



# March 2015

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PRAY: v. 1 say prayers (to God etc.); make devout supplication. 2 a entreat, beseech. b ask earnestly (*prayed to be released*).

PRAYER (1): n. 1 a a solemn request or thanksgiving to God or an object of worship (*say a prayer*). b a formula or form of words used in praying (*the Lord's prayer*). c the act of praying (*be at prayer*). d a religious service consisting largely of prayers (*morning prayers*). 2 a an entreaty to a person. b a thing entreated or prayed for. \* not have a prayer *N.Amer. colloq.* have no chance (of success etc.). prayer-book a book containing the forms of prayer in regular use, esp. the Book of Common Prayer. prayer-mat a small carpet used by Muslims when praying. prayer-wheel a revolving cylindrical box inscribed with or containing prayers, used esp. by Tibetan Buddhists.

PRAYER (2): n. a person who prays.





I am a prayer.



I pray. A lot. Pretty much daily.  
And the truth is, I always have.  
I wasn't raised in a religious tradition.  
I don't remember being taught to pray.

But I have flashes of memory. Of experiences. I can see my young self sitting on the edge of my bed, looking out the window. I can't remember the thoughts. I don't remember if there were words. Or actions. But the feeling in the memory is a feeling of being at prayer. Of seeking something.

Was I praying to God? What understanding did my young self have (of God? of prayer? of seeking?) as she sat on the edge of that bed and looked out? I have no idea.





What understanding do I have now?  
I can no longer say that I have no idea.  
But I can't say that I have a clear idea either.  
I am without neatly articulated answers.

But I have reached a place in my searching where I no longer seek  
them. I have come to believe that they don't exist. And when they're  
forced into existence, they pose a risk. Answers can be dangerous.  
They can be wielded as a weapon.

This means that I pray without a comfortable answer to the question:  
"Who are you praying to?"







