

A Humorous Look at Praying

by Mitchell Bard

I was standing in the shower the other day having a casual conversation with the deity, inquiring why the woman I love does not love me. It suddenly occurred to me that there are wars, famines, and bear markets, not to mention pestilence, boils, frogs, and James Watt all afflicting parts of the world. With all of that going on, why should G-d be listening to me and my trivial problems?

The question of whether G-d hears us is not uncommon. It is probably most frequently asked by children who wonder why they don't receive the Chanukah presents they prayed for. More seriously, it is asked by the victims of tragedies. A friend suggested I consider whether G-d hears the prayers of freshmen, but everyone knows that *no one* listens to freshmen.

There is some evidence, however, that G-d hears the prayers of the poor and the rich because He (the semantically sensitive may insert She and/or It, but frankly I can't believe G-d is a woman; after all, can you imagine G-d having "that time of month?") created the welfare state for the poor and gave the rich enough money to buy the answers to their prayers. As usual the middle class seems to be the loser.

Why worry about middle class college students? Well, besides the fact that I fall into that category, this group of individuals is probably the

most demanding. They want good grades, good sex, good drugs, and good rock 'n' roll (not necessarily in that order). For many, the only hope of receiving any or all of these is prayer.

If you expect your prayers to be heard, you should believe there is someone or something out there listening. Pascal's wager might convince those of you who lack faith. Pascal argued that you have nothing to lose and everything to gain by believing in G-d. If you win (if G-d exists), you win everything. If you lose (if G-d doesn't exist), you haven't lost anything.

I have a slightly different outlook. Judaism teaches that G-d is omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, omnifarious, omnificient... The way I see it, if there was no G-d, there would be no words with the prefix "omni."

G-d is unknowable yet we all try to conceive of G-d. Cecil B. DeMille's thunder, lightning, and fire is a perennial favorite. My own belief is that G-d is like one of those aliens on Star Trek. You know, the ones that are pure energy and know everything the Enterprise crew is thinking.

Once you've developed your own conception of the deity, you have to decide how to communicate your feelings. There are many ways to communicate with G-d. The movies have inspired the Rocky Balboa method of yelling, "Yo G-d!" and, more recently, the E.T. approach.

The most popular and direct means of communica-

tion is the expression "G-d dammit." However, this method is usually frowned upon by the religious establishment.

The generally accepted method is prayer. This raises the question of whether G-d

ready gave away my belief that a less formal environment is permissible. I would not advocate praying in the same place you read the *Daily Bruin*, however; I do have some standards of propriety.

Finally, there is only one

thoughts, impressions, and impulses within; next internalizes them in the presence of the Creator; then recites songs and praises of the Creator; and lastly, if he or she so desires, may conclude with some petition." Too many people have inverted this sequence or simply ignored the first three steps and gone directly to the last one.

It seems to be an easily testable hypothesis: if we ask for something and receive it, then G-d hears us. The sequence of worship demonstrates, however, that the purpose of prayer is not to make demands upon G-d but rather upon one's self.

"Prayer does not cause any change in the Will of the Creator," Gendler explains, "but rather works its effects within the worshipper as s/he offers heart and mind to the Creator. When the heart and mind of the worshipper change for the better through worship, by this change in the worshipper the worshipper's situation is also changed..."

Thus, we should not expect G-d to answer our prayers. Nor should we be overly concerned with whether He is listening, for it is the act of prayer which brings us closer to G-d and allows us to become better college students. I guess I'll just continue praying for help with my love life and hope that my heart and mind improve in the meantime.

This article has also appeared in *Ha'Etdgar*. Mitchell Bard is in UCLA's political science graduate program.



only hears prayers that are in Hebrew. Americans are a chauvinistic lot. We think everyone understands English; just ask any European. However, I don't think it is unreasonable to expect the Creator of the universe to be bilingual.

Another important question is where one should pray. Many people believe that the synagogue is the appropriate location. The introduction al-

question left to be answered; the one I started with—does G-d hear our prayers? Maybe we should dismiss it as beyond our comprehension. I do not think that is necessary. We can at least acquire some understanding by a closer examination of prayer.

Consider the act of prayer, the sequence of which is given by Everett Gendler: "The worshipper first clarifies and sorts out the mixture of

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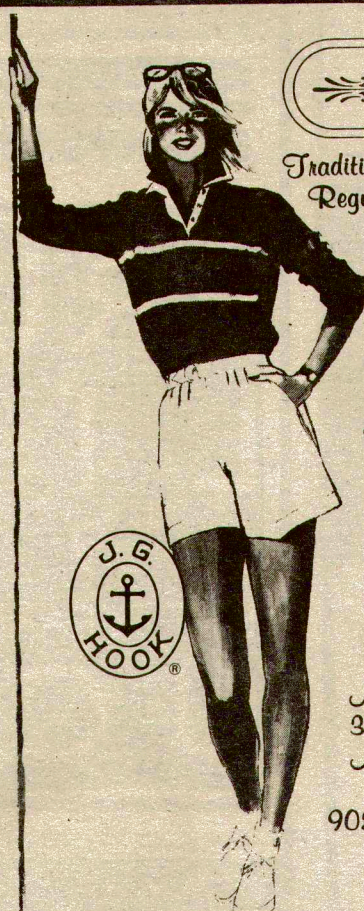
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