

# THE HEALING PATH OF PRAYER

A Modern Mystic's Guide  
To Spiritual Power

*Ron Roth*

*With Peter Occhiogrosso*



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HEALING  
PATH  
OF  
PRAYER



A MODERN MYSTIC'S  
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SPIRITUAL POWER

RON ROTH

WITH PETER OCCHIOGROSSO

FOREWORD BY CAROLINE MYSS, Ph.D.



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*To all the friends and family members who supported me as I traveled my own path of prayer, from institutional to independent healer. Your love helped bring me closer to God during a time of difficulty and growth.*



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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I am indebted to many people whose love, support, and encouragement during my years of healing work have brought me to this joyous moment in my life, culminating in the realization of this book. Although they are too numerous to list, I am grateful to each of them, and I ask God to bless them all with the best life has to offer. I do, however, need to single out a handful of people who were instrumental in helping me complete this book.

I begin by thanking my Aunt Julie and Uncle Ben and my associate and dearest friend, Paul Funfsinn, whose guidance and love continue to be invaluable assets to me. Caroline Myss was there for me during my darkest times of loneliness. Dr. Norman Shealy encouraged me to move forward in the field of spiritual healing. Bob and Linda Sendra have given me their friendship and inspiration throughout the years. My parents, William and Valerie, have passed from the physical dimension of existence, yet their spirit is continually with me.

Louise L. Green was my first office manager and secretary in healing work, and her combination of guidance and efficiency kept my healing ministry on its course during the early days. Dorothy and Karl Baughman opened their home to me and my work so that I could continue to bring God's healing love to an even larger number of people. Janice Christopher and Eugenia Patthoff assisted me in assembling the original manuscript.

I would also like to thank my agent, Stuart Krichevsky, who shepherded this project through the publishing stage, and my editor, Leslie Meredith, who had faith in this book from the beginning and whose many helpful suggestions improved the manuscript immensely. Finally, I want to thank my coauthor, Peter Occhiogrosso, whose expertise in Eastern religions and mysticism have brought me a deeper appreciation of these traditions. He has become more than a colleague to me. I call him my friend.



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# FOREWORD

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**Caroline Myss, Ph.D.**

Does prayer really work or are we simply releasing our needs and concerns into empty space? How do we know our prayers are answered? Are miracles real? If so, do we need to do something special to qualify for such profound divine intervention?

Few of us have not asked these types of questions. Everyone of us has had moments—perhaps even years—when we have been unable to find a way through the crises that are a continual part of the human experience. After all, life is a mystery and we all require a candle to light our way through the dark times.

*The Healing Path of Prayer: A Modern Mystic's Guide to Spiritual Power* is a treasury of answers to these questions—answers that we can rarely attain on our own. Those who have received responses to their prayers say with absolute certainty that the source of their answer was divine and believe that all is possible with faith. How do we find our faith? Is there a way to activate this force inside of us when we need it?

In this rich and inspiring book, Ron guides us into the heart of prayer and offers us examples of profound healings that can result from prayer—from the healing of terminal illnesses to the healing of infertility. These remarkable real-life events are all a part of Ron's life as a healer and of all that he represents as a teacher of the mysteries of God.

In reading this magnificent book, you know immediately that each story Ron shares is authentic, separating the meaning and power of prayer from the fictitious and superstitious notions that often clutter the truth. He directs us into the power of these experiences by weaving personal instructions on how to pray using meditation techniques with directions on how to use our breath to draw us into the interior of our minds, our hearts, and our spirits. The techniques in this book are both ancient and modern, universal and personal. Moreover, they are effective. Aside from the many methods of instruction Ron presents, he also shares with us the history of prayer, such as the original wording and meaning of the "Our Father," offering us insight into how we were meant to interpret that prayer. Knowing the truth behind this prayer and the many others he investigates can literally bring you to your knees with the awesome light he shines on the history of these sacred words and the power they contain—power that was and is meant to flood our spiritual life.

Ron further adds so much wealth to his work by combining the teachings of other major spiritual traditions. His use of the endless wisdom of the Hebrew tradition, together with that of Hinduism and Buddhism, complete his presentation like a mandala, giving us a spectrum of light and truth through which to absorb the intimate and ever-compassionate nature of God.

