

## April Theme *Prayer: The Practice of Vulnerability*

### Introduction

People pray for different reasons, and the nature of prayer differs among different religions. For example, Orthodox Jews pray thanks to God for almost everything, whereas Buddhists practice no Western equivalent of prayer. For we Unitarian Universalists, prayer spans the spectrum from an intimate communication with the imminent God/Divine to total non-belief and non-practice. Each of us chooses how or whether we pray.

We gain insight into the *relationship between prayer and vulnerability* by examining their etymologies:

prayer (n.): c. 1300, from Old French *prier* "prayer, petition, request" (12c., Modern French *prière*), from Medieval Latin *precaria* "petition, prayer," noun use of Latin adjective *precarius*, fem. of *precarius* "obtained by prayer, given as a favor," from *precari* "to ask, beg, pray."

vulnerable (adj.): vulnerable capable of being wounded or hurt; susceptible to criticism or persuasion or temptation. From Late Latin: *vulnerābilis* ("injurious, wounding"), from Latin *vulnerō* ("I wound").

This relationship, of prayer and vulnerability, most clearly applies to the type of prayer that asks for help or healing from hurt/harm or protection from danger. But there are different types of prayers, broadly categorized as:

*Please, Thank you, I'm Sorry, I love you, and Hear my grief/angst.*

1. *Please*: Petition: Asks for something to be done, a cry for help.
2. *Thank you*: Gratitude: Thankfulness for a good outcome, whether seen as a deserved reward or windfall gain (God's Grace).
3. *I'm sorry*: Contrition: Statement of guilt/responsibility and request for forgiveness. This is often accompanied by a promise of some sacrifice/offering to pay for the harm or to expiate the sin.
4. *Adoration*: Expression of love and praise for the Divine. This might be inspired by Gratitude (cf. 2, above) or could be a spontaneous feeling.
5. *Grief/Angst*: lamentation: This passionate expression of pain and deep sorrow is also a form of prayer, a voice that contains the sense of rejection and is rooted in an unfulfilled expectation. Psalm 74, for example.

As prayers, these *emotional expressions* are most often addressed to a transcendent being or power that can provide what the individual offering prayer cannot do for him or herself. Whether that *prayer* is directed to some abstract concept of God (*Spirit of Life*) or to a symbolic representation (an icon or an idol), it still positions the one praying as less powerful than that being prayed to, and in that sense it marks the *vulnerability* of the praying person.

Prayer can be offered by an individual praying for herself/himself or as Prayers of (and for) the Community, recited by all or by a leader on behalf of an assembled congregation. (The use of “Amen” arose as the Jewish response to the blessing or benediction offered by the prayer leader, and is the congregational affirmation of that blessing; *May it be so.*)

### Questions for discussion and discernment on your own or with others:

1. Is prayer a regular part of your life? Was it ever? Do you feel awkward or hesitant about praying? Why?
2. What circumstances in your life seem beyond your control? What would make it possible for you to approach those circumstances with renewed energy, creativity, trust and love? *UU Minister Rev Ashley Horan*
3. What first comes to your mind when you hear the word “vulnerable”? Describe a time when you felt vulnerable. How did you respond to that feeling?
4. Is it difficult for you to ask for what you need, to talk about how you’re feeling, or to have the “hard conversations”? Are those difficulties mirrored in difficulty with “prayer”? If so, why do you think those things are difficult for you?
5. Describe someone you know whom you consider to be a whole person. Is it possible to be whole without being vulnerable?

### Quotes and Short Reading

*“At its best, as a statement of heartfelt intention, prayer evokes the way we want the world to be. Whether it’s God who answers those prayers or some combination of our own effort and the grace of a willing universe, there is something about stating one’s aspirations that makes them more likely to come true.”*

Rev. Nancy McDonald Ladd, in The Call to Prayer, UU World Spring 20127, pp.20-21.