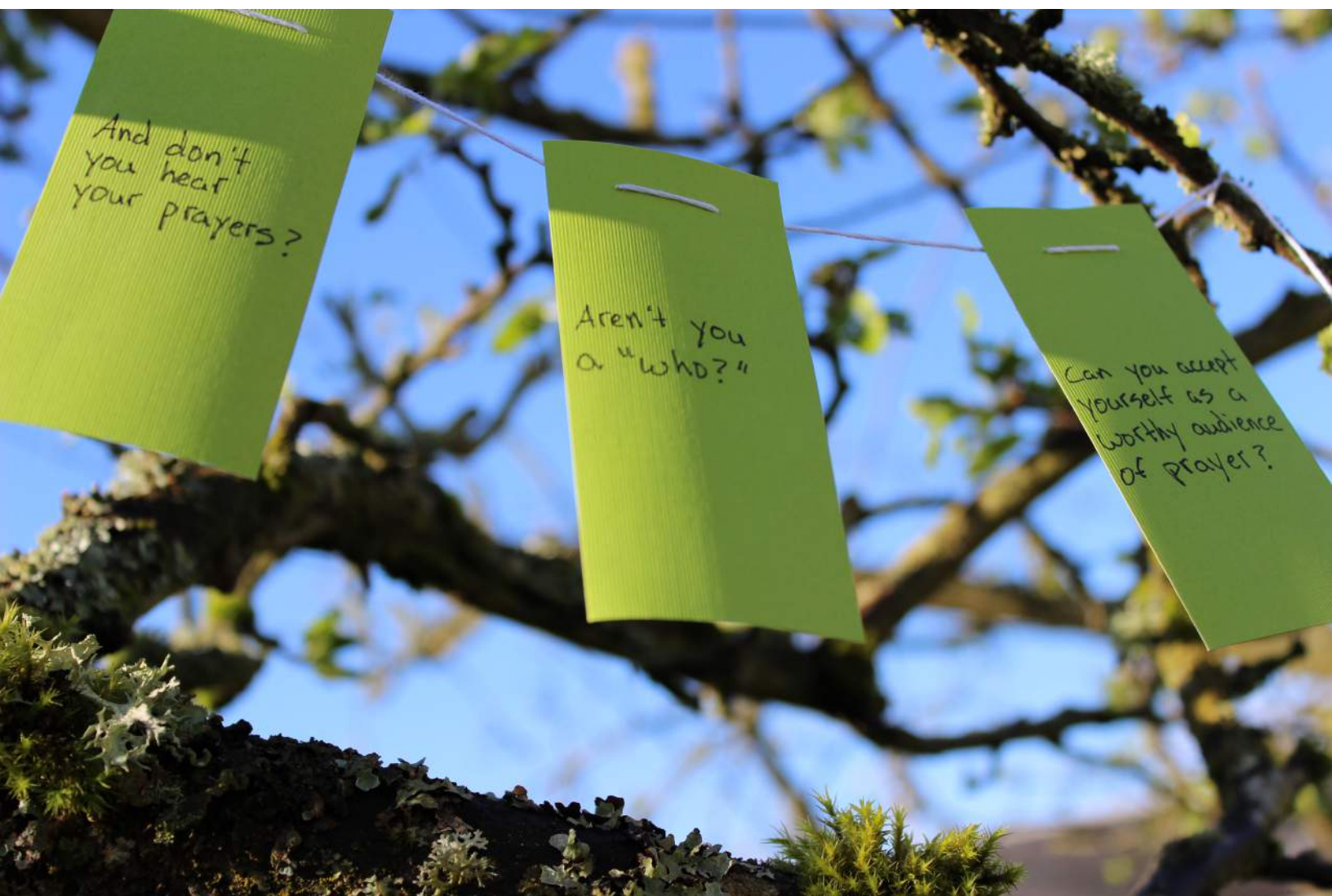




What if you know there isn't a "who" that you're praying to? And what if you decided not to come up with an acceptable "who?" What if instead you sought to understand the meaning and practice of prayer beyond the question of who's listening?

I realize these questions won't make sense to many. And might even seem ridiculous, uninteresting, or heretical—depending on the perspective you're coming from.

But I wonder: Is the practice of uttering whispered words of awe, confusion, fear, cries for help, hope, dreams, love, useful without an audience—without a "who" that possesses a listening ear?




And don't  
you hear  
your prayers?

Aren't you  
a "who?"

Can you accept  
yourself as a  
worthy audience  
of prayer?





Of course, I spent quite a bit of time trying to answer the question of “who” before I began exploring prayer beyond the listener. I’m not suggesting that you simply move past it.

It doesn’t really matter what I suggest anyway. The question can’t easily be ignored. The practice of prayer usually begins by addressing the “who.”

So beyond yourself—or those whom you’re praying with—who is the listener? I have no answer for you. I can’t. It’s a personal question.

But I can tell you where I’ve landed (for now) in my own pondering.



The tradition of yoga tells me that I am the unchanging source of pure awareness. I can't articulate what this means. But I've had glimpses of an internal silence that lead me to value the idea. I have felt the truth of it.

I've been contemplating the idea that there is something from which everything comes and to which everything will return. All of this becoming and unbecoming is, of course, filled with change. It's the constant movement of energy.

But I wonder, is there an unchanging source underneath it? A unity underneath the multiplicity? A stillness underneath the activity? Is there somehow a relationship between the ever changing phenomena in which I live and the unchanging source of pure awareness that the tradition says I am?

I will admit—and it feels vulnerable to do so— I believe there is.