I feel honored to be a part of this text with this Foreword, not only because Ron is one of my dearest friends, but because I have personally witnessed the power of prayer he describes, as well as his God-given ability to heal others. Throughout this affecting and effective teaching, Ron shares his personal journey as a Catholic priest who discovered the reality of divine intervention in healing. Although Ron had never planned a life as a healer, he was called to the task in the manner that God often calls us—when we least expect it and in such a way that we cannot say no. He was called on spontaneously and publicly to pray, and when he did members of the prayer service were healed. Were someone to ask me if Ron's healing power is authentic, I would have

no other reply but yes. And if someone asked me to describe in one word the significance of the  
~~book, only one word is worthy of reply: truth.~~

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# AUTHOR'S NOTE

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My whole mission is to make the idea of a loving God credible again to people. For too long religion has portrayed a punishing God, lying in wait to throw the wicked into hell for breaking even one of His laws. I want to spread the word that God is on our side.

The basis of this book is the knowledge that every one of us has at one time or another felt a energy that we didn't know how to explain. In our most ecstatic moments, we may have felt a touch on our shoulder, and nobody was there. We may have felt some caring presence breathing upon us, and no one was there. We may have smelled the aroma of roses when none were in the room. In my case, when I went to Medjugorje the chain of the rosary I was praying on turned to gold. These phenomena are evidence of God's love in action, saying to us that there is energy all around us that we haven't yet tapped into. When we finally do learn to tap into that energy through prayer, it will work wonders. ...



# INTRODUCTION

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*Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you*

I CORINTHIANS 3:16

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According to the Gospel of John, Jesus said to his disciples (14:12), “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do.” What did Jesus actually mean by these startling words? Was he saying that we would share an abstract piety, or did he mean that we could all possess the ability to heal, as he did? I believe that Jesus meant exactly what he said when he told his disciples, “Whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him” (Mark 11:23–24).

Jesus is referring to the faith that results in healing. Clearly he is not referring to faith in institutional dogmas and doctrines—in fact, Jesus spent much of his ministry decrying the institutional brand of faith purveyed by the religious leaders of his day. Repeatedly in the Gospels, Jesus names personal, inner faith as the immediate cause of the miraculous. “Daughter, your faith has made you well,” he says to the woman who touched the hem of his garment and was healed of her hemorrhaging (Mark 5:24ff). “Go your way; your faith has made you whole,” he says to the blind beggar (Luke 18:42). When the Roman centurion’s servant is miraculously healed, Jesus does not tell the centurion that God has healed his servant, or even that he (Jesus) has healed him. The centurion’s faith, Jesus says, has saved his servant.

In the verse following his statement about moving mountains in Mark 11, Jesus tells us plainly: “Whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive if you have faith.” As elsewhere in the Gospels, Jesus links prayer with the ability to heal and produce miracles. But he adds one crucial condition: “Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven will forgive you your trespasses.” Jesus’ mission is to transmit love and forgiveness, which are prerequisites to authentic prayer.

Faith, prayer, forgiveness. These are the linchpins of the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. If we but knew how to pray and had faith that what we were praying for would come to be, Jesus is telling us, we could ourselves perform the same feats as he—and more. We can heal ourselves and others, we can bring abundance and joy to our lives—but first we have to learn how to pray. In this book, I will attempt to explain in detail the connection between healing, faith, and prayer and give explicit instructions on how you can pray in a way that taps into the healing energy of God. That energy can be applied not only toward physical healing but also, perhaps more significantly, to heal emotional and spiritual wounds that have thrown the spirit out of balance and may have opened the door for physical maladies. On a larger scale, we can look at our entire life as one long healing process: as we heal ourselves of our identification with the body and the separative ego, we learn to see ourselves as spirit connected with all other human spirits and with the Spirit of God. This is indeed healing toward wholeness.

In some cases, simply reconceptualizing how you perceive God and how you approach prayer may release you from the negative energy generated by the confused and often oppressive conceptions that may have been inculcated in you by religious institutions earlier in life. Such a reconception in itself may begin the healing of body, mind, and spirit.

Through a series of simple but effective daily practices and rituals, you can become your own priest and celebrate your own sacraments. You can become a mystic in the course of your daily life. Today you no longer need to enter a convent or seminary, a monastery or ashram or temple to live the mystical life. By learning how to pray effectively and how to gain access to the healing energy of God, we can all be mystics and priests. We will be fulfilling the promise in the ancient scripture of Exodus, which predates the teachings of Jesus, and which says, in the nineteenth chapter, that God led his people out of Egypt and bore them “on eagles’ wings” to make them H



own if they keep His covenant. Then God adds, “For all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

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I believe it is our calling today to be a kingdom of priests. Without the mediation of an institutional church, we can all take on the functions of priest and laity, and practice faith, prayer, and forgiveness. In fact, that artificial division between official and layperson is no longer necessary. I’d like to propose a single category for all of us: mystic.

