

THE ETHICAL SIGNIFICATION OF PRAYER IN EMMANUEL LEVINAS' PHILOSOPHY

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This paper aims to elucidate the ethical signification of prayer in the light of Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy. The idea of prayer for Levinas has different interpretations depending on which work is read. While prayer is usually understood as a communicative action, the intention of the paper is to analyze a few of Levinas' confessional works regarding prayer and to interrelate them with Levinas' stance on language where ethics occur in a discourse. It explores Levinas' idea of prayer coming from his exposition of the "Soul of Life" by Rabbi Hayyim. It then discusses Levinas' notion of language and its ethical insinuation. Lastly, it highlights the commonalities between the ethical encounter and prayer within the concept of suffering, where the subject responds towards the suffering the Other. The paper concludes by reanalyzing what prayer means as the Service of the Heart as not only an elevation of the soul to God but an ethical act in responding towards the suffering Other.

Keywords: Ethics, Language, Prayer, Suffering

INTRODUCTION

In *Education and Prayer*, Emmanuel Levinas (1990, 269) mentions the scandalous nature of prayer in contemporary times, which makes it a difficult subject for reflection. The experience of scandal, according to Levinas, is two-fold; it is scandalous to the believer and likewise to the philosopher. The philosopher runs the risk of scandal that the search for the meaning of prayer has the tendency to even go beyond the comprehensible or philosophical. It is scandalous in the sense that it cannot offer any form of supplication to God for who is already all-glorious, who knows all human suffering and all holiness. For the believer, the very act of prayer is the pronouncement of one's religious identity. Religious identity gives negative connotations to the believer, and he experiences prejudice like that of a bourgeois who is said to appeal to ideas that protect his comforts or a person who loses sense of the world at hand and believes in a strange world. This scandalous experience makes the act of praying difficult at best. In effect, prayer is left within the synagogues, solitary confinements, and walls. Concerning this, Benjamin Hutchen's *Levinas: A Guide for the Perplexed* (2005, 85) exposes that Levinas argues how Prayer is "insufficiently

ethical." Surprisingly, his commentary from Levinas in understanding the experience of prayer remains relevant. It is difficult indeed to pray or express our prayerful disposition nowadays, especially when ideas of secularism and the progress of modernity continue to flourish. Praying eventually puts one to shame as he pronounces his beliefs. Interestingly, in several ways of expressing religiosity, Levinas took the idea of prayer as one of the very manifestations of religious experience and religious identity, and challenged its conception accordingly. For the believer, and even to the philosopher, praying in the midst of the present condition remains a challenge, and the value of such an act is now put into question.

Levinas wrote on the idea of prayer in different occasions and writings, from the religious or the "confessional writings" to the philosophical. While Levinas differentiates these two (Levinas, 1987; Burggaeve 2002, 188),¹ in another interview, he clarifies that these dimensions of his philosophy go hand in hand, wherein the Confessional provides a form of exegesis to the rigidity of the language of the philosophical (Levinas 1988,172). Jill Robbins (2005,35) notes that these readings are called "Confessional writings" insofar as Levinas tries to discuss them by "making explicit" the implicit philosophical notions in rabbinical texts or perhaps to translate the Talmud into Greek philosophical conceptuality. In another aspect, Annabel Herzog (2020, 3-5,9) interprets that Levinas uses the wisdom of the rabbis to ground the "philosophical" into concrete situations. Coming from this conception of "making explicit" -ness of the confessional to the philosophical, I adhere to such interpretation to dispel the possible difference. In doing so, I interpret that while Levinas wrote the idea of prayer on different occasions, they show a commonality that prayer is and must be ethical. Indeed, it is simply "a matter of style, and not of essence," as Herzog notes. And for Levinas to realize his idea of a reality of ethical responsibility can thrive in contemporary times since his ethics can go beyond conditions and structures that most ethical theories require.