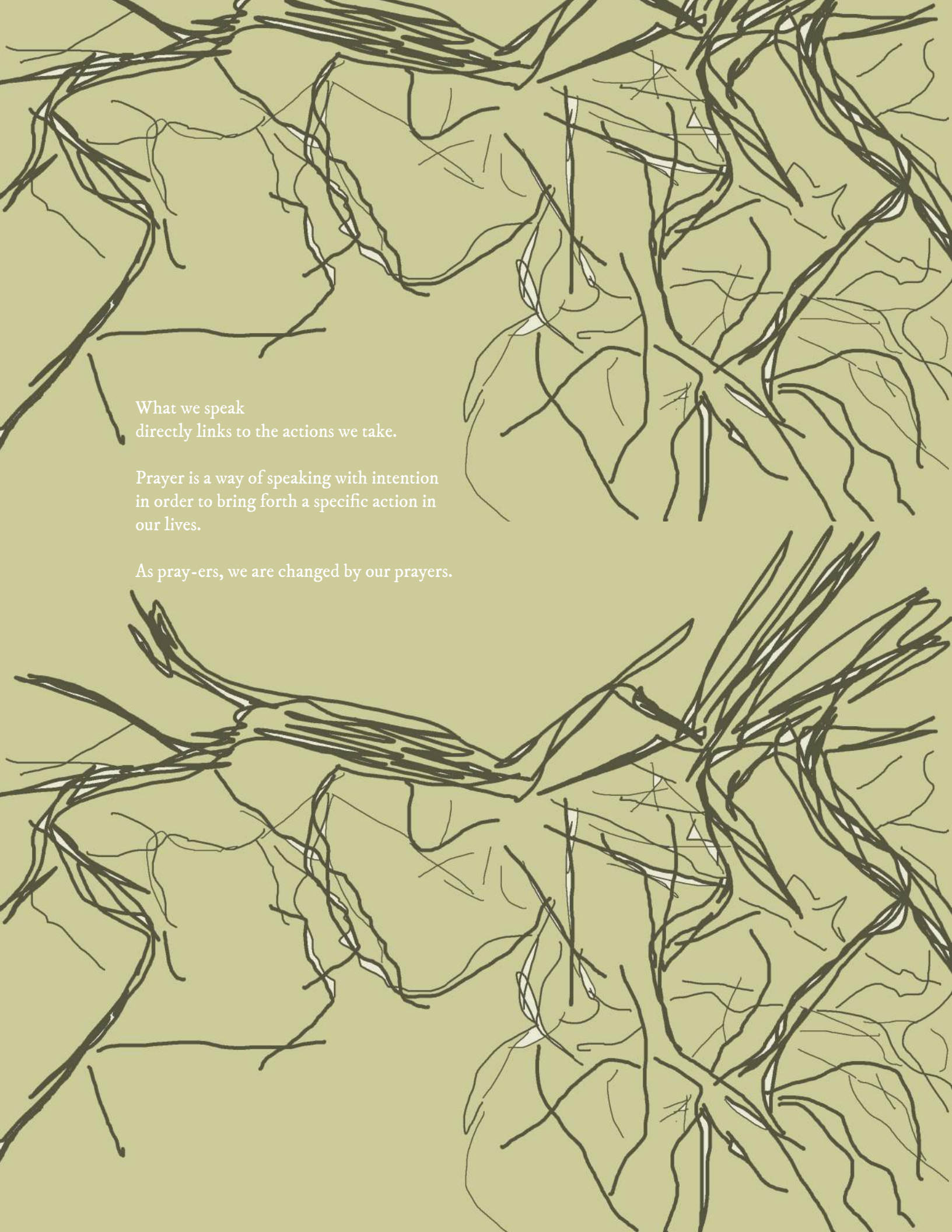
I am the unchanging source of pure awareness. And I contain the energy of all becoming and unbecoming.

You are the unchanging source of pure awareness. And you contain the energy of all becoming and unbecoming.

She who sees everywhere the Self in all existences and all existences in the Self, shrinks not thereafter from anything at all. She in whom it is the Self-Being that has become all existences that are Becomings, she has the perfect knowledge, how shall she be deluded, when shall she have grief who sees everywhere oneness?  
-Isha Upanishad







What we speak  
directly links to the actions we take.

Prayer is a way of speaking with intention  
in order to bring forth a specific action in  
our lives.

As pray-ers, we are changed by our prayers.



Our speaking is in some way a form of prayer. This feels risky, doesn't it?

Prayer can be a way of declaring something to oneself and/or to one's community.

It can be a way of having an intimate conversation with oneself.

It can be a way of doing "something" in situations where there isn't anything to do.

Prayer can be a way of expressing (in order to release) feelings of darkness, shame, and guilt.

It can be a way of gaining a sense of power in powerless situations.

It can be a way of expressing gratitude when there isn't an obvious way to do so.

Prayer can be a form of activism.

It can be a way to self-soothe. A tonic for feelings of uselessness, fear, anxiety.

It can be a way to celebrate something. To mourn something.

It can be a way to ask for help. To focus attention. To seek clarity.

Praying is an action.

It can be embodied in varying ways.

It can be silent or loud. Whispered, spoken, sung, or screamed.

Prayer can be a ritual.

It can be communal or individual.

It can be formal or not.





Prayer is a way  
of consecrating words.

to consecrate is to  
make or declare  
something sacred.

Prayer is words  
made sacred through  
intention.



I have spent years circling around the question of “who” in my prayers. But I have never stopped praying. It’s just a strange thing about me. Prayer has always mattered. I’m grateful for this.

My prayers are simple. They are internal conversations where I can express the hopes and fears I hold for myself, the people I love, people I don’t know, the earth, the world. They are internal conversations where I can connect with the mysterious divine energy of which I am a part.

