

Reflections on the BP ‘prayer-chain’

Preamble

Broadly speaking, prayer is an activity between people and their God.

The specific activity of our prayer-chain is aimed at enhancing outcomes for the declared needs of others. We want to do it well. So we did our bit to check out what works best.

David scanned about 180 entries on the net for ‘effective prayer’. Almost all were very traditional with from 3 to 31 ‘tips on prayer’ that were more conceptual than ‘doable’. Vicky scanned the research on ‘prayer outcomes’. Her summary is attached as Appendix I, with key points listed in the following section.

We find that the insights that Quantum Physics offers in showing how all things are inter-related, and how they can influence each other are helpful. Here is an example: a string of DNA on a microscope slide is influenced by the person who views it. If the observer is ‘up tight’ the string tightens. If the observer is relaxed the string unwinds to a looser state.¹ Our moods influence our ‘outside world’, which probably includes our prayerful intentions.

On a grander scale, there is evidence that the energy expended in prayer (words, thoughts and emotion) influences what we traditionally think of as the ‘All Knowing God’. Quantum Physics offers an enlightening update: *You can call it God if you want, but you don’t have to. ‘Quantum consciousness’ will do...we now have a science of spirituality that is fully verifiable and objective.*² Now, there’s a great research area for up and coming young minds!

Here’s a nice link. Sanguin notes that *What scientists call information, Christians call Sophia—information with loving intent, weaving her tapestry throughout the universe.*³ Sanguin defines ‘Sophia’ (Greek for ‘Wisdom’) as *...the hidden wholeness, the very presence of the divine at work and play in the heart of all creation.*⁴

So, here’s a goal for effective prayer—mobilise human energies to collaborate with the wise, all knowing energies of the Cosmos to create the best of what is yet to become— for ourselves, for others, and for our world. It’s a way to ‘pray without ceasing’.

In the mid 1800’s, Rev Jeffris modelled a blend of theology, philosophy, and science to the congregation at Brougham Place. He was well ahead of his time. Modern theologians are playing catch-up. Michael Dowd is one such. His website is *thankgodforevolution.com*. It’s well worth a browse.

The following steps enhance the effectiveness of prayer. A description of each follows.

- Avoid negative ‘sponsoring thoughts’
- Choose helpful space in which to pray
- Power up (get into meditative state)
- Be acutely aware of surroundings
- Merge empathically with the one being prayed for
- Be compassionate and loving
- State your intention clearly and specifically
- Visualise the positive outcome in detail
- Believe the desired outcome is achieved and ‘let go’ responsibility to the higher power
- Pray at good time—some say around 1pm!

¹ http://www.tybro.com/html/effective_prayer.html accessed on 15/11/10

² Amit Gaswami, Website: amitgaswami.org/ accessed on 15/11/10

³ Sanguine, B., 2007, *Darwin, Divinity, and the Dance of the Cosmos*, p.235, Wood Lake Publishing, Canada

⁴ *ibid* p. 175

Pointers to enhance the effectiveness of prayer

The following points have been gleaned from different sources. They are not exhaustive.

Avoid negative ‘Sponsoring Thoughts’

All thoughts, words, and emotions have creative influence. The thought that prompts a prayer has been called the ‘sponsoring thought’. It influences the outcome of the prayer. If the Sponsoring Thought focused on a **need** of some kind (and the prayer then asks for the need to be met) the ‘sponsor’ is likely to create more of what it focused on—i.e. more need. Walsch reports that the only Sponsoring Thought that can override this negativity is *the thought held faith that God will grant whatever is requested without fail*.⁵ One can but agree that very few have such faith. Walsch argues that prayer becomes easier if, rather than having to believe that God gives the nod to all requests, *we realise that the need is already known, and envisage a successful outcome, and give thanks for ‘what is so’*.⁶ This is not always, easy but further steps from McTaggart’s Book ‘The Intention Experiment’ are enlightening.⁷

The Intention Exercises

Lynne McTaggart wrote this overview for people wanting to become part of her global research.

Although the power of intention is such that any sort of focused will may have some effect, the scientific evidence suggests that you will be a more effective ‘intender’ if you become more ‘coherent’ in the scientific sense of the term. To do this to greatest effect, or so the scientific evidence suggests, you will need to choose the right time and place, quieten your mind, learn how to focus, entrain yourself with the object of your intention, visualise, and mentally rehearse. Believing that the experiment will work is also essential.

