The ultimate goal of prayer is communion -- not the kind of communion in which bread and wine are served -- but our own individual communion with God, the Source of our being, within us. It may be in a moment of silence, or during an activity of some kind. True communion is when we reach the zenith of our being, when we know we have reached within ourselves to touch God. It is nothing more than a mystical, spiritual experience.

This kind of experience should happen to us every day, and more than once a day. When we begin to tune in properly, we find that we have peak periods in which our only response is "Ahhhhh." We feel it coming forth from us, and then all we want is to share what we have with others, to share our spiritual gifts, understanding, experience. We do this not by talking about our spirituality, but by being the best we can be -- our best selves. We light up our own lives with a sense of joy and ecstasy in being alive.

### Prayer Is Talking to God Within Us

What a wonderful, broadening thought it is when we recognize that prayer is actually talking to God who is already within us.

We need only to reach inside ourselves. We can do this every day, all day, on the job, in our marriages and relationships with others, walking down the street -- in whatever we do, anytime we wish. We then are in tune with the Infinite, in communion with the Higher Order of things.

So prayer is a communion between our God and ourselves. It is a living, direct experience. This is the ultimate purpose of prayer -- becoming one with God, consciously. To be who we are and bubble over with excitement and enthusiasm, to be alive and excited about life -- this is a living prayer.

MEDITATION: Jesus said, "But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door, and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." Let us realize that the purpose of prayer is communion, and that we can learn to pray effectively when we accept prayer as a direct approach to God. We do not have to beg, or beseech, or bargain. We know that we can never be separated from the infinite stream of God's love and life, eternal and abundant. We are beloved children of the Most High.

We know that prayer is not to change God's mind, but to change ourselves. Let us realize that we can begin, with very simple methods and disciplines, and ultimately find the way that is best suited to us individually. Let us remember that we already have what we are looking for, and we need only to commune with that Power in the stillness of our soul, where we discover the Secret Place of the Most High.