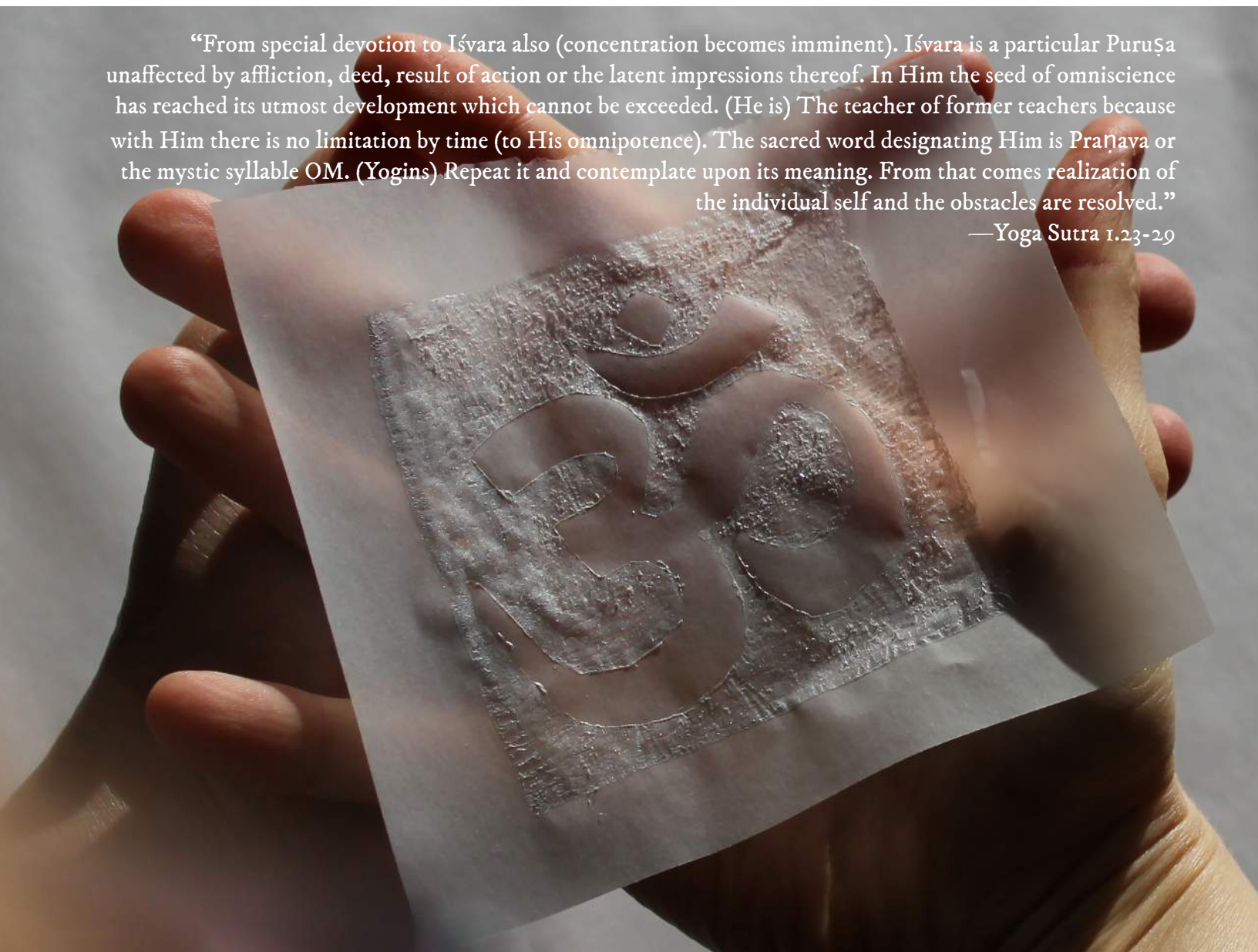
I most often use the words Lord or God as the addressee in my prayers. I use these words because they fall comfortably out of my mouth. I don’t believe there’s a listening being who goes by these names (although I will shyly admit that sometimes in moments of prayer I feel the comfort of one...).

I understand that others take the words Lord or God to mean something different than I do and that’s ok. I use them because I’ve worked and worked and worked with them. In my effort to understand them, I’ve been able to release the baggage I held for so long in relationship to them. I am now able to accept them as words. Words that I use to point toward divine mystery, source energy, pure awareness (to point toward something that I can’t understand) (to point toward something beyond language and answers).

After years of practicing yoga, I also use the words in relation to the idea of *Íśvara*, which is often translated as Lord and can be understood as a generic name for God (meaning it doesn’t point toward a particular sectarian idea of God).

“From special devotion to *Íśvara* also (concentration becomes imminent). *Íśvara* is a particular *Puruṣa* unaffected by affliction, deed, result of action or the latent impressions thereof. In Him the seed of omniscience has reached its utmost development which cannot be exceeded. (He is) The teacher of former teachers because with Him there is no limitation by time (to His omnipotence). The sacred word designating Him is *Praṇava* or the mystic syllable OM. (Yogins) Repeat it and contemplate upon its meaning. From that comes realization of the individual self and the obstacles are resolved.”