Below is our summary of the steps that McTaggart’s developed in the light of research findings.

Choose your intention space

‘Conditioning’ your space magnifies the effectiveness of your intentions. The space should be comfortable, an ‘enjoyable refuge’. Have items that help you to meditate—candles, incense, inspirational photos or objects.

The level of ions in the air is a critical factor. Best spots are in natural habitats, near running water, (shower or waterfall), in clear sunshine, after storms, in the mountains. The worst spots are in enclosed spaces with lots of people; near TV, computers, electrical gear; in, cities, in industrial areas; in smog fog, dust or haze.

Installing an ioniser helps, so does running water—even small desktop fountains.

Power up

‘Powering up’ to peak intensity requires that we get into a meditative, dreamlike or ‘alpha’ state (that’s 8–13 herz if you’ve got your own EEG Machine!) Things that help to ‘get into alpha’ are slow, rhythmic breathing using the diaphragm (the belly goes forward when you breathe in and moves towards your backbone when you breathe out)

Practice breathing like this, without straining, until you can work up to about 10 minutes.

Your next step is to still your mind. Focusing on some sort of anchor helps. The focus can be on your breathing; dissociation from your thoughts by floating them away on a carpet; a mantra (such as ‘om’, or ‘ah), music (we have a selection that were selected for the ‘Oasis’ gatherings; or repetition of the rosary. Practice until you can comfortably focus on your anchor for 20 minutes.

⁵Walsh, N. D. 1996, *Conversations with God*, book 1, p.12, Hodder and Stoughton.

⁶ Ibid p. 13.

⁷ McTaggart, Lynne, 2007, *The Intention Experiment*, Free Press, NY.

Peak intensity

When the alpha state is achieved, you need to practice ‘mindfulness’. This involves the precise awareness of manifestations within or without—thoughts, ideas, positive or negative—without judgment or processing—smells, colour, honking, barking. There is a list of practices that will help to develop this kind of ‘vigilance’. We have copied them as Appendix II

Merging with the ‘other’

Research shows that touch or focus on the heart or compassionate feelings for another is a powerful means of causing brainwave connection [synchronicity or harmony] between people.

A number of suggestions are listed for making empathic contact, such as ‘get to know’, ‘go for a walk’, etc. These do not address the ‘how to do it’. We know that being able to feel what the other is feeling (rather than guess or intellectualise about the feeling) is a critical aspect of accurate empathy. You might try the following simple exercise.

1. Think of someone you know well, but do not like very much.
2. Fill in the blanks of the following template (in your mind). Use the ‘strongest’ language you like in your when filling in the blanks.

*‘How does it feel, right now, to be (name/race/age/sex/role)
in (circumstances) with (history) and (expectations)
under (pressures/constraints) from (within/outside)’⁸*

By giving rich, detailed words (sub-vocally) to each element to ‘attune’ to the others state of being and, with considerable practice or accurate intuition, experience a ‘resonance’ with the other’s emotive state.

The exercise is out of usual training context, but you may have found your heart a little ‘warmer’ towards your subject. Within a training context it can help lead to accurate, intimate empathy.

There is a better outcome when the ‘receiver’ is agreeably aware of your intent.

Be compassionate

Before any communication begins, as best you can, ‘empty your heart of all but love’.

Encourage a sense of universal compassion.

Focus on your heart as if sending light to it. Imagine that the light goes right through your body. Love yourself and say (some thing like) ‘May I be well and free from suffering’.(better still give thanks for it).

As you breath out, imagine the white light irradiating from your heart, and think ‘I appreciate the kindnesses and love of all living creatures, may all others be well.

If needs be use the ‘think steps in 2 above to experience any others state of being.

If the person is present ask if you may touch them or hold their hand.

State your intention—specifically

Express your intent specifically and in the present tense—seek an end point. For example, ‘John’s lower back and sacrum are free of pain and now move more easily and fluidly’, rather than ‘John’s problem is OK now, all fixed’.

Frame the intention positively— ‘They will be free of side effects’ —rather than ‘They will not have side effects’. Describe as many of the ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘where’, ‘when’ ‘why’, and ‘how’ aspects as fits the particular intent.

Have a mental dry run— visualise

The best way to send an intention is to visualise the desired outcome with all five senses, in real time. Plan this imagery ahead of time. Don’t just visualise the improved back, see the person running and other

⁸ Kranz, D. H. & Sanders, V. 2006, *Roadworthy skills for counsellors and other helpers*, p.212, Quest Partners, Oakden, Sth Aust

specifics of their life. Visualising need not be applied exclusively to ‘pictures’, word descriptions. Remember to be specific—see or talk ‘healthy nerve endings’ and so on.

