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# Unanswered Prayers

HAVE YOU BEEN PRAYING FOR TRUE LOVE—OR ANYTHING ELSE? AND DOES IT SEEM AS IF YOUR PRAYERS HAVE NEVER BEEN ANSWERED?

BY AUGUST GOLD AND JOEL FOTINOS

**THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT** thing you need to know about prayer: You either get the answer to your prayer...or you get what stands in the way. Most people do not know this, so when they pray and something unlike what they prayed for comes, they assume that:

- + THEIR PRAYER WASN'T AND WON'T BE ANSWERED,
- + GOD WASN'T LISTENING,
- + THEY DON'T DESERVE THE ANSWER, OR
- + THEY PRAYED WRONG.

Actually, everything that happens to us after we've prayed is a tiny piece of the puzzle to the answered prayer. Everything.

So when you pray for peace and unexpected anger comes up in you, or you pray for love and you start to spew some old hatred that you thought was healed, even those things are to be considered part of the answer to your prayer. How else can you get to the peace or the love or whatever you want if what stands in its way isn't removed?

The *Tao Te Ching* teaches that when you want something to shrink, you must let it first expand. Eastern teachings insist that the obstacles that stand in the way to answered prayer can always be found within ourselves. That means that if there is something within blocking us, it has to come out of hiding.

## SOMEONE TO LOVE

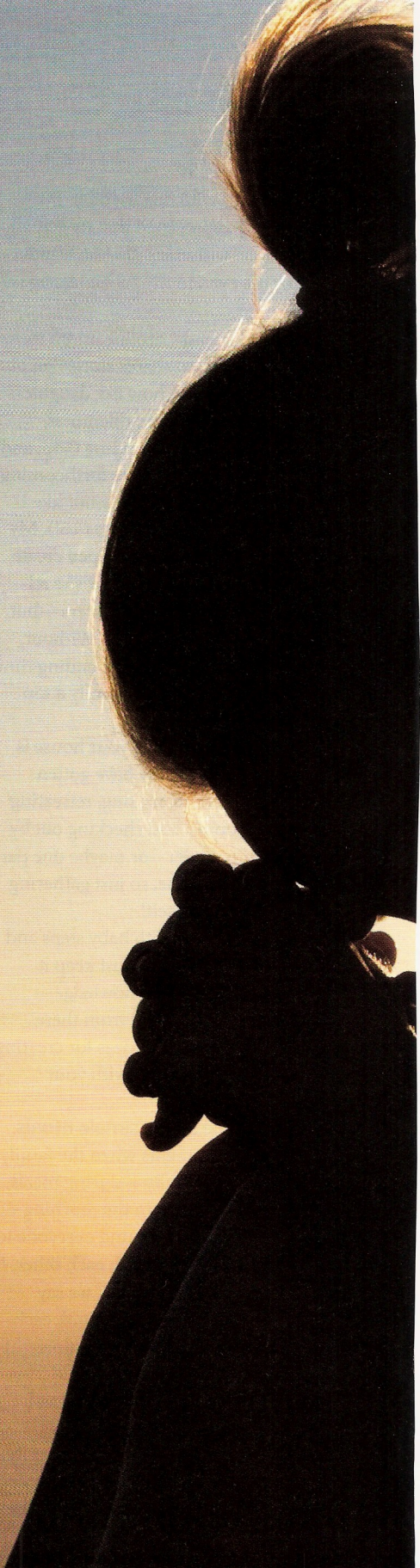
Janice is someone who understands this now. She received a big surprise from Prayer Partnering, a spiritual practice we teach that involves praying with a partner each day at a designated time. Janice had prayed for a man to love her truly. She'd had plenty of affairs with men when she was a younger woman—she wasn't ashamed of that. But now that she was in her thirties, she was ready for something more serious, and that's why she entered into Prayer Partnering: to find a man to love, and one who would love her.

Oddly enough, she explained, she didn't get any man at all, not even one to pass the time with in a casual affair. Before, she'd had many men to choose from, but since she had begun praying with her partner, her phone didn't ring at all.


She started to wonder... was she being punished for praying for such a silly thing as someone to love, in the face of real problems like war and world hunger?

Then one night it hit her: She had never been alone in her life. She'd left her father's home and gone from man to man ever since. She had no idea what being alone with herself meant.

