

the



# BELIEVERS

WE ASKED NINE **more**-AGE WOMEN TO TELL US WHAT PRAYER AND THE SACRED MEAN TO THEM BY ELIZABETH HANLY

## Anita Diamant

*The author of 11 books on contemporary Jewish practice, she portrays the world of Old Testament women in her popular "The Red Tent" (Picador, 1998). Her latest novel is "Good Harbor" (Scribner, 2000).*

"I am the child of Holocaust survivors and lived in a home where Judaism was more cultural than religious—central without being focused upon. I began to study my religion seriously as an adult. I had fallen in love with someone who was not Jewish, and it became important for me to figure out what that meant. We studied together, and his conversion classes became my remedial course.

"My religion is how I understand the world and my place in it—my obligations to it. Seeing how Judaism has shaped me and my husband is, in turn, part of my daughter's education.

"Jews are encouraged to have crises of faith. If you don't have them, you're not a serious Jew. It's not the dark night of the soul, though; they're a part of the ebb and flow.

"The Shabbat observance is one of the anchors of our life. Every Friday night, my family lights candles and says blessings and has dinner together. We often go to services, but the table rituals are sacro-

sanct; we do them every week, wherever we are. That moment of peace, of stopping, is crucial. It's a time to reflect on the preciousness of life, to count our blessings. Nothing esoteric. I think of prayer as a deep please and thank-you. Shabbat is definitely a thank-you moment."

## Diane Komp, M.D.

*The former head of pediatric oncology at Yale University School of Medicine, where she is a professor emerita, she lectures widely. She is the author of nine books on the dreams and visions of children she met in her practice.*

"By the time I finished medical school, whatever faith I'd had was whittled away. I had seen too much suffering. So, why did I choose a specialty where I would see even more?

"I think the children chose me. The closer you get to them, the closer you want to get. If we let our hearts be broken by the things that break the heart of God, we may just find them healed.

"One afternoon—I was in my early thirties at the time—I was standing with a mother by the bedside of a young girl so sick with leukemia that she was not able to sit up. But that afternoon she did. She looked at us and said, 'Can you see the angels? Can you hear them singing?'

I've never heard such beautiful music in my life.' A few minutes later, she was dead. You don't witness such a moment without beginning to wonder.

"By now, I've had decades of such experiences. There was the young boy who told me that he thought neither science nor religion had it right all the time. He had trouble with the big bang theory: 'They say the world came about by accident, but when I look at it and everything in it, I see a design.' That little guy was prevailing over the biggest thing there is, even as he lay dying.

"I feel that children are born with a sense of their spiritual origins, and then we drum it out of them, as we let it be drummed out of ourselves. But, before we die, clues begin to come back, and we become pilgrims in a land we once knew. We are learning, we are searching, we are looking for reliable witnesses—those who can share their faith with us in a way we can understand. I report what I have heard when I listen to the children; I'm just the secretary, the reliable witness.

"Why are there so many innocents suffering in the world? There isn't an answer, but there are three ways to handle the question. We can decide God would not run the universe this way, therefore

there is no God; or we can be so angry at God, we give Him the silent treatment. Or we can have a conversation about all of this with Him, which is called prayer. And give God a chance.”

### Tessie Naranjo, Ph.D.

*A sociologist from Santa Clara Pueblo and board member of various New Mexico cultural organizations, she collects Southwestern oral histories, writes ethnographies and works to preserve indigenous languages.*

“From the time we are born here at Santa Clara to the time we are no more, we are working to complete ourselves: spiritually, physically, emotionally. It’s similar to the Jungian idea of individuation, except the desired state includes a collective, rather than an individual, consciousness. We call it ‘seeking life.’ We have rituals and rites of passage associated with birth, death, initiation and marriage. We can also assume ceremonial offices and roles. This is not entirely about ritual, though; we are always seeking life.

“Our idea of the sacred is simple: We live in a world where we see all things as

having breath and sharing existence with us. To live fully, we must walk and behave carefully. To do so turns life

**“To live fully, we must walk carefully, behave carefully. To do so turns life into a prayer and thereby a sacred thing.”**

into a prayer and thereby a sacred thing.

