

Does God Hear The Prayers of a Middle Class Student?

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 when it suddenly occurred to me 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 God be listening to me and my trivial problems?

The question of whether God 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 and more seriously by the victims of tragedies. A friend suggested I consider whether God hears the prayers of freshmen, but everyone knows that *no one* listens to freshmen. There is some evidence, however, that God hears the prayers of the poor and the rich because he 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, good rock n' roll (not necessarily in that order) and, for many, the only hope of receiving any or all of these is prayer.

If you expected 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 God. If you win (if God exists), you win everything. If you lose (if God doesn't exist), you haven't lost anything. I have a slightly different

know, the ones that are pure energy and know everything that the Enterprise crew is thinking. Once you've developed your own conception of the deity, you have to decide how to communicate your feelings.

judging of the thoughts and impressions which fill the human heart, the distinguishing of the worthy from the unworthy, and the *connecting* or *joining* of them to the Divine . . ."

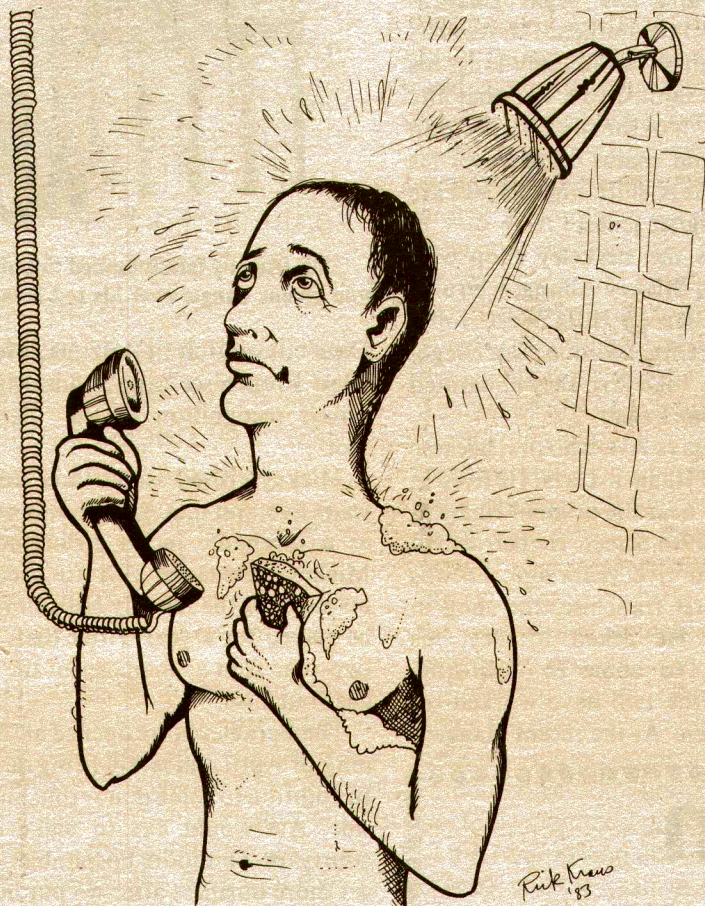
This raises the question of whether God only hears prayers that are in Hebrew. Americans are a chauvinistic lot, we think everybody understands English (just ask any European); however, I don't think it is unreasonable to expect the creator of the universe to be bilingual.

Another important question is where one should pray. Many people believe that the synagogue is the appropriate location, but the introduction already gave away my belief that a less formal environment is permissible. I would not advocate praying in the same place you read the *Daily Cal*; however, I do have some standards of propriety.

Finally, there is only one question left to be answered; that is the one I started with—does God hear our prayers? Maybe we should dismiss it as beyond our comprehension. I do not think it is necessary. We can at least glean some understanding by a closer examination of prayer. Consider the act of prayer, the sequence of which is given by Gendler: "the worshipper first clarifies and sorts out the mixture of 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 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 God hears us. The sequence of worship demonstrates, however, that the purpose of prayer is not to make demands upon God 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 God to answer our prayers nor should we be overly concerned with whether he is listening because it is the *act* of prayer which brings us closer to God and allows us to become better middle class 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.

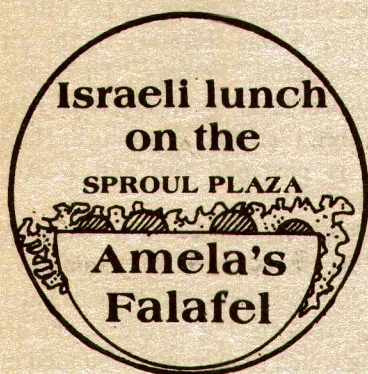
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outlook. Judaism teaches that God is omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, omnifarious, omnificent, omnibus . . . The way I see it, if there were no God, there would be no words with the prefix omni.

God is unknowable yet we all try to conceive of God. Cecil B. DeMille's thunder, lightning, and fire is a perennial favorite. My own belief is that God is like one of those aliens on Star Trek. You

There are many ways to communicate with God. The movies have inspired the Rocky Balboa method of yelling "Yo God!" The most popular and direct means of communication is the expression "God damnit;" however, this is usually frowned upon by the religious establishment. The generally accepted method of prayer is *tefilah* defined by Everett Gendler as "the *clarification* or



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