The paper aims to analyze his notion of prayer as an ethical response in bridging the idea of prayer from the confessional works to the philosophical one. This is to realize that his notion of prayer as an ethical act is best and concretely understood within the discourse of the subject to the Other. In response to the Other, I emphasize Levinas' analysis of language, specifically the Saying and the Said, which highlights that the Other communicates his vulnerability and suffering. It is in the hope that I conclude that prayer finds its ethical signification in the form of response towards the suffering Other.

LEVINASIAN IDEA OF PRAYER IN THE *CONFESSIONAL*

This part of the paper surveys the writing of Levinas about his idea of Prayer within the confessional writings. By observation, Levinas wrote his ideas on prayer on different materials and occasions. In this regard, I discuss and reflect on three writings, "In the Image of God," "Judaism and Kenosis," and "Prayer without Demand," which are consistently related to Levinas' ideas about prayer. The essay "In the Image of God" is written in *Beyond the Verse*; "Judaism and Kenosis" in *In Times of the Nation*;

"Prayer without Demand" in *The Levinas Reader*. Here I reiterate the idea of the cosmological-ethical structure as interpreted by Levinas.

Levinas(1994, 156-159) reverberates the cosmological interpretation of Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhiner's *Nefesh Ha'Hayyim* or the *Soul of Life* by providing an ethical dimension, turning from a "cosmological" structure to a "cosmological-ethical" structure. Levinas discusses the *Soul of Life* by emphasizing the idea of God as *Elohim*. *Elohim* is an attribute of God, where God has the mastery of forces he can create. Aside from the world, he also created man in his likeness. Man is interrelated with God precisely because of his creative force. This interrelatedness with man establishes a hierarchy where God is the soul of the world, and the soul of man is near to Him. Man's body, on the other hand, remains in the world. Additionally, according to Rabbi Hayyim, man remains at the very top of the hierarchy of creation for possessing three characteristics, the Vital Principle, the Spirit, and the Divine Breath. Such, then, is the cosmological structure within the *Soul of Life*. Levinas further comments about the three characteristics in *Judaism and Kenosis*, which provides the implications of man as the "Image of God" is all about.

One important analysis here is Rabbi Hayyim's description of man conforming to the Torah. Since man is said to be at the top of the hierarchy next to God, conformity to the Torah establishes a clearer connection with the Divine. Conformity to the Torah is a responsibility given to man because preserving the world depends on him. Levinas noted that with such preservation in following the laws given by God, man brings life to the world and breathes into the world. Failure to follow the commandments of God results in its destruction. Therefore, to be responsible for sustaining life in the world or not is the very exercise of the likeness of man to God. Like God, man also has the mastery of forces to breathe life into the world or cause its destruction. Responsibility for the world rests on man's capacity to become responsible. Contrary to the understanding that sustaining the world might sound like an argument of Being for itself, Levinas analyzes that act of sustaining the world as a Being-for-others. Sustaining life in the world is also to sustain it for other people and, therefore, a form of responsibility to the Other. It leaves man with a moral impetus that sinning against God may also mean the very destruction of the world for others (Levinas 1994, 158-162). With all these being said, aside from following the Torah, prayer is also the disposition of one's soul towards the infinite (Levinas 1994, 163).

In the Image of God exposes the groundwork of reality or the structure where Levinas finds the standpoint for the discussion of prayer. He transforms the cosmological structure into an ethical reality, from Being-for-itself to Being-for-others, to establish a worldly structure built on responsibility. As mentioned, if the sustainability of the world or its destruction depends on Man's responsibility to follow the Torah, thus responsibility comes into play when man follows the Torah for the sake of the world and other people. The important idea within this reading is how Levinas not only successfully inserted his ethical philosophy into the *Soul of Life* but translated a Judaic material into philosophical terms wherein it demystifies the theological language of the text. Indeed, a form of making "explicit" the wisdom of the rabbis.

Following *In the Image of God* is the reading of *Judaism and Kenosis*, which further analyzes the idea of Kenosis or Humility in the cosmological-ethical structure. For Levinas, to introduce the concept of humility as another attribute of God is to

further exemplify the weight of responsibility. According to Levinas, he defined the term "Kenosