

Topic Page: [Prayer](#)

Definition: **prayer** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

Act of thanking, adoring, conferring with or petitioning a divine power; also the form of words used for this purpose. Many religions have set forms for praying. Muslims recite prayers while facing in the direction of Mecca. In Christianity, the Roman Catholic missal contains regulated customary prayers. The Book of Common Prayer plays the same role in the Anglican Communion. Prayer can also be the private devotional act of an individual using his or her own words.



Image from: [The Virgin in Prayer in the National Gallery Collection](#)

Summary Article: **prayer**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Address to divine power, ranging from a ritual formula to attain a desired end, to selfless communication in meditation.

Within Christianity, the Catholic and Orthodox churches sanction prayer to the Virgin Mary, angels, and saints as intercessors, whereas Protestantism limits prayer to God alone.

Hindu prayer may be addressed to any god or to the supreme godhead. It often includes chanting the scriptures in Sanskrit, and the sacred sound 'Om' or 'Aum'. In Judaism, there are traditional prayers related to many everyday tasks or situations, and congregational prayers are said at the synagogue every day. It is the duty of every adult male Jew to attend these if possible and help form part of the *minyan*, or quorum of ten, which is necessary for congregational prayers. Sikhs repeat morning and evening prayers taken from the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Muslims are required to pray five times a day (*salat*).

Prayer in some religions is devoted almost entirely to the securing of material benefits, such as health, good crops, or success in war. In most religions, however, prayer includes not only petitions but also acts of contemplation, adoration, love, thanksgiving, intercession (prayers on behalf of another), confession, and atonement. Many religions also use symbols – for instance, icons in Hinduism or the crucifix in Christianity – as aids to prayer.

In Taoism, prayer links the worshipper to a specific deity or to ancestors. Printed versions of popular prayers asking for health or wealth are purchased and burned before the statue of a god. Private silent prayer is also common. Prayer wheels are used in Tibetan Buddhism and prayers are often written on flags and banners, so that the wind may carry them everywhere. Repetition of the *nembutsu* prayer (*Namu amida butsu* 'Save us, merciful Buddha') is at the core of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism. Shinto ritual prayers are based on an ancient belief that beautiful words well spoken would cause good things to happen whereas ugly words brought about evil.

Christian prayer Prayers that are frequently used in Christian worship include the Lord's Prayer (Pateroster or Our Father), the Hail Mary (Ave Maria), and the Gloria Patri. According to the Gospels, the Lord's Prayer was taught by Jesus to his disciples. The Hail Mary is used most often by Roman Catholics, particularly during the reciting of the rosary. Christians usually end a prayer with 'Amen' ('so be it').

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