To that end, I’ve included in each chapter of this book distinctive prayer and meditation exercises that each of you can incorporate into your lives. Some take more time than others, some should be performed alone, while others can be conducted with a friend or a group of like-minded souls. But all are designed to be worked into your daily schedule so that you can maximize your awareness and remembrance of the divine presence in your life. Although I invite you to find your own rhythm in working with these exercises, I would recommend that you allow at least a week for each of them to enter gently into your consciousness. It’s easy to become confused or feel overwhelmed by taking on too much spiritual work too quickly. If you read this book at a faster pace than that, give yourself time to return to the exercises you’ve passed over once you’ve incorporated the previous ones into your awareness. Naturally, you are free to start with one particular prayer or exercise until you feel comfortable moving on, or at any time take a rest from the process. It simply takes some people longer than others to digest each step along the path, depending on how long it takes your spirit to metabolize each prayer exercise. Nobody is keeping score.

People often express confusion over the difference between prayer and meditation. I’ve heard the saying that prayer is talking to God, but meditation is God talking to you. I don’t agree with that, since for me prayer also means primarily listening to God. As far as I’m concerned, a prayer can be defined as communion with God in whatever form you choose, including silence. Meditation, then, is simply a particularized form of prayer.

If you have never meditated before, the best way to begin is by emptying your mind of all preconceptions you may have acquired, especially the notion that it takes years of hard work to “learn” how to meditate. You will actually begin to learn the moment you sit down and enter into one of the exercises in this book. All you really need is to find a quiet spot—preferably a separate room but possibly just a corner of your bedroom—and allot a few minutes each day during which you will not be disturbed.

Dozens of books on the market offer detailed instructions about posture and breathing—and someday I’m going to read them all, really I am. For now, it’s best to keep the basics simple. Although it’s helpful to sit up (lying down tends to be a prelude to sleep) and keep your back straight, you don’t need to work yourself into a classic full-lotus posture. Especially for us aging Westerners with weak backs and crabby knees, sitting on a chair with your feet planted flat on the floor and legs uncrossed is fine. Closing your eyes is optional, and taking air in slowly and steadily through the nostrils and letting it out evenly through the mouth is the simplest and most common method.

Before doing anything else in your prayer or meditation sessions, spend a few minutes just placing your attention on your breath. Focusing on the breath is one element common to the meditation techniques of all the world’s mystical traditions, whether Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, Sufi, Kabbalistic, or Christian. As we shall see, the breath is one manifestation of the action of the Holy Spirit in the world. Some people like to place a few sacred images (we’ll say more about those later), and possibly a candle or two on the floor or a low table that can serve as a home altar. One of the oldest forms of meditation from India involves focusing your attention on a candle flame, and this may help you in the beginning.

That's about all you need to know about meditation to get started. I'll provide somewhat more detailed advice beginning with the exercise at the end of [Chapter 1](#).

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It's natural for someone picking up a book of this kind, which purports to prescribe the most productive ways to pray, to wonder how I myself conceptualize the Divine. I'm afraid I can't answer that easily or succinctly, and I don't think it would be especially helpful even if I could. In the view of most Eastern mystics, we're wasting our time trying to define God; for them, God has to be experienced, and I would agree with them. My experience of God is of a loving Being of unbounded energy whose love and guidance are always available to me as long as I let myself be open to them.

My deepest aspiration for anyone reading this book is for each of you, through the exercises and prayers I've included, to find God in a way that is significant to you at this particular time in your life. I don't necessarily want you to have my experience of God, or your mother's or father's. You have to discover God on your own. That's part of what I believe Jesus was trying to get across when he said, "But when you pray, go into your closet and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret" (Matt. 6:6). You may gain great strength from praying or meditating with other people at times, but your experience of God will ultimately be your own. Think of it as a voyage of discovery, with the destination to become clearer as you sail further along.



