

## Dean Chavooshian

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- What is prayer? It is not so simple to define.
- Answer? Communicating with a higher order. Acknowledging that it is not just us/me who make up this life.
- In going back to a time, I'll offer a few hints of what others were thinking:

Parmenides – The father of metaphysics (Plato referred to him as “father”) inaugurated the idea of a holistic world system in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, by suggesting that what “can be thought of [i.e. God] is the same as what can be [i.e. nature]”

Lao Tzu – “There is a thing, formless yet complete. Before heaven and earth it existed. Without sound, without substance, it stands alone and unchanging. It is all-pervading and unfailing. We do not know its name but we call it Tao” (Chapter 1)

Upanishads/Vedas – The ancient religious texts of Hinduism (Upanishads) attest to the interconnection of the inner self (Atman), the eternal (Brahman), and universality of the world.

Buddha – Does not reference a God but taught “the Truth and Path leading to the Truth”

Moses – When Moses asked God in Exodus 3:14 what he should tell the Israelites the name of the God of their forefathers He answered: “I AM; that is who I am” (note capital “AM”).

- This brings me to the 17th century Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza who had a pantheist approach to the world and offered a uniquely passionate view of life. By employing the doctrine of reason and living harmoniously with nature, man could attain virtue and happiness. I'd like to read 2 paragraphs on Spinoza from my forthcoming book titled *The Pursuit of Wisdom*:

“Spinoza emphasized the absolute divine unity of nature and the existence of God, famously pronouncing that the two were interchangeable when he wrote “God or nature” (Ethics, Part 4, Preface).

Spinoza believed God was not an object of religious faith or a personal God who judged, rewarded and punished. His God was infinite, imminent to all that existed, and the mind's greatest virtue was to know Him. For that reason, Spinoza concluded that it was meaningless to expect God to love us; since God and nature were identical and all-pervading, we should simply accept what was offered. His argument was that “God cannot properly be said to love any one, nor hate any one. For God is neither affected by joy nor sorrow” (Ibid., Proposition 17, Corollary). Spinoza warned that it was a mistake for man to impose his own limited perspective

upon nature, believing instead that “everything in nature proceeds from a sort of necessity, and with the utmost perfection...explanations commonly given of nature [God] are mere modes of imagination, and do not indicate the true nature of anything” (Ibid., Part 1, Appendix). Alas, it was Spinoza who was the first modern philosopher to clearly conceptualize the nexus of God and nature as an alliance that followed an orderly set of natural laws ruled by logical necessity. Accepting Spinoza’s vision suggested that nothing bad can happen in the world – a world that man cannot affect, since it was preordained by God’s decree and perfected in its unity with nature.”

- Hoping not to appear irreverent, and appreciating Spinoza’s worldview, I have selected a prayer from David’s Book of Psalms #75 – substituting the word “Nature” for the word “God:”

We give thanks to you, Nature;  
we give thanks, for your name is near.  
We recount your wondrous deeds.

<sup>2</sup> “At the set time that Nature appoints  
it will judge with equity.

<sup>3</sup> When the earth totters, and all its inhabitants,  
it is Nature who keep steady its pillars.

<sup>4</sup> Nature says to the boastful, ‘Do not boast,’  
and to the wicked, ‘Do not lift up your horn;

<sup>5</sup> do not lift up your horn on high,  
or speak with haughty neck.”

<sup>6</sup> For not from the east or from the west  
and not from the wilderness comes lifting up,

<sup>7</sup> but it is Nature who executes judgment,  
putting down one and lifting up another.

<sup>8</sup> For in the hand of Nature there is a cup  
with foaming wine, hot with spice,  
and Nature pours out from it,  
and all the wicked of the earth  
shall drain it down to the dregs.

<sup>9</sup> But I will glorify Nature forever;  
I will sing praises to Nature.

<sup>10</sup> All the horns of the wicked Nature will cut off,  
but the horns of the righteous shall be lifted up.