

Rabbi Daniel G. Zemel
Temple Micah, Washington, DC
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CONSIDERING PRAYER

לֵב טָהוֹר בְּרָא־לִי אֱלֹהִים וְרוּחַ נְכוֹן חִדָּשׁ בְּקִרְבִּי:

“Create me a clean heart, O God; and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” (Psalm 51:12)

(Something I feel a need for in this hour. DGZ)

מִה־גְּדֹלוֹ מַעֲשֵׂיךָ יְהוָה מְאֹד עֲמֻקּוֹ מִחֻשְׁבְּתֶיךָ:

How great are Your works, YHWH, Your thoughts are very deep. (Psalm 92:12)

(A prayer for deeper understanding. DGZ)

(In the following text, I like to read the word “poetry or “poem” as “prayer.” DGZ)
Stevens... goes on to describe ... nobility, so rare and so essential to poetry and to life, in what might at first seem to be curious terms:

*It is a violence from within that protects us from a violence without. It is the imagination pressing back against the pressure of **reality**. It seems, in the last analysis, to have something to do with our self-preservation; and that, no doubt, is why the expression of it, the sound of its words, helps us to live our lives.*

...To resist the pressure of the real is to preserve a space within ourselves, where everything we see and know can get recombined, in the hopes of a **deeper** and more mysterious knowledge...

At times, I am sure it is good to know as much as we can about the world. At others, I feel quite sure almost all of this knowledge is extraneous, even **anesthetizing**. When it comes to social issues, the ease with which we can find out information and vicariously experience the suffering of others can make us feel as if, merely by knowing something and passing it along, we are *doing* something, when in fact, sadly, we are not. (*Why Poetry* by Matthew Zapruder pp 96-97)

(Poetry/Prayer simultaneously invites us to into a deeper reality and works to prevent **anesthetizing**.)

(A different thought on what prayer offers. Reorientation DGZ)

Existence is something tremendous, and day-to-day life, however indispensable, seems an insufficient response to it, a failure of consciousness. Outrageous as it sounds, the religious temperament regards **a merely human life as insufficient**, as a partial blindness to or rejection of the terms of our existence. It asks for something more encompassing **without knowing what it might be**...How can one bring into one's individual life a full recognition of one's relation to the universe as a whole?" (Thomas Nagel, *Secular Philosophy and the Religious Temperament*)

Like the animals, we are finite creatures, controlled by a biochemistry that condemns us to inevitable decline and extinction; but in view of the faculty of reason we have the ability to distance ourselves in thought from our quotidian existence, and thereby to perceive our finitude in all its starkness. The very ability to see the implications of our finite nature so acutely, means that, alone among the rest of creation, we cannot wholly be at rest, we cannot entirely be at home in the world.

Here, it seems to me, is to be found the enduring appeal, despite modern science's many successes, of the idea of spirituality. If the origin of **the spiritual impulse is the gap between what we are and what we aspire to be**...It is just such an interior modification, allowing the possibility of a meaningful life ... that the great religions have typically aimed to achieve...

So what are the goals of spirituality in the actual world...?

Most forms... have in common that they aim to turn us away from typical preoccupations such as career, status, and the accumulation of wealth, and prepare us instead to focus on something extraordinarily simple and yet mysterious: **our presence here, at this moment**, 'at the still point of the turning world.' T.S. Eliot, (*Burnt Norton* in *Four Quartets*). Thus do we begin to experience **the raw wonder of existence; the sense of life as a blessing and a gift that we can never fully understand**. (*On the Meaning of Life* by John Cottingham, pp78-79, 83)

This is prayer as a reckoning, a consideration of "the gap between what we are and what we aspire to be.