Hold belief

Believing in the effectiveness of outcome is a vital component. The copious evidence of the placebo effect demonstrates the extraordinary power of belief. (Remember how good it was when mum ‘kissed it better’?)

It is more effective if the ‘intender’ and the ‘intendee’ share the same belief. Discussing the scientific or experiential evidence of effective outcomes is beneficial. Holding doubts about beneficial outcome projects a negative sponsoring thought that is likely to nullify the intended outcome. Tricky stuff!

Move aside

The most successful ‘intenders’ imagine themselves and the intendee to be at one with the universe—one’s ego is merged with the object of intention and ‘The Field’.

When the intention is clearly stated, one ‘lets go’—‘hand’s over’—to the ‘higher power’. At this point there may be an awareness that the intention has been ‘taken over’. Be conscious that in this process one is a ‘conduit’ sending a request to the universe.

Timing

The evidence suggests that mind-over-matter intention (psychokinesis) works best at points of increased geomagnetic activity. All geomagnetic activity is measured on a ‘K Index’. We can check the index for Australia on the internet at <http://www.ips.gov.au/Geophysical/1/3/1> . The communication of intent is more effective when the K Index is 5 or more.

It is suggested that it may be best to use intention during local 1.00pm sidereal time. Frankly, we cannot fathom how to compute ‘sidereal time’. It has something to do with ‘star time’ as opposed to normal ‘solar time’, but it feels a bit like a refinement that any truly benevolent deity would happily overlook for humble folk like us!

There is evidence, however, that effectiveness is directly linked to one’s state of health and sense of well being (more ‘in tune’ with the Cosmos).

Appendix I

The miracle of prayer and healing—some research findings

There has been much debate about whether and how prayer and healing works

In 2000 John Astin and Elaine Harkness undertook a systematic review of 23 experimental trials involving 2774 patients and found that the methodologic limitations of several studies made it difficult to draw definitive conclusions about the efficacy of distant healing. However, given that approximately 57% of trials showed a positive treatment effect, the evidence thus far merited further study.

Sceptics say many of the findings about the effectiveness of prayer are questionable but positive outcomes continue to get reported. Some of these are listed below

Examples of outcomes of praying and meditation that seem to create miracles include:

- Daniel Benor (2001) reported that he changed from being a sceptical doctor to ‘explorer’ when he examined a man before and after a Reiki healing whose lesion (lump) reduced by 1 cm after the healing. He, Benor (1990) surveyed 150 research studies of spiritual healing which found overall a 74% positive, significant correlation between prayer and healing.
- The Spindrift group (Owen 1988) tested prayer on simple biological systems, such as germinating seeds. They collected their data by praying for the treatment group, and not for the control group, and then measured the respective germination rates of the seeds. Their experimental results were unequivocal:
- In 1988, Randolph Byrd undertook a double-blind study of 393 cardiac patients at the San Francisco General Hospital. He found that patients that were prayed for by Christians were five times less likely to require antibiotics or diuretics, three times less likely to develop pneumonia, or suffer cardiopulmonary arrest, and two and a half times less likely to have congestive heart failure than those in the un-prayed-for control group.
- 1999 William Harris, Manohar Gowda, Jerry Kolb, Christopher Strychacz, James Vacek, Philip Jones, Alan Forker, James O’Keefe, and Ben McCallister replicated Byrd’s study and found that 990 patients prayed-for by people from a range of Christian traditions stayed in the hospital the same average length of time as those not prayed-for, but their overall Coronary Care Unit course scores were significantly lower. In this study, only 51 (10.9%) of the prayed-for patients required major surgery, whereas 76 (14.5%) of the control group did; and only 12 (2.6%) of the prayed-for patients required intra-aortic balloon pumps, whereas 20 (3.8%) of the control group did.
- Zvi Bentwich, (1993) Professor of Medicine at the Kaplan Hospital in Rehovot, Israel, studied the effects of healing intention operating at a distance on a group of hospitalised patients undergoing herniotomy. He found a significant difference in those receiving healing intention when evaluated for 36 variables relating to the speed of recovery from surgery, rate of complications, and cognitive orientation of health—when compared to a control group and a third group who received only suggestion.
- Remote ‘Influencers’ (people using focussed attention) affected the breathing, eye movement, brain rhythm and haemolysis of red blood cells of others some distance away in another place. (Braud, 1995)
- Elisabeth Targ (1995) enrolled 20 patients with advanced AIDS in a randomised, double-blind pilot study at the UC San Francisco Medical Centre. All patients received standard care, but psychic healers prayed for the 10 in the treatment group. The healers lived an

average of 1,500 miles away from the patients. None of the patients knew which group they had been randomly assigned to, and thus whether they were being prayed for. During the six-month study, four of the patients died—a typical mortality rate. When the data was unblinded, the researchers learned that the four who had died were in the control group. All 10 who were prayed for were still alive.

