

The First Secret:

Our Lost Mode of Prayer by Gregg Braden

*The force that created the unimaginable splendors
and the unimaginable horrors has taken refuge in us,
and it will follow our commands.*

— St. Catherine of Siena

There is something "out there." Just beyond our perceptions of the everyday world there's a presence, or force, that's at once both mysterious and comforting. We talk about it. We feel it. We believe in it and pray to it, perhaps without even understanding precisely what it is!

Calling it by names that vary from the Web of Creation to the Spirit of God, ancient traditions knew that this presence exists. They also knew how to apply it in their lives. In the words of their time, they left detailed instructions to the people of their future describing how we may use this invisible force to heal our bodies and relationships, and bring peace to our world. Today we know that the language connects all three as a "lost" mode of prayer.

Unlike the traditional prayers that we may have used in the past, however, this technique of prayer has no words. It is based in the silent language of human emotion. It invites us to feel gratitude and appreciation, as if our prayers have already been answered. Through this quality of feeling, the ancients believed that we're given direct access to the power of creation: the Spirit of God.

In the 20th century, modern science may have rediscovered the Spirit of God as a field of energy that's different from any other form of energy. It appears to be everywhere, always, and to have existed since the beginning of time. The man widely regarded as the father of quantum physics, Max Planck, stated that the existence of the Field suggests that a great intelligence is responsible for our physical world. *"We must assume behind this force the existence of a conscious and intelligent mind."* He concluded, simply saying, *"This mind is the matrix of all matter."* ¹ Referring to it by other terms such as the Unity Field, contemporary studies have shown that Planck's matrix does, in fact, have intelligence. Just as the ancients suggested, the Field responds to human emotion!

Regardless of what we call it or how science and religion define it, it's clear that there's something out there—a force, a field, a presence—that is the "great magnet" constantly pulling us toward one another and connecting us to a higher power. Knowing that this force exists, it makes tremendous sense that we'd be able to communicate with it in a way that is meaningful and useful in our lives. Ultimately, we may discover that the same power that heals our deepest hurts and creates peace between nations holds the key to our survival as a species.

The worldwide census that was conducted in 2000 is believed to be the most accurate accounting of our world in recorded history. Among the compelling statistics that the survey revealed about our global family, and perhaps the most telling, is our nearly universal sense that we're here on purpose, and we're not alone. Over 95 percent of the world's population believes in the existence of a higher power. Of that number, over half call that power "God."

The question now is less about whether or not something is "out there," and more about what that "something" means in our lives. How can we speak to the higher power that so many of us believe in? The same traditions that described nature's secrets thousands of years ago answered this question as well. As you'd expect, the language that connects us with God is found in a very common experience that we all share. It is the experience of our feelings and emotions.

When we focus on a certain quality of feeling in our hearts, we're actually using the mode of prayer that was largely forgotten after the now well-publicized biblical edits of the fourth century. The key to using feeling as our prayer-language is simply to understand how prayer works. In the

most remote and isolated sanctuaries remaining on Earth today, those least disturbed by modern civilization, we find some of the best-preserved examples of how we may speak to the presence that 95 percent of us believes exists.

Feeling Is the Prayer

I was reeling from what I'd just heard. The cold from the stone floor beneath my knees had found its way through the dampness of two layers of clothing that I'd worn that morning. Each day on the Tibetan plateau is both summer and winter: summer in the direct high-altitude sun; and winter as the sun disappears behind the jagged peaks of the Himalayas . . . or behind the high temple walls like those that surrounded me. It felt as if there was nothing between my skin and the ancient stones on the floor beneath me, yet I couldn't leave. This was the reason why I'd invited 20 others to join me in a journey that led us halfway around the world. On this day, we found ourselves in some of the most remote, isolated, magnificent, and sacred places of knowledge remaining on Earth today: the monasteries of the Tibetan plateau.

For 14 days we'd acclimated our bodies to altitudes of more than 16,000 feet above sea level. We'd crossed an icy river in hand-hewn wooden barges, and driven for hours peering at one another over our surgical masks, which doubled as filters for the dust that floated through the floorboards of our vintage Chinese bus. Although the bus seemed as old as the temples themselves, our translator assured me that it wasn't! Holding on to the seats around us, and even on to one another, we had braced ourselves over washed-away bridges and roadless desert, as we were jarred from the inside out, just to be in this very place in this precise moment. I thought, Today is not about being warm. Today is a day of answers.