—Yoga Sutra 1.23-29





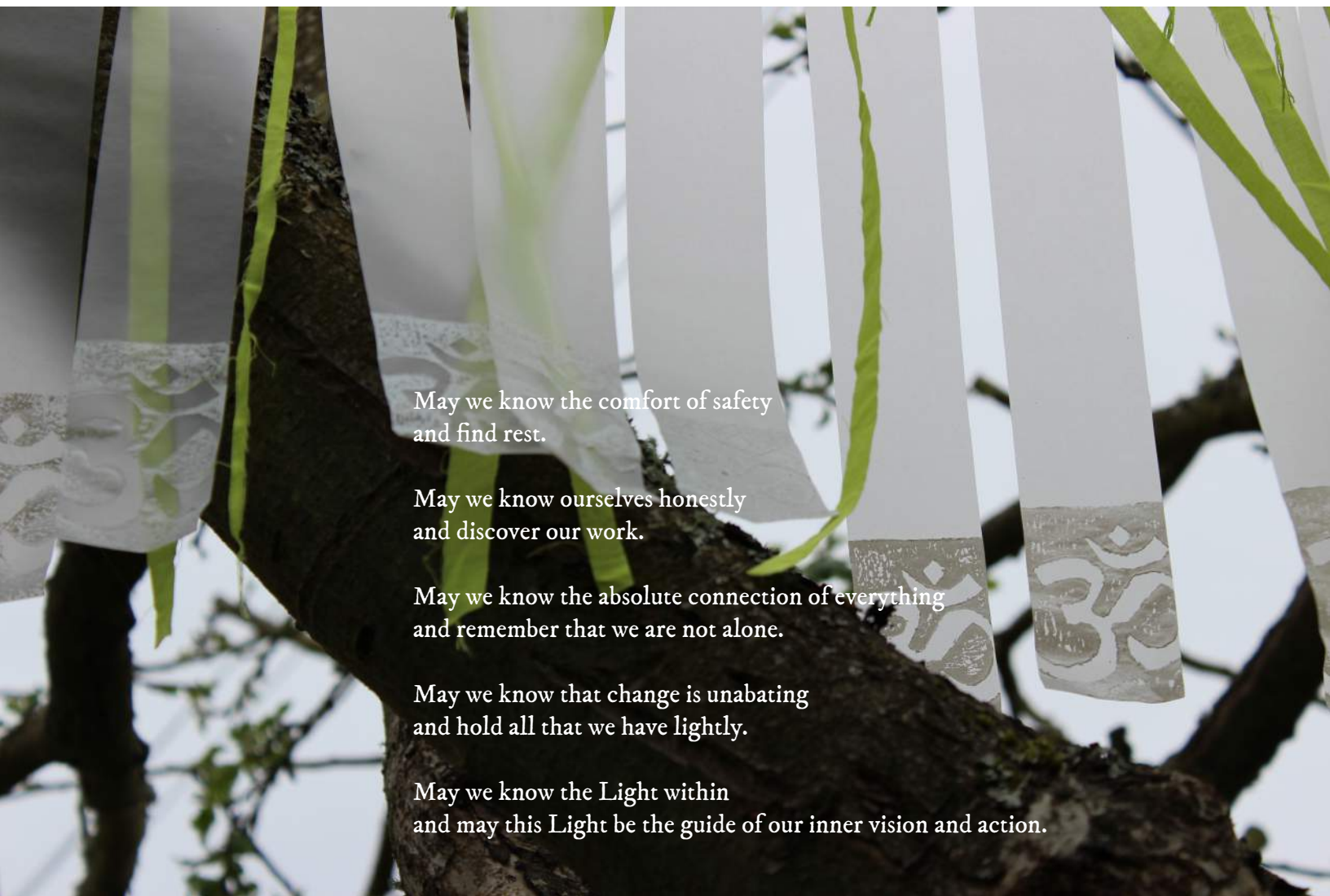
In the end, I don't believe it matters  
what words you use or what forms your  
praying takes.

Whispered words of awe, confusion,  
fear, cries for help, hope, dreams, love,  
are useful whether they are heard by  
you, your community, or your  
understanding of God.

The practice of prayer is useful.

We are changed  
through the action  
and intention  
of our praying.





May we know the comfort of safety  
and find rest.

May we know ourselves honestly  
and discover our work.

May we know the absolute connection of everything  
and remember that we are not alone.

May we know that change is unabating  
and hold all that we have lightly.

May we know the Light within  
and may this Light be the guide of our inner vision and action.



Amen (so be it)