- Benson and Dusak, 2006, in a study of therapeutic effects of intercessory prayer on 1800 cardiac bypass patients, found that overall intercessory prayer had no particular beneficial effect.
- A 1997 study by O'Laoire measured the effects on the agents performing daily prayers and reported benefits not only for the beneficiary, but the agents, and the benefit levels correlated with the belief levels of agents and beneficiaries in some cases. The study measured anxiety and depression. This study used beneficiary names as well as photographs.[9]

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Appendix II

The intention experiment

- Be aware of all the smells, textures, colours, and sensual feelings you are experiencing. What does the room smell like? What taste is in your mouth? What does your seat feel like?
- Be mindful of what is happening internally and externally. Whenever you catch yourself judging what you see, think to yourself, ‘I am thinking’, and return to observing with simple attention.
- Cultivate the art of simple listening to all sounds in your room: the rumble of a pipe, the honking of a horn, the barking of a dog, a plane flying overhead. Accept all sounds—the noise, chaos, or stillness—without judgment.
- Notice other sensations in the room: the ‘color’ of the day, the light in the room, any movement going on in front of you, the sensations of quiet.
- Try not to try. Work on eliminating your expectations or striving for (and anxiety over) certain results.
- Accept without judgment all that happens. This means putting away all opinions and interpretations of what goes on. Catch yourself clinging to certain views, thoughts, opinions, and preferences, and rejecting others. Accept your own feelings and experiences, even the unpleasant ones.
- Try never to rush. If you must rush, be present in the rushing. Feel what it feels like.

Developing mindfulness in your daily life

Even when you are not using intention, the evidence suggests that you will mould your brain to become better at it if you develop mindfulness in your daily life. Psychologist Dr. Charles Tart, one of the world’s experts on altered states of consciousness, has a number of suggestions of ways to do so

- Take periodic breaks during the day in which you have quiet time to be mindful of what is happening internally and externally.
- Whenever you feel your concentration flitting away in your daily activities, sense your breath—it will help to ground you.
- Be mindful of the most mundane of activities, such as brushing your teeth or shaving.
- Start with a small exercise, such as fetching your coat and walking, in which you stay focused completely on what you are doing.
- Engage in mental noting, in which you label an ongoing activity, for example, ‘I’m putting on my coat’, ‘opening the door’, ‘tying my shoes’.
- Use mindfulness in every ordinary situation. When you are preparing dinner or even brushing your teeth, be aware of all the smells, textures, colors, and sensual feelings you are experiencing. Learn to really look at your partner and your children, your pets, your friends, and your colleagues. Observe them closely during every activity—every part of them without judgment.
- During some activity, such as breakfast, ask your children to be mindful (without speaking) of every aspect of it. Concentrate on the taste of your food. Look closely at the texture and the colors of it. How does the cereal crunch? How does the juice feel as it cascades down your throat? Become aware of the smells and sounds around you. While you are watching all this, how are the different parts of your body feeling? Listen to what your life sounds like—the myriad noises surrounding you every day. When someone speaks to you, listen to the sound of his or her voice as well as the words. Do not think of a reply until he or she has stopped speaking.

- Practice mindfulness in every activity: walking down the street, driving home, in the garden.
- If you are practicing these exercises and you happen to bump into someone, do not enter into conversation. Just greet the person, shake hands, and stay in the present moment.
- Use mindfulness when you are extremely busy or under a tight deadline. Observe what it is like to hurry or to be under the gun and what happens when you do. How does it affect your equilibrium? Be an observer of yourself in that situation. Can you stay in your body while you are working hard?
- Practice mindfulness while you are standing in line. Experience the feeling of waiting itself, rather than focusing on what you are waiting for. Be aware of your physical movements and your thoughts. Do not think about or try to work out your problems. Just deal with whatever daily problem solving is immediately in front of you.