



## Yearning

When I'm on top of the world, it's easy to forget gratitude and humility. So the greatest gift of longing is just to tap into your inadequacy or the world's inadequacy, the homesickness your heart has. That opens the doors of the heart; that's where prayer life begins.

RABBI TIRZAH FIRESTONE

Prayer expresses desire. Holy desire: for an end to an illness or for a peaceful world, to live in joy and to behave well, or to find connection with God. We start by asking, where does holy desire come from? Why do we yearn? For what do we long?

### Longing and Belonging

Longing is the impulse that started the process of creation. Not God's will, but God's desire. So I understand longing as a language that is hard-wired within us, who were made in the image of God. Longing is how we communicate with Source, the way we bring the energy of creation into the world. So when my prayers really come from that longing place, they have the greatest power.

RABBI NADYA GROSS

In the heart of our souls, there is an existential longing that most of us sublimate, a place we often only face with mortality, for as much as we're surrounded by friends and family, dying is the one place that is truly ours to navigate. You can find your dream job or live in your dream place, you can marry your dream partner, and you think the longing would be gone. But it's not.

RABBI SHAWN ZEVIT

Our tradition tells us that the soul has its own yearning, its own longing for union with the Divine. Longing to connect with another and longing to connect with the Eternal, with God. If we ignore that yearning, we can have everything and still feel empty. That's why as a society we can have so much and still feel like there's a hole, an emptiness that can't be filled. *Tzama lecha nafshi* [Psalms 63:1, My soul thirsts for You] is describing that hunger.

RABBI NAOMI LEVY

Prayer is about longing and belonging. To "belong" is to "be-in-longing." Praying is being able to say, "*Ribbono shel Olam*, Master of the World, I belong to you, and I am in-longing for you. I believe that You long for me, and are in-longing for me." When we can identify where we belong, to whom we belong, to whom we are in-longing, then our lives have been transformed.

REB MIMI FEIGELSON

### Prayer and Love

We cannot speak much about desire without turning to the strongest of the noble emotions, to love.

For me, prayer is all about yearning. In a way, when we really pray, we expose ourselves to the humility of that deep longing.

What do we long for? Love. Not much more than that. We long to know that we are loved in such a way that we matter. That Someone cares when we're in distress. It takes courage to humble ourselves so much, in pining for love. It takes courage to pray.

RABBI ZOË KLEIN

I use a myriad of images to think of Divinity at different times in my life, but mostly, I speak to God as one lover to the other. I find that for myself, this has the most comfort and the most power. I recognize, theologically, the problematic with it, but as Reb Zalman [Schachter-Shalomi] once said, I don't let my theology get in the way of my spiritual life.

RABBI LAVEY YITZCHAK DERBY

## The Seed and the Fruit

Part of what davenning does is reorient us toward our deepest yearnings, our real wants. Yearning is both a seed and fruit. Yearning is true when it's something that fills you with wholeness, and yearning itself fills you with wholeness much like what you imagine and yearn for. It's a funny thing. When you yearn for wholeness, the yearning itself brings you wholeness.

RABBI DAVID INGBER

This is an important, if paradoxical, truth about the efficacy of prayer, one that I resisted for much of my life. It seems too easy, and too self-serving. But that was before I prayed with sincerity. Just as recognizing the source of a problem can solve the problem, recognizing the depth of our desire for peace or love can actually evoke peace or love.

The experience of longing I can only describe as an exquisite pain that brings intense joy. Finding the longing is already finding the connection. Prayer is one of the ways I get there.

RABBI NADYA GROSS

## Stay in Touch with Your Longing

Yearning can reveal the gap between where we are and where we ought to be. Sometimes longing is painful, but as Rabbi Nadya Gross reports, we might experience our pain with compassion. We can feel the pain of where we are, but we can also experience the joy of getting honest and knowing where we want to go. We can hold on to longing and let it be our teacher.

I can't always tell you what's missing, but it's staying with "missing," with "longing," that gets me in touch. And if we don't try to solve the question right away, if we don't look at prayer as being the answer, but at prayer as being a conversation, we can enter a dialogue.

I liken this process of being with missing or longing or disconnection with the universe's black holes. At first when we looked at black holes, we only saw the absence of light. Until we pointed the Hubble telescope at them. Then, voilà! Thousands of galaxies. There were fireworks going on in there. All these worlds of light. All these worlds of possibility that we could not see—not because they weren't there, but our capacity and vision were not strong enough to penetrate the veil. That's what prayer can reveal, if we get in touch with our longing and peer into what may at first seem like nothingness.

RABBI SHAWN ZEVIT

Yearning seems to be one of those things we are either born with or not. Many people feel quite at home in the world and don't live with a sense of something missing. Those raised in a happy and healthy home may well wonder what all the commotion is about. As long as they are living in honesty rather than denial, they certainly shouldn't feel bad about it.

For others, yearning is always present. Here the question is whether longing is healthy and holy or self-centered and destructive. Do we long for virtue or vice, for peace or for power, for joy