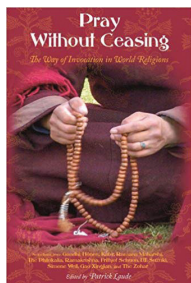


Book Review



**PRAY WITHOUT CEASING:
The Way of the Invocation in World Religions**

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“Pray without ceasing.” (I Thessalonians 5:17)

IF THE PRESUPPOSITION held is that the human being exists in both the horizontal and vertical domains, that is both in time and what is timeless, both in the physical and that of the metaphysical, it is easier to comprehend and consequently situate the significance of prayer as a quintessential bridge between these two distinct domains. Without prayer as a vital link to connect these two domains, they remain separate, opaque, and disconnected, as if impervious to one another without the aid of a higher reality. It can be argued that without prayer, it is not possible to be truly what the human state is intended to be in its most complete sense. Yet to think and see from this point of view in an era so deprived of the sacred one needs to be vigilant about the very presuppositions held about the nature of reality and the course this paves for the wayfarer on the Path. We cannot overlook that the modern world and its prolongation the postmodern world are not neutral or value-free—that is, without their own theoretical tenets that are antagonistic to metaphysics and integral spirituality.

This anthology compiled by Patrick Laude (*SHIMMERING MIRRORS; PATHWAYS TO AN INNER ISLAM*, etc.) provides extraordinary foundational texts on the experience of prayer that are complemented by essays on the remembrance and realization of the Divine. According to diverse saints and sages, to abide in the Divine Name is to abide in none other than the Divine Presence itself, meaning there is no distinction between the Name and the Named. The Name is none other than the transpersonal reality itself. Prayer allows for a direct relationship with the Divine, establishing a link between the human and the Divine. When surveying the diverse traditions and the mystical dimensions of the world’s religions, it becomes apparent that prayer defines the centrality of the human condition and holds an eschatological relevance. This is because human beings cannot go beyond themselves by effort alone; they need an agency that transcends the empirical ego. Prayer provides an integral method of accessing the transpersonal dimension known as *japa-yoga* in Hinduism, *nembutsu* in Buddhism, Jesus Prayer in Christianity, and *dhikr* in Islam. In his insightful introduction to the book, Laude explains that “the invocation is not only a prayer of the human to the Divine, it is also a prayer of the Divine to itself through a human intermediary.” He adds, “The invocation realizes the *raison d’être* of all religious practices since the latter ultimately aim at recognizing, remembering, and assimilating the supreme Reality.” It has also been underscored that in order to make this pilgrimage to the One, spiritual guidance and an affiliation to a divine Revelation is needed for the methodic repetition or invocation of the Divine Name to be efficacious.

It is imperative to define our terms and recall that the etymological root of the English word “religion” is from the Latin *religare*, meaning to “to re-bind” or “to bind back” by implication to the Divine or a transcendent Reality. The function of prayer is to do just this, to assist in the reintegration of the human with the Divine. In fact, each of the world’s religions provides doctrines (theories) and methods (practices) on how to make the journey or return to the Spirit. Prayer from this perspective informs in its wholeness what human identity is *in divinis*.

Within the Hindu tradition (known as the *sanātana dharma* or “eternal religion”), the medieval poet and philosopher Tulsīdās, frames the paramount nature that prayer holds in the final phase of the temporal cycle and its essential connection to the invocation of the Divine Name: “In this *Kali* Age salvation is not gained by knowledge, karma, and worship. But only by taking shelter in the Name.” Śrī Rāmakrishna makes a providential observation concerning the Divine Name and its identification with the transpersonal dimension: “God and His name are identical”. Swami Ramdas confirms this same teaching, “God and His Name are not distinct from one another. The Name is God Himself.” According to the *BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ* it is sufficient at the moment of death to recall the Divine Name in order to abide in the divine Presence itself:

And at the hour of death, he who dies
Remembering Me,
Having relinquished the body,
Goes to My state of being.
In this matter there is no doubt....

It is furthermore added,
Therefore, at all times
Meditate on Me (or: Remember Me
[*mam anusmara*])
With your mind and intellect
Fixed on Me.
In this way, you shall surely come
To Me....

Chaitanya, who revitalized the *bhakti* movement in India, emphasizes that the practice of the invocation of the Divine Name can be observed in all situations and at all moments of the day and is available to all seekers regardless of one's ethnic, racial, socio-economic, or religious identity:

The names of the Lord are many, they are filled with power like Himself and He has laid down no laws regarding their repetition. (They can be repeated anywhere and at all times by anybody of any caste, age, or denomination.) Alas! such is His Grace, and yet we on our part have not yet developed full love and enthusiasm for the name of the Lord.

