

God Has No Religion

Blending Traditions For Prayer

Frances Sheridan Goulart

Society is infused with aspects of Christianity. Christianity and each of its denominations lay a claim on God, but what about God? The title, ***God Has No Religion***, taken from a quote by Mohandas Gandhi, catches us off guard. Our culture conditions us to see God and our religion, or faith tradition, as inseparable. God, however, is bigger and more amazing than any religion can capture or explain. Frances Sheridan Goulart collects the best prayer practices from the many religions found worldwide to give us more tools in our prayer toolbox to build a better prayer life.

What was your initial reaction to the title? Did it change after having read the introductory materials? After having prayed many of the prayers?

As the author tells us in the introductory materials, we need to pray, and we are increasingly doing so in ways that break traditional boundaries. Prayer can and does involve more of ourselves; fewer of us are content to limit ourselves to reciting rote prayers in church. Instead, Goulart combines rote prayers with those borrowed from the Buddhist tradition, demonstrates how prayer beads can be used on the commute to work, and that prayer is made physical through the labyrinth and yoga.

What was your idea of prayer as a child? How has that notion of prayer developed through the years?

How can you build a better prayer life? Goulart presents practices and prayerware from a variety of traditions. She encourages us to mix them up to make a prayer that is comfortable for us. Practices include: *lectio divina*, or sacred reading; use of a mantra; the quick arrow prayer; walking a labyrinth (perhaps “the next best thing to a pilgrimage”); walking meditation; the Tibetan Buddhist practice of inner light meditation; and prayer journaling (for more on this spiritual practice, see ***Journal Keeping*** by Carl Koch in the *Exploring a Great Spiritual Practice* series).

Which of your current prayer practices do you find life giving? Where do you feel a need for something to break up a stale routine? Or are you searching for a routine?

Prayerware are the props we can use to aid in our practice. Beads have been used for thousands of years, and Goulart explains briefly the different types of beads. As she does throughout the book, she encourages us to personalize the experience: to use beads with any prayer practice, or to make a rosary or mala that has special significance and to have it blessed. Other tools for the prayer

toolbox include the eastern Mandala, the Tibetan Buddhist singing bowls, bells, candles, incense and a prayer shawl, among others.

The prayers themselves, clearly titled to show their focus, are beautifully presented and include inclusive language options. Goulart has given us information about the origin of each, not too much but enough to enable us to delve deeper should we wish. She has included a Resource Section of websites to allow further exploration of each spiritual path presented in this book.

While Using These Prayers

The author has included options for nearly every prayer. Many are suitable for group use. As always, consider journaling or sharing with your small faith-sharing group about the impact of this book on your prayer life using the questions here and those in the book.

Think about why you are drawn to certain forms of prayer. Try one that does not initially appeal to you in an effort to break out of your comfort zone. What was the experience like?

A key theme is creativity in prayer. The author has given us here tools to be more creative in our prayer, and perhaps permission for some of us who feel a bit inhibited. God created us as creative beings designed to praise God all the days of our lives.

How has your prayer and your renewed prayer life affected your actions? What prayer have you created, and what has it in turn created in you?