“Our small universe here at Santa Clara Pueblo is a feminine world. We emerged from a feminine earth. We are surrounded by a soft landscape, bounded with rounded hills. Our responsibility is nurturing the earth and sky that nurture us and gave us life.

“Caring for my elderly mother, who has many physical complications, takes a great deal of my time right now. I was able to come to terms with this responsibility by returning to my community’s values. Belief in the cycle of life makes it easier for me to respond to her physical needs. The idea is to give back to Mother Earth, with care, the life which she gave to us. We live and approach death in a process of inching toward completion in an imperfect world,

knowing that we can never reach it. This is the unending process of seeking life.”

### Leila Ahmed, Ph.D.

*A professor of Women’s Studies in Religion at Harvard University, she specializes in Islam. Her memoir of her childhood in Egypt is “A Border Passage” (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999).*

“One starry night during Ramadan, when I was a small child, my grandmother took my hand and led me up to the roof of our family home to look for angels. Ramadan is a particularly auspicious time for such adventures. I was sitting next to her, perhaps her arm was around me, and she was talking about the continuity of life. I saw no angels, but I saw my grandmother and the miraculousness of that starry night. Then there was a flight of birds that moved together as though they were one. All this was sacred to me as a child.

“Now, as I remember my grandmother and witness the miracles of this world, its dawn and its stars, I feel that having words to address all this is miraculous, too. For me, those words often come from the Koran, which teaches that these moments are premonitions of the sacred.

“The Islam I grew up with was mystical and pacifist. Nothing was conveyed to us of hellfire. Rather, Islam was how

did, I noticed he was very calm and seemed to be focusing differently than I was. ‘What are you thinking about?’ he asked me. I answered, ‘I’m thinking about bringing my hand down to the table.’ ‘Oh,’ he said. ‘I’m focusing beyond the table, toward an infinite source of energy.’ That was what I needed to remind myself of during a free climb of the Nose [a dangerous Yosemite rock face].

“I’m interested in the philosophy of Buddhism, but I see no need to do the chanting and meditation as such. Climbing is like a moving meditation for me—a kind of martial art. When mind, body and spirit come together, something magical happens. You are literally reaching to the heights—to heaven.

“In the kind of climbing I do, you adapt yourself to the rock, and after a while, you tap into its energy—into nature in its raw form. You feel life, colors, the wind on your back; you are going straight into the heart of it.”

### Octavia Butler

*A prominent science-fiction writer who has authored 14 novels, she has won a MacArthur fellowship, as well as science fiction’s most coveted awards, the Hugo and the Nebula.*

“My novels take place in the past, present and future. The freedom to consider

anything at all is an attractive aspect of this genre. I have written love stories between humans and aliens, but finally, it all comes back to an exploration of our humanity. For me, life is what is sacred—nothing more nor less. I wish it were far less easy for people to kill or to order a life to be taken. Evil, though, is not just killing, but also causing unnecessary pain.

“I was raised by strict Baptists, who were poor and intensely religious. If they hadn’t had some hope of heaven, they probably would have committed suicide. Their lives were that hard. Church was the only place they could let loose and cry and shout, and God was the only entity paying attention to them. My conscience got installed good and early.

“Most people seem to be born with great empathy, which keeps getting knocked out of them. It’s like imagination.

### Lynn Hill

*One of the most accomplished female rock climbers, she wrote an autobiography called “Climbing Free” (W. W. Norton, 2002).*

“I once had the opportunity to talk with a very old Chinese Chi Quong master. He suggested that we arm-wrestle. When we



# Look Beautiful from the Inside Out

True beauty goes beyond the skin's surface – just like the benefits of Jergens Ultra Healing® Lotion. And to help you maintain beautiful skin from the inside out, Jergens Ultra Healing® Lotion contains the unique HydraLux™ – system that seals in moisture that heals and prevents dryness, leaving your skin soothed, refreshed and ready for the day.

Jergens

Ultra Healing® LOTION

With Provitamins & Hyaluronic Acid

© 2002



Love your body.™

Jergens has more In-store for you...

Get a sleek black mesh cosmetic case from **more**™ when you send an original UPC code from any Jergen's product, the original cash register receipt (with date and price circled) to: **more** Magazine, Attn: Cassandre Pierre, 125 Park Avenue, 18th Floor, New York, NY 10017-5529. All receipts must be received by October 31, 2002. Offer good while supplies last. A maximum quantity of 500 premiums available. Please allow 8-12 weeks for delivery.