## IN THE BEGINNING ...



*My nature became so sensitized that I could lay my hands on any man or woman and tell what organ was diseased, and to what extent.*

◆  
JOHN LAKE

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**M**y first healing occurred when I was eleven years old. I had developed a severe strep throat and become so sick that my parents were getting ready to take me to the hospital. As I waited to go, I heard a voice inside me say very clearly, “Take your first two fingers and put them up to your throat where the infection is, and I will heal you.”

I never doubted for a moment that this would happen. With a child’s confidence, I did as I was told and immediately began to feel better. My parents told me not to speak of this to anyone, just as they had told me not to speak of an experience six years before, when, following a routine mastectomy operation, something had gone wrong and I’d started turning blue. On that occasion, my throat had puffed up and the doctors had held out no hope that I would live. In referring to this incident later, my parents always told me that I had almost died of complications following surgery, but now I am convinced that I *had* died. I still retain a dim memory of seeing myself as a little child being taken into Jesus’ arms and then abruptly pulled back to Earth. (When I was fifty-four, I recounted these events to a spiritually oriented psychiatrist friend of mine who told me that I had had a near-death experience. Until then, I simply hadn’t had the vocabulary to describe it.)

When the healing occurred at age eleven, I didn’t connect it to the earlier experience, and so I forgot both events until I was in my mid-thirties. By then, I had been a Roman Catholic priest for several years, having been ordained in 1966. Something had begun to happen in my work for which I wasn’t prepared but that conjured up long-suppressed memories of those childhood events. The content couldn’t have been more mundane, and perhaps the very ordinariness of the setting helped to set off a dramatic relief the surprising nature of what was about to occur. I had been assigned to outlying Midwestern parishes, safely ensconced among the corn and soybeans, where my superiors probably figured I couldn’t disturb anyone with my somewhat iconoclastic views of the importance of individual spiritual authority. My work had begun to lose its savor, and I found myself increasingly in a state of ease with my role as parish priest.

Around this time, a fellow priest named Dan with whom I had been in the seminary but who was a few years younger than I appeared in my parish. He had had a nervous breakdown some time before, yet when he visited me I saw that every pore of his being radiated a joy that I had lost. I had known him a long time and now he was utterly changed, so I asked him how he had come by this sudden joy.

“I had an experience with God,” he said simply. When I asked how that had happened, he said that while he had been institutionalized some religious people had come to visit and had prayed with him. He said they had laid hands on him and asked God to give him just what he needed. And he got it. As a priest, of course, I ought to have believed in the power of prayer as much as anyone, but I had never seen such a simple and unavoidable sign of its efficacy. I asked Dan to pray with me as those folks had prayed with him. I still had enough faith to believe that something would come of it.

Dan told me to kneel down and then he uttered a prayer to God that completely astonished me. Dan’s prayer may sound inexplicably simple, but all he said was “Come, Holy Spirit, fill Ron now.” Then he began to speak in tongues—an unspecified language made up of uncomprehended and apparently random vocal sounds. The combination had a profound emotional and spiritual effect on me. I thought I knew how to pray. I thought I knew how to make a connection with God. I thought I understood that God was loving and merciful and kind, and was not a wrathful God. Yet when Dan spoke that prayer, something inexplicable happened to me. Today I would say that my heart chakra opened, because I could actually feel the heat and movement in my chest, and the one thing I wanted more than anything else at that moment was to give people an awareness of God’s love. I had been pretty successful as a give-’em-hell preacher in the past, but all of that changed in a heartbeat. At that time, however, I did not know anything about the chakras, the seven spiritual energy centers in the

body, derived from Hindu spirituality.

I felt this love within me so powerfully that I decided that I would try something different in my church. That Saturday, I called in the janitor at my church and asked him if he had a long microphone cord that could reach from the altar to the back of the church. He sounded dubious but he agreed to set it up for me. When I walked into the church on Sunday morning, for the first time in my preaching career I became aware of a presence taking hold of me. This presence took the form of an enveloping aura of confidence that told me to move away from the altar because I didn't need the notes I prepared for my sermon. If I would just allow myself to be a channel, what needed to be said to the people would be said.

If you've ever spent much time inside a Catholic church, you know that on a Sunday, most of the congregation arrives two minutes before mass and occupies the last ten pews in the back of the church. They fight for those rear pews, where they can hide without fear of being noticed. I felt that, if nothing else worked, just the fact that I could now walk to the back of the church where the parishioners didn't expect me to go would be enough to blow the saddle right out from underneath them. As I started to talk, sharing whatever was coming through me, I picked the microphone off its stand and made my way to the back. People who had been checking their wristwatches a moment before suddenly sat up straight with some alarm and began to listen. The following week, a small miracle occurred: most of my parishioners sat in the front. Maybe they felt that if I was going to the back of the church, they could avoid me by moving up.

