

## The connection between the heart and its prayer (Elder Ephraim of Arizona)

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But in order to reach this point [the heart saying the prayer by itself], of great assistance is the way in which the prayer's said, which, of course, you'll have heard of or maybe read about. But now we'll systematize it, so we can practice it, and that'll bring good results.

We said, the heart's the centre of all movement, spiritual and intellectual, but also of the pains of the body. Every bodily pain resounds in the heart. Even if your tooth hurts, it causes pain in the heart. Or your hand, if you cut it, or your kidneys, they all cause pain in the heart. The heart works through the respiration. When we stop breathing, gradually the heart stops as well. Through inhalation, we draw in fresh air, which we then expel and take in more, and in this way we maintain our life.



When we stop breathing naturally and normally, and we inhale and exhale slowly, this is an anomaly for the heart. As long as this anomaly exists, there's some pain, some sort of restriction, let's say, in the heart, because it's not taking in air in a natural rhythm. Instead of getting air quickly, we breathe it in more slowly. The pain which follows naturally from this makes the mind aware of the heart and this attraction of the mind to the heart creates a union between the two. Just as when a tooth hurts, the mind goes round and round but keeps coming back to the pain, the same is true with the heart.

When we start to say the prayer with slow breathing, it's natural that it'll cause this pain, this worry in the heart. And this concern will help us so that the mind will pay attention to the heart. So if we say the prayer with slow respiration, the mind will go down into the pain, in which case there'll be no distraction.

When there's no distraction, because of this way of saying the prayer, the mind will calm down and won't have any reason to wander. The pain will concentrate it.

This method of slow breathing is a necessary means, together with careful attention, to stop the mind wandering. So we can then avoid distraction, which is a drain on real prayer. In other words, distraction takes away any benefit from the prayer we offer.

So, when we shut out distraction, we give fresh air to the mind, to make it pure,

and attentive to the heart. We begin to breathe slowly and, in doing so, we say the prayer: 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me'. We can say it once, twice or three times when we inhale. Then the same when we exhale. Three times when we inhale, twice when we exhale, whatever we can. But we'll regulate the prayer with our breathing according to this concept.

Now if we can say the prayer silently, with slow breathing, that's very good. But if it's difficult because the mind's troubled by temptations, then we'll take a breath through the mouth and move the tongue a little and that's very beneficial in the beginning.

Once we're engaged, in this sense, regulating the prayer with slow breathing, we start to feel a pain in our heart and the mind adheres to it. The mind will try to be in the heart, without moving.

When we take a breath from the nose or the mouth, we'll say the prayer and, in the meantime, the mind will be in the heart, it'll attend to the heart as it is. Not the form of the heart. The mind will be attentive to the heart without imagining what it's like, because once we do that, we're subject to delusion and our prayer's also delusional.

Prayer isn't delusional when we pray without distraction, without shape or embellishment, without form, shape or anything else at all. The mind should be free of any fantasy, be it divine or human. No Christ, no Mother of God, nothing. Only the mind, in the heart, within the breast, nothing else. It just needs to be aware of the fact that it's there. But with our breathing, the mind will start saying the prayer without imagining anything else. Like an engine, the heart will start 'working' the prayer and the mind, like a spectator, will follow the words of the prayer. This is the unerring path to prayer of the heart.

***(to be continued)***