The start date of this promotion is September 24, 2002 and ends October 31, 2002 ("Premium Period"). Premiums will be fulfilled based on date and time of receipt of premium request. Those requests received first will be fulfilled first until either the Premium Period has ended or the premium supply has been exhausted. You must be 18 years of age and a U.S. resident. Duplicate requests will not be honored; one premium per household. No PO boxes allowed. Meredith Corporation is not responsible for any lost, late, damaged, misdirected, incomplete, incorrect, illegible or postage due requests or mail. Void where prohibited, taxed or restricted. We reserve the right to verify identification.

## DIRECTION

Everyone has it, but many are encouraged not to use it.

"I have long thought that we must have at least one space colony, as a kind of species insurance. If we are destroyed on earth, probably by our own hands—by global warming or transgenetic research, for example—there would be a small group of human beings somewhere else. Would I be willing to go? In a minute."

### Helen Gurley Brown

*The longtime editor-in-chief of Cosmopolitan magazine, she has written several books, but is best known for "Sex and the Single Girl," first published in 1962.*

"I am the least spiritual person on earth and have no religious beliefs whatsoever. I simply believe in continuous, unrelenting hard work and being good to your fellow man along the way, and probably everything will turn out okay."

### Ann Hamilton

*A multimedia artist and winner of many prestigious awards, she has traveled to dozens of countries, making installations that are responsive to the spaces in which they are sited.*

"Do I pray? Not if you mean prayer as an address to a particular god. The traditional institutions for prayer—the houses of the sacred—don't speak to a lot of us anymore. Yet, I think I share with many people an ambivalent pull toward religion, or a longing to be absorbed into something larger than my individual, human-centered experience.

"So how do we identify or speak of a longing to embrace something larger than this visceral present—something that is felt but not graspable? Words such as 'soul' and 'spirit' are difficult for us. We are uncomfortable talking about experiences that are sensed or intuited. We don't have a language for this way of knowing—for ecstatic experiences.

"The idea of presence comes closest to what I understand as a way to speak of the sacred: one person being present to another, or being present to his or her own experience without expectations.

"When I begin an installation in a particular setting, there are the exterior things I can identify and respond to—the social history of the place, its physical architecture. But the project also has to re-

spond to what is present, but perhaps invisible: the intangibles of a place. For me, this is a bodily experience. The body senses far more than we know. At a certain point, the work becomes about what a poet has described as 'trying to render something present without naming it and therefore scaring it from the room.'"

### Elaine Pagels, Ph.D.

*She is a religious scholar and the author of books on Christianity and the Gnostic Gospels, including "Adam, Eve and the Serpent" (Random House, 1988) and "The Origin of Satan" (Random House, 1995). She is also a recipient of a MacArthur fellowship.*

"If I were choosing a religion from scratch, I'd probably choose Buddhism—as do many people who, like me, were brought up in Western culture. However, I find that I am still drawn to Bach masses, John Donne's poetry and Chartres Cathedral. I am also attracted to the singing of the cantor at a bar mitzvah and Native dances on the Arizona mesas.

"So I engage in the culture in which I grew up. But I don't swallow it whole, and wouldn't want to—it's indigestible! I explore it, quarrel with it and, once in a while, find the part of it I love.

"Why do I do this work on the Gnostic Gospels? It's the texts that keep pulling me back. I work on them because they work on me—particularly the Gospel of Thomas. 'If you bring forth what is within you,' it says, 'what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you.'

"At a moment of extreme vulnerability, I discovered something that astonished me. I was devastated by the death of my husband of over twenty years. Our son had died of a rare illness a year before, at age six. Father Thomas Keating, who had taught me to meditate, came to see me, and we meditated together. In that raw and tenuous state, I was aware of energy coming toward me and realized that people were sending this energy to me in their intentions, thoughts and prayers.

"Before that, if someone had said, 'I'm praying for you,' I would have thought it was a well-meant but empty sentiment, like, 'Let's have lunch sometime.' At that moment, I realized what kinds of interchange can take place between people." ■