What was harder for her to admit was that she didn't *want* to be alone with herself because she didn't like herself, let







alone love herself. As a little girl maybe she had loved herself—she didn't remember—but not as a grown woman. There were too many things wrong with her to love. She'd made sure her calendar was booked with other people to ensure she didn't have to spend any face time with herself.

And here she was praying for true love when she didn't even love herself! She made a commitment to her

Prayer Partner right then and there: "I'm not going to date anybody for the 90 days that we're praying together." Instead, she said, she was going to date herself... finally.

This answer to her prayer felt so right that if true love didn't come, she didn't care anymore. Being able to love herself felt like the answer to an older prayer, one that her soul had been waiting for all her life. To love herself as she wished to



platinum rings, the pinky rings, the diamond drop earrings, the pearl choker, the various Tiffany pins, and the silver and turquoise bracelets too numerous to count.

Here were her invisible fingerprints on the story of why her ex-husband wouldn't let her go. She hadn't wanted to let all that expensive jewelry go. What if she never met a man who was as rich or generous with her? What if she could never afford to buy herself such gifts? And if something ever went wrong in her life, couldn't she always pawn the jewelry for cash?

Unknowingly, the fearful what-ifs had tied her to his gifts, which tied her to him. "My intuition is telling me that I have to let the jewelry go," she said. Slowly she opened her eyes. She wasn't angry anymore.

"I get it," she said, suddenly in a hurry for the session to be over. "I totally get it!" In the office waiting room I heard her cancel her dinner plans with a colleague before practically racing out the door.

Later, she told me she had gone straight home from my office to her co-op apartment and walked straight to the bedroom bureau, as if she were on a mission. She opened the top drawer and stared at its contents for a long time. It was exactly as it had appeared in her mind's eye.

She went to the pantry, retrieved a brown paper bag more suited to bagging a lunch than bagging gems, and returned to her bedroom. She emptied every last piece of jewelry her ex-husband had given her, walked down the hallway, and, without hesitation, dropped the bag into the garbage chute and slammed it shut.

Only then did the unexpected, long-overdue flood of grief rise up from within her—the tears she had not shed for the loss of this relationship, which had had so many beautiful moments—the tears she had not wept for the loss of this man whom she had once loved, who had been very kind to her. The relationship had ended a year prior, but only

now was she grieving the loss of it. Only now was she letting him go, as well as all of the riches he had given to her, the riches that had attracted her to him in the first place . . . the riches that had tied her to him—until now.

First thing the next morning Sonia called me. She was breathless. "He didn't call me this morning!" There was no 5 a.m. call as there had been for the last six months. "I'm sure there won't be any more calls," she said confidently. "I've let him go, him and his stuff . . . and it was really cool stuff." We laughed together at the bold, crazy audacity of her throwing away all that expensive jewelry rather than selling it, but she was certain it had been the right move for her.

## MAKING ROOM

Sonia could not truly open to another man until she had let go of her ties to this one. We think walking out the door is sufficient, but we often carry the energy of that experience—our emotional baggage—with us.

There was no telephone call from Sonia's ex that morning or any morning thereafter. Less than two years later, she was married to a wonderful man.

Why couldn't the wonderful man have come in answer to her prayer in the first place, we ask?

He couldn't come in because there was no room. The obstacle that stood in the way of Sonia's answered prayer—and ours—dwells within ourselves. It needs to be moved out of the way so that there will be room for our heart's desire to enter.

Everything that happens after you pray is a part of the answer to your prayer. It's a waste of time to fight with whatever happens or resist it or run away from it or stop praying altogether. If there is something there, we must need to deal with it in some way, or heal it, or release it, or let it go. Often it looks like old relationship issues with our families or friends, bosses or loved ones. Take the step to complete the unfinished business,

and you will be one step closer to being open to receive the answer to your prayer.

## THINK ABOUT IT

What things are coming up "in answer" to your prayers? What are you being invited to look at and resolve (e.g., you secretly don't like your job, there is someone you haven't yet forgiven, you are afraid of being alone)?

## TRY THIS

- ✦ Use your journal to take these very things out of hiding. Write about them daily. See what positive ideas come up on the journal pages about how you might heal these unresolved issues in your life (e.g., counseling, making amends, seeing a doctor, spending time in nature).
- ✦ When the positive ideas emerge, follow their wisdom and do what they instruct you to do in a timely manner.



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