*Vulnerability opens the door to deeper connection to one another.* ~Gayle Lynne Goodwin

*In reality prayer is useless. To rediscover the useless yet valuable in life is to recover prayer. Those who try to make use of prayer do not respect prayer at all but manipulate it. Prayer is not a means but a value in itself.* ~Matthew Fox

*Daring greatly means the courage to BE VULNERABLE. It means to show up and be seen. To ask for what you need. To talk about how you’re feeling. To have the hard conversations.* Brene Brown

*We are never so vulnerable as when we trust someone, but paradoxically, if we cannot trust, neither can we find love or joy.* ~Walter Anderson

*In times of suffering, when you feel abandoned, perhaps even annihilated, there is occurring at levels deeper than your pain the entry of the sacred, the possibility of redemption. Wounding opens doors of our sensibility to a larger reality. Pathos gives us eyes and ears to see and hear what our normal eyes and ears cannot.* ~Jean Houston in “A Dancing Star”

The Worship Associates are: Carly Baker, Alexandra Businger, Alan Cantor, Margaret Homer, Maria Kempner, Julien Lafleur, Megan Momtaheni, Jennifer Ollington, Nevin Shanabrook, and Gary Strichartz.

*Vulnerability is the only bridge to build connection. ~Brene Brown*

*Vulnerability is the only way to allow your heart to feel true pleasure. ~Bob Marley*

*Vulnerability is not weakness, and that myth is profoundly dangerous. Vulnerability is the birthplace of innovation, creativity, and change. ~Brene Brown*

*The most beautiful people we know are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths. These people have an appreciation, sensitivity, an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness, and a deep loving concern. Beautiful people do not just happen. ~Elizabeth Kubler-Ross*

*I found that the more truthful and vulnerable I was, the more empowering it was for me. ~Alanis Morissette*

*I tend to keep everything to myself. Not because I don't trust, but because I'm terrified of vulnerability. Once you tell someone everything, you hand them your heart, and that's a lot of power to play with, but I am finding that vulnerability gives me great strength, because you're not hiding anymore. It's really about being a pioneer for myself, going into the places where I am not being taught. I have to teach myself. ~Tori Amos*

*Opening yourself up to making mistakes and being vulnerable is what makes us beautiful and special with the people you love.~Simone Elkeles "*

## Sources

*"The Discipline of Recognizing What's True and Beautiful", by Parker Palmer from On Being*  
<http://www.onbeing.org/blog/parker-palmer-the-discipline-of-recognizing-whats-true-and-beautiful/>

<http://www.ucmtl.ca/meditations/2016/4/11/a-prayer-for-vulnerability>

<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/blessing/go-boldly>

On the theologies that bring questions of meaning to being a human being:

[http://www.uucr.org/sites/default/files/sermons/transcripts/20120122\\_theology\\_of\\_vulnerability.pdf](http://www.uucr.org/sites/default/files/sermons/transcripts/20120122_theology_of_vulnerability.pdf)

*Home needs to be a sanctuary for the vulnerable heart.*

[https://committedparent.wordpress.com/>.../cultivating-the-neuropsychology-of-vulnerability.](https://committedparent.wordpress.com/>.../cultivating-the-neuropsychology-of-vulnerability)

*I think I fall in love a little bit with anyone who shows me their soul - this world is so guarded and fearful - I appreciate rawness so much. ~Anonymous*

The Worship Associates are: Carly Baker, Alexandra Businger, Alan Cantor, Margaret Homer, Maria Kempner, Julien Lafleur, Megan Momtaheni, Jennifer Ollington, Nevin Shanabrook, and Gary Strichartz.

**One Love- by Bob Marley and the Wailers**

One love, one heart  
 Let's get together and feel all right  
 Hear the children crying (One love)  
 Hear the children crying (One heart)  
 Sayin', "Give thanks and praise to the Lord and I will feel all right  
 Sayin', "Let's get together and feel all right  
 Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa

Let them all pass all their dirty remarks (one love)  
 There is one question I'd really love to ask (one heart)  
 Is there a place for the hopeless sinner  
 Who has hurt all mankind just to save his own?  
 Believe me

One love, one heart  
 Let's get together and feel all right  
 As it was in the beginning (one love)  
 So shall it be in the end (one heart)  
 Alright, give thanks and praise to the Lord and I will feel all right  
 Let's get together and feel all right  
 One more thing

Let's get together to fight this Holy Armageddon (one love)  
 So when the Man comes there will be no, no doom (one song)  
 Have pity on those whose chances grow thinner  
 There ain't no hiding place from the Father of Creation

Sayin', one love, one heart  
 Let's get together and feel all right  
 I'm pleading to mankind (one love)  
 Oh, Lord (one heart) whoa

Give thanks and praise to the Lord and I will feel all right  
 Let's get together and feel all right

Give thanks and praise to the Lord and I will feel all right  
 Let's get together and feel all right