Swami Ramdas tirelessly emphasized the universality of this spiritual practice that is available to all, “whatever race, caste, creed, or color you may belong, take up the Name of God.”

A renowned exponent of *Advaita Vedānta* or non-duality, Shankara recognizes the spiritual validity of *japa* when writing: “Remember, nothing can save thee at the last moment except the shelter of the Lord, so sing thou His sweet Name Govinda! Govinda!.... Indulge not in formal ceremonies. Dwell in the Atman. Cross the Ocean of transmigration singing the sweet name—Govinda! Govinda! Govinda!” Shankara elsewhere writes, “Control thy soul, restrain thy breathing, distinguish

the transitory from the True, repeat the holy Name of God, and thus calm the agitated mind. To this universal rule apply thyself with all thy heart and all thy soul.” When a devotee asked Ramana Maharshi the following question: “Can *advaita* be realized by *japa* of holy names; say Rāma, Krishna, etc.?” The Sage of Arunachala unequivocally affirmed, “Yes.”

Kabīr, who was regarded as a saint by Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims alike, stressed that: “The True Name is the only thing to repeat. It is the best gift to make.” The highly esteemed bhakti poet Mīrābāī recalls discovering the Divine Name and its impact on her life: “I discovered the great secret in uttering the Name and adhering to this quintessence of *sāstras* (scriptures), I reached my Girdhar through prayers and tears.”

Within the Buddhist tradition, Hōnen stresses the practice of *nembutsu* or the invocation of the name of Amida: “cease from all other religious practices, apply yourself to the Nembutsu alone.” He recounts the Buddha Shakyamuni, expressing, “Give yourself with undivided mind to the repetition of the name of the Buddha who is in Himself endless life.” The chief disciple of Hōnen, Shinran, makes an important link between the invocation of the Divine Name and mindfulness practice: “Saying the Name is constant mindfulness.” Respected author on Tibetan Buddhism Marco Pallis points out that the six-syllabled formula *Om mani padme Hum*, while facilitating complex mystical correspondences, contains “the quintessence of the teaching of all the Buddhas.”

Within the Jewish tradition, the Old Testament instructs: “I will praise Thy

Name continuously and will extol it in all things.” (Ecclesiastes 51) Rabbi Isaac of Akko discusses the mystery of the Divine Name and its connection between the finite and the Infinite as a means of transpersonal union within the Jewish tradition and its mystical dimension:

Remember God and God's love constantly. Let your thought not be separated from God. I declare, both to individuals and to the masses: If you want to know the secret of binding your soul above and joining your thought to God—so that by means of such continuous contemplation you attain incessantly the world that is coming, and so that God be with you always, in this life and the next—then place in front of the eyes of your mind the letters of God's name, as if they were written in a book in Hebrew script. Visualize every letter extending to infinity. What I mean is: when you visualize the letters, focus on them with your mind's eye as you contemplate infinity. Both together: gazing and meditating.

Maimonides explains that only those who received special instruction were permitted to invoke the tetragrammation YHVH:

A priestly blessing has been prescribed for us, in which the name of the Eternal (YHVH) is pronounced as it is written (and not in the form of a substituted name) and that name is the “explicit name.” It was not generally known how the name had to be pronounced, nor how it was proper to vocalize the separate letters, nor whether any of the letters which could be doubled should in fact be doubled. Men who had received special instruction transmitted this one to another (that is, the manner of pronouncing this name) and taught it to none but their chosen disciples....

Within the Christian tradition, we recall the words: “Whosoever shall call

on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21). Saint Philotheos of Sinai discloses that remembrance itself is to be in the divine Presence: “The blessed remembrance of God—which is the very presence of Jesus.” In the classic of Eastern Orthodox spirituality *THE WAY OF A PILGRIM*, an anonymous seeker receives a powerful and memorable instruction from his spiritual father on how to practice the Jesus Prayer or the Prayer of the Heart:

The continuous interior Prayer of Jesus is a constant uninterrupted calling upon the divine Name of Jesus with the lips, in the spirit, in the heart; while forming a mental picture of His constant presence, and imploring His grace, during every occupation, at all times, in all places, even during sleep. The appeal is couched in these terms, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.” One who accustoms himself to this appeal experiences as a result so deep a consolation and so great a need to offer the prayer always, that he can no longer live without it, and it will continue to voice itself within him of its own accord.

