



The Forty Day Prayer

by Rick Belden

Introduction

I encountered the seed of the process I'm about to describe in a magazine article (now long lost) many years ago. I took what I saw and developed it into a practice that I used and found helpful for several years.

I'll say up front that I have no belief in any deity or deities, and haven't for a long time, but I've always believed and still believe that there is divinity in all things. This sort of thinking would probably attract scorn from theologians and atheologists alike. So it goes.

Given that context, I've always seen this process more as a meditative exercise in building focus and awareness than as an appeal to any sort of supernatural force, although I can't completely rule out the possibility of ripple effects in this big pool of energy in which we're all swimming, or even the invisible influence of some [bigger fish](#) in that pool.

From my perspective, prayer works primarily as a meditative and psychological conditioning process. It can be used to explore existing patterns of thought and perception, as well as to reinforce, shift, or replace them. I don't see anything inherently magical or supernatural about it. I also believe that there's a good deal of potential consciousness-transforming power available to us in universal spiritual archetypes; whether one believes in their literal existence or not, these patterns embody and express energies and forces that are ancient and deeply authentic in the human psyche.

This was the process I used; adapt as needed to make it yours. It may help you get a result you want or need; it may not. But if you pay attention as the forty day cycle unfolds, you may find that getting what you thought you wanted or needed was never the real point anyway.

As with many meditation practices, the core of the Forty Day Prayer practice is very simple. But there are some things you'll need to know in order to get it right. I'm also going to include some info from my personal experience that may be helpful.

The Template

The basic template for the Forty Day Prayer, as I've practiced it, is:

"In the name of Jesus the Christ, thank you that _____, if it be Thy will."

The phrasing used has three important components and all must be present:

1) *"In the name of Jesus the Christ, ..."*

This is your call to Spirit, higher forces (internal or external), what have you, in whatever form you find appropriate for yourself. I've used this phrasing, even though I'm not a Christian, with something along the lines of the ideal frequently labeled as "Christ Consciousness" in mind. I can imagine that other folks might invoke the Great Spirit, Higher Power, or some other beneficent spiritual entity if that is more suited to their beliefs.

2) *"... thank you that _____, ..."*

Fill in the blank with a core statement that expresses what you hope to create, resolve, or receive in your life during the next forty days. It's very important that you state it in the present tense, as if you already have it and are expressing your gratitude for having it. This helps condition your mind to receive it, and perhaps more importantly, activates your creative power to manifest it.

3) *"... if it be Thy will."*

Not everything our conscious mind desires is in our best interest at the soul level. This last bit acknowledges that we are not always the best and final judges of what life should bring us. Sometimes there is something else at work in life that takes precedence over what appears to us to be our most obvious need at the time.

The Core Statement

In order to begin the process, you first have to identify the core statement that goes in the blank. For example, if you were having a problem with your stomach, you might use something like:

"In the name of Jesus the Christ, thank you that my stomach is healthy and clear of any dysfunction, if it be Thy will."

Another more general possibility might be:

“In the name of Jesus the Christ, thank you that I have all the help I need to heal my stomach issues, if it be Thy will”

How you arrive at the core statement you’re going to use is up to you. In my case, it often comes to me while I’m walking. I typically don’t make changes to my core statement once I’ve started the forty day cycle, unless something compelling comes up. Even then, it’s usually only the addition or the rearrangement of a word or two. Best to pick something concise that you’re comfortable saying, ’cause you’re going to say it 240 times over the next forty days: three times every morning and three times every night.

The Practice

Once I have my prayer in mind, I write it down on a small piece of notebook paper that I can tuck under my pillow. Each morning when I wake up I say it three times before I get out of bed. Each evening I say it three times just before I go to sleep. I keep track by marking off the days (one through forty) on the back of the piece of paper that has the prayer written on it.

It’s probably best if you can focus on the words as you say them (visualize, etc.), but a lot of the time all I can manage to do is recite the words without a lot of thought behind what I’m saying. This doesn’t seem to hurt the process, in my experience. To the contrary, I think this is part of the process. It’s a very interesting exercise in self-observation to notice, over the course of forty days and forty nights, the different mental states in which I find myself when I recite the prayer ... at times feeling very connected with the words, at times not. Because the words don’t change, the practice tends to draw my attention to what does change from day to day: my emotional and mental states and how those states affect my relationship with the words.

The Catch

All of this sounds easy, right? Well, here’s the only tricky part:

If you miss a morning or an evening, you have to start the whole cycle all over again, from Day One.

This is why I put the piece of paper with the prayer on it under my pillow. I’m most likely to forget to do the prayer in the morning (and I have), but since I make my bed every morning, I always find the prayer right under my pillow when I make the bed if I’ve forgotten and that way I don’t miss a day.

You’ll have to find your own best way to remind yourself, but I suggest you choose a strategy up front, because I can almost guarantee that something (your mind or your life) will intrude at some point and make you forgetful. And who wants to start over on Day 39? Not me!

Observing the Process

Once you've begun the forty day cycle, try to observe things in kind of a neutral way as you go along and see if anything begins to change around the issue you've chosen. Things may improve or they may seem to get worse. Maybe it will appear that nothing at all is happening. But no matter what happens, finish the cycle. Keep your commitment to yourself, to the issue, and to the process. You may notice a real difference by the end of the cycle. Something surprising may have happened. Or it may appear that nothing has happened, and you may not realize the effects until you can look back on it later in a fuller context.

Summary

I believe this practice can be very useful. I was skeptical at first (as I tend to be with most things of this nature), but I used this process about two dozen times over a period of about five years and found it helpful more often than not, in some cases quite dynamically and in others very subtly.

Here's a quick review of the practice:

1. *Design your prayer using the template, with all three parts as described above.*
2. *Develop a memory aid (such as putting the prayer under your pillow) to remind you if you forget to say your prayer.*
3. *Recite the prayer three times each morning before rising and three times each evening prior to sleep for forty days.*
4. *Observe any changes that might relate to the issue, but finish the whole forty day cycle, no matter what (even if the problem seems to be resolved).*
5. *If you miss a morning or an evening, start over from Day One.*

I hope I haven't made this sound too complicated or like too much work, because it is neither, especially considering the potential benefits. But you do have to be consistent and pay attention if you want to get something out of it.

Originally posted at [poetry, dreams, and the body](#) on Feb 25 2009.

Image: [Cactus Rainbow](#) by [David Jewell](#). Used by permission.



The Forty Day Prayer by Rick Belden, unless otherwise expressly stated, is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](#).

Rick Belden is a respected explorer and chronicler of the psychology and inner lives of men. His book, [Iron Man Family Outing: Poems about Transition into a More Conscious Manhood](#), is widely used in the United

States and internationally by therapists, counselors, and men's groups as an aid in the exploration of masculine psychology and men's issues, and as a resource for men who grew up in dysfunctional, abusive, or neglectful family systems. His second book, [*Scapegoat's Cross: Poems about Finding and Reclaiming the Lost Man Within*](#), is currently awaiting publication. He lives in Austin, Texas.

More information, including excerpts from Rick's books, is available on his [website](#) and [blog](#). You can also find him on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [YouTube](#).