I focused my attention directly into the eyes of the beautiful and timeless-looking man seated lotus-style in front of me: the abbot of the monastery. Through our translator, I'd just asked him the same question that I'd asked each monk and nun that we'd met throughout our pilgrimage: *"When we see your prayers," I began, "what are you doing? When we see you tone and chant for 14 and 16 hours a day, when we see the bells, the bowls, the gongs, the chimes, the mudras, and the mantras on the outside, what is happening to you on the inside?"*

As the translator shared the abbot's reply, a powerful sensation rippled through my body, and I knew that this was the reason we'd come to this place. *"You have never seen our prayers," he answered, "because a prayer cannot be seen."* Adjusting the heavy wool robes beneath his feet, the abbot continued. *"What you have seen is what we do to create the feeling in our bodies. Feeling is the prayer!"*

The clarity of the abbot's answer sent me reeling. His words echoed the ideas that had been recorded in ancient Gnostic and Christian traditions more than 2,000 years ago. In early translations of the biblical book of John (chapter. 16, verse 24, for example), we're invited to empower our prayers by being surrounded [feeling] by our desires fulfilled, just as the abbot suggested: *"Ask without hidden motive and be surrounded by your answer."* For our prayers to be answered, we must transcend the doubt that often accompanies the positive nature of our desire.

Following a brief teaching on the power of overcoming such polarities, the words of Jesus recorded in the Nag Hammadi Library remind us that when we do this, and say to the mountain, *"Mountain move away, it will move away."*²

If the wisdom was that consistent over such vast periods of time, then it must be useful to us, even today! Using nearly identical language, both the abbot and the scrolls were describing a form of prayer that has been largely forgotten in the West.

Sacred Lessons from the Past

Prayer is perhaps one of the most ancient and mysterious of human experiences. It's also one of the most personal. Even before the word prayer appeared in spiritual practices, the oldest records of the Christian and Gnostic traditions used words such as communion to describe our ability to speak with the unseen forces of the universe. Prayer is unique to everyone who experiences it. Some estimate that there are as many different ways to pray as there are people who do the praying!

Today, modern prayer researchers have identified four broad categories that are believed to encompass all the many ways that we pray. In no particular order, they are: (1) colloquial, or informal, prayers; (2) petitionary prayers; (3) ritualistic prayers; and (4) meditative prayers.³ When we pray, they suggest that we use one of these four modes—or a combination.

As good as these descriptions are, and as well as each of these prayers appears to work, there's always been another mode of prayer that this list doesn't account for. This fifth mode of prayer, the "*lost mode*," is a prayer that's based solely in feeling. Rather than the sense of helplessness that often leads us to ask for assistance from a higher power, feeling-based prayer acknowledges our ability to communicate with the intelligent force that 95 percent of us believe in, and participate in the outcome.

Without any words, without our hands held in a certain position or any outward physical expression, this mode of prayer simply invites us to feel a clear and powerful feeling as if our prayers have already been answered. Through this intangible "*language*," we participate in the healing of our bodies, the abundance that comes to our friends and families, and the peace between nations.

Sometimes we see references to this mode of prayer, perhaps without recognizing what we're being shown. In the American Southwest, for instance, ancient stone structures were created in the desert by their builders as "*chapels*": sacred places where wisdom could be shared and prayers offered. These perfectly circular stone buildings, some submerged and covered deep within the earth, were known as kivas (pronounced *KEE-vuhs*). Etched, carved, and painted into the walls of some kivas are clues as to how the lost mode of prayer was used in native traditions.

Inside restored kivas in the Four-Corners area, there are the remnants of the mud plaster that covered the stone structures long ago. Lightly etched into the earthen stucco, we can still see the faint images of rain clouds and lightning hovering over abundant fields of corn. In other places, the walls show outlines that hint at wildlife such as elk and deer, which were abundant in the valleys. In this way, the ancient artists recorded the secret of the lost mode of prayer.

In the places where the prayers were offered, those praying surrounded themselves with the images of the very things that they chose to experience in their lives! Not unlike the scenes of miracles and resurrection that we see in a church or temple today, the images inspired those who were praying with the feeling that their prayers had been answered. For them, prayer was a full-body experience, involving all of their senses.

If you have not already done so, I now invite you to try this mode of prayer for yourself. Think of something that you'd like to experience in your life—anything. It may be the healing of a physical condition for you or someone else, abundance for your family, or finding the perfect person to share your life with. Whatever you're thinking of, rather than asking for it to become present in your life, feel as though it has already happened. Breathe deeply, and feel the fullness of your prayer fulfilled in every detail, in every way.

Now, feel the gratitude for what your life is like with this prayer already answered. Note the ease and release that comes from the giving of thanks, rather than the longing and yearning that comes from asking for help! The subtle difference between the ease and the longing is the power that sets asking apart from receiving.