The Islamic tradition highlights the paramount nature of remembrance as instructed in the Qur'ān: “Remember Me, and I shall remember you” (2:152), “Your Lord hath said: Call upon Me and I will answer you” (40:60), and “To God belong the most beautiful Names, so call upon Him by them” (7:180). Within the mystical dimension of Islam, also known as *tasawwuf* or Sufism, Ibn 'Atā' Allāh Al-Iskandarī asserts, “Invoking causes God's remembrance of the servant, which is the greatest honor and loftiest distinction.” He continues, “Invoking removes hardness from the heart and engenders tenderness and mildness. Forgetfulness of the

heart is a disease and an ailment, while remembrance is a cure for the invoker from every malady and symptom.” From a spiritual point of view, life and death take on a different meaning as indicated in the following: “The invoker is alive even if he be dead; while the forgetful man, even though he is alive, is actually to be counted among the dead.” Shaykh Ahmad Al-‘Alawī also emphasized the importance of the way of invocation as a means of fixing consciousness on the divine Reality: “Remembrance is the mightiest rule of the religion....The law was not enjoined upon us, neither were the rites of worship ordained, but for the sake of establishing the remembrance of God.” He also stressed that this remembrance “is not to be restricted to a certain time or place, but can be practiced at all times and in all places.” Rūmī poetically speaks to the role of invocation of the Divine Name: “Do not apply musk to the body, rub it on the heart. / What is musk? The sacred name of Him who is full of Majesty.”

Within the Shamanic or primordial religion of the First Peoples, as Patrick Laude points out:

In shamanistic practices the world over, as in Africa or in Central Asia, invocations are numerous, pervading the whole of life: every qualitative action, in craft for instance, is introduced by a specific invocation that effects an “actualization” of the invisible entities, or an “animation” of the “matter” of the activity. This animation by the word is expressed by a sense of the “power” (*nyame*) inherent in invocations....[T]he shamanistic path primarily invokes an increased receptivity to the presence of the Divine in Nature. In that sense pure receptivity is in itself a kind of invocation.

Medicine man and Sun Dance Chief Thomas Yellowtail states the following about the practice of the invocation of the Divine Name: “Each day, whatever I am doing, I am always praying and thinking of God...all the time I am praying...continually praying to God, remembering the name of God.”

It has been shown that spiritual aspirants are unable to directly contemplate the transpersonal domain. They therefore require symbols in order to access the transcendent, as Titus Burckhardt eloquently illustrates: “Man cannot concentrate directly on the Infinite, but, by concentrating on the symbol of the Infinite, attains to the Infinite Itself.” Frithjof Schuon summarizes the significance of the invocation of the Divine Name and its relationship to the Absolute:

The sufficient reason for the invocation of the Name is the “remembering of God”; in the final analysis this is nothing other than consciousness of the Absolute. The Name actualizes this consciousness and, in the end, perpetuates it in the soul and fixes it in the heart, so that it penetrates the whole being and at the same time transmutes and absorbs it. Consciousness of the Absolute is the prerogative of human intelligence and also its aim.

French philosopher Simone Weil also affirms the way of invocation as it applies across the diverse religions: “Every religious practice, every rite, all liturgy is a form of the recitation of the name of the Lord”. Leo Schaya articulates the important function of the invocation of the Divine Name: “God, by invoking his creative and redemptive name, causes everything that exists to issue from him and to return into him; by

invoking his name with him, every being is born from him, lives by him, and is united with him.”

The editor of this volume deserves to be congratulated for this timely work, which is a true gem in that it not only highlights unique and diverse religious and mystical perspectives, but elucidates on their central spiritual method of prayer and the invocation of the Divine Name as it is found across all of the world’s sapiential traditions. It is this practice of remembrance that facilitates the human being’s journey or rather return to the Absolute. In a single volume one will find powerful illustrations of this central practice, which would require significant effort and time to compile from diverse sources. This is an excellent reference book that will provide tremendous value for seekers and students of comparative religion, esoterism, or mysticism, interfaith dialogue, and cross-cultural studies as it demonstrates the common ground on which the transcendent unity of religions may be realized. Through the way of remembrance, the human being can realize the divine Unity that is both immanent and transcendent and that is a reflection of integral human identity *in divinis*. Many are the paths and ways to the One, yet through the universal spiritual practice of the invocation of the Divine Name this reality can be crystallized in the heart and mind of the wayfarer so that, as Antony the Great explains, there is no one praying, only the actualization of prayer itself: “The only real prayer is the one in which we are no longer aware that we are praying.” ♦

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and the interface between spirituality and psychology. His works include Behaviorism: The Quandary of a Psychology with a Soul and Psychology, Without Spirit: The Freudian Quandary, and he is the editor of Psychology and the Perennial Philosophy. His writing has appeared in Sacred Web, Sophia, Parabola, Resurgence, Temenos Academy Review, and Studies in Comparative Religion.