For whatever reason, the word soon got out that I was doing something unusual at my church, and a short time I was invited to speak in a nearby hall to a new interfaith organization of Catholics, Protestants, and nondenominational believers. I was told that about forty members would be present but when I arrived more than four hundred people had gathered in the room. I gave a talk on the healing power of God.

After I had finished, the gentleman in charge came over to me and said rather casually that a lot of sick people were in the audience. He asked if I would mind praying for them. I was a parish priest from a very conservative Catholic neighborhood, so I assumed he meant "Pray for these people in the privacy of your home for God's will to be done." That usually meant praying for them to learn to accept their sickness, so I assured him I would be more than happy to do so. But to this man, who was a Pentecostal, prayer and healing meant something much more immediate. He promptly returned the microphone. "Ron would be delighted to pray for the healing of those in the audience who are sick," he announced happily, "and by so doing to demonstrate the power of God active in our midst. So would anyone interested in healing please come forward now?"

When I heard those words, I almost went into cardiac arrest. Theologically speaking, I believed in the power of God—but the power of God *to heal* was another matter...or was it? I sat there stunned and two hundred people began to file up to the podium. That was when I recalled my seminary training during which one of my professors had told us, "If you're ever caught in a situation where you don't know what to do, look pious." That I could handle. I put my head down and started to count the tiles on the floor, hoping to become not only pious but invisible. The man at the microphone called to me to come over, but he had to walk over to me and literally take me by the arm to get me to go. I had never done anything like a public healing, and I was thinking to myself that I wasn't about to begin now.

My mind was racing to come up with the most pious prayer imaginable. "Now," I said in my best clerical tone of voice, "while every eye is closed and every head is bowed, let us pray." At the same time, I silently uttered to myself the most profoundly theological prayer that came to mind: *Help!*

When you take yourself too seriously, however, the Spirit of God, or what some people might call an angel of the Lord, comes down to touch you and lighten you up—a lesson I learned very well that night. Just at that moment, an astonishing question for a Catholic priest in the early 1970s popped in

my mind. I firmly believe that what springs into your mind at moments like these is not at all accidental and I asked myself, ~~What would Oral Roberts do at a time like this?~~

For the better part of the past year, I had been in the habit of watching Roberts on Sunday morning before going to the church to celebrate mass. Since I knew my congregation probably wouldn't be caught dead watching a Protestant faith healer, I even used to steal some of his sermons! I didn't believe in healing, but the guy was a great preacher and I wasn't above appropriating some of his messages. Now I had use for another of his techniques. I had seen Roberts lay hands on people, so I instantly decided I should emulate him in this as well. With that thought in mind, I walked off the platform toward the woman at the head of the line.

All of a sudden, I was seized with a bad case of second-guessing. Wait a minute, I thought, laying hands on people is what the *Protestants* do! Catholics make the sign of the cross. And in fact, the woman in front of me turned out to be Catholic. "Just bless me, Father," she said. Bless her or lay hands on her, what should I do? Then the voice of God said very loudly to me, "Give her double or nothing!"

I laid my left hand on the woman's forehead and blessed her with my right, as out of my mouth came the words, "You're healed!" And I continued to move swiftly through the crowd, speeding up the process as I went so that I could make a quick exit. I arrived home that night somewhat exhausted by an experience that I had neither desired nor planned and proceeded to put the entire event out of my mind.

Approximately four months later, the woman I had touched at the front of the line showed up on the doorstep of my church to share with me what had happened to her since that healing service. She began by saying that she had never experienced anything like it in her life. "When you touched me," she said, "I felt a lightning bolt go through me. And I heard a voice say to me, 'Go back to your doctor.'"

She then revealed to me for the first time that prior to coming to my talk she had been diagnosed with lung cancer. "On Monday morning, I called my doctor," she continued, "and said I wanted to come in for some more tests."

The day after the tests were done, her doctor informed her that no trace of cancer could be detected. From the day she told me that story, my life followed a direction I had not consciously charted and could not have predicted.

The focal point of my consciousness shifted from preaching to spiritual healing. People began coming to me for help, although at the time I did not understand how I could provide this help. I was following a meandering path of gradual recognition, with plenty of fits and starts along the way, and my destination was often far from clear. I had begun to hold an ecumenical service on Monday nights at my church because I wanted to meet the needs of Protestants and Catholics who had intermarried and felt excluded from their own churches. One night a woman in a wheelchair was brought to me for the service. I was led to touch her on her hip, and as I did so I heard a crackle of electricity and suddenly the man standing next to her fell to the floor. I was terribly unnerved and said to myself, "Thank you, God, but that's enough of this."

After that service, I went back to the rectory with the firm intention of having a long talk with the Lord and setting Him straight. But what I found out is that God talks, we listen. I began to realize that I had little control over what was happening through me other than to make myself the clearest channel I could. Around this time a phrase from the Prayer of Saint Francis embedded itself in my consciousness: "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace." This suggested that I needed to surrender to a force far greater than myself, a force that could be trusted to do the work *through* me. I needed only to offer that "spiritual force" a vehicle through which to operate. Gradually I gave in to God's desire and began to learn how to heal by the power of God's Spirit, which emanates from love and fills the whole universe with its divine energy.

As I continued my healing services, I saw people get out of their wheelchairs or drop their crutches. I received reports from some who were healed of cancer and from women who had been unable to conceive but who were now pregnant—all of these cases verified by their own doctors. In many instances, I did not even have to touch physically the person seeking healing. All that was needed was my intention to be the channel of God's divine energy, no matter what the circumstances.

As a direct result of these experiences, I became convinced that prayer was the conduit of the healing energy that my parishioners and I tangibly felt. On some occasions, I actually experienced the presence; at other times, tremendous heat would fill the church or the sound of electrical discharge would ripple through the air. Since it has always been plain to me that I am perfectly ordinary in almost every way, I knew that I could not be personally responsible for these healings. I continued to ask God for an explanation of what was happening, and one evening I received a very long dissertation that I can briefly summarize: "It is not up to you. You don't need to know what is happening or why. Your job is to pray, to connect, to love and show compassion for people. I do the rest."

I still couldn't help asking what kind of prayer was the key to this startling energy release and the healings that were occurring through me. The kind of prayer I had been taught as a Catholic boy growing up in the Midwest had never had this kind of effect. On reflection, I realized that I had never had a single course on how to pray. Even during my years in the seminary, we had received no instruction on the Lord's Prayer, perhaps the most important prayer in the Christian canon, and we had had no course on invoking the Holy Spirit. When we had studied the sacraments, we focused entirely on getting the ritual correct. We had never talked about whether the sacraments or prayer generate energy of any sort.

Based on my own experiences with prayer after leaving the seminary, however, I had begun to reexamine what I believed and what I had been taught. I gradually came to realize that the essence of genuine prayer lies not in the words themselves or in some attitude of solemnity or piousness but in our focus on God and the attributes of God. As I learned to center myself on God rather than obsessing about my personal difficulties or problems, prayers like the Our Father and the 23rd Psalm, which had grown stale and devoid of energy from years of perfunctory recitation, began to come alive in me. God began to reveal Himself as a genuine presence, a living, vibrating energy.

At the time, I hadn't heard of "centering prayer," a method of meditative prayer promulgated in the 1970s and '80s by Father Thomas Keating, a Cistercian monk and the former abbot of St. Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts, and Father Basil Pennington, a Trappist monk also at St. Joseph's. Centering prayer combined early Christian mystical models, especially the anonymous fourteenth-century treatise *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and certain Eastern techniques, most notably the Transcendental Meditation developed by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.

I had stumbled across my own version of centering prayer, which I deepened by readings of the Desert Fathers and medieval Christian mystical works, including *The Cloud*. I may not have called it centering prayer back then, but that would have been the right name for what I had begun to do: centering on the core of who I really was. I began to simplify my prayers, letting myself dwell on a single word or phrase until the repetition carried me into a blissful feeling of unity with God unlike any I had achieved from wordier prayers. The principles of this kind of prayer are quite simple and can be easily learned by anyone willing to try.

1. Begin by choosing a sacred word that is a symbol of your intention to consent to the presence and action of God within you. The word could be the name of Jesus in English, Greek, or Aramaic, for instance, or the name of any sacred Being or holy person of your choice, like the Buddha, Kuan Yin, or Sri Ramakrishna. Or it could be a word such as "love," "peace," "surrender," or an attribute of God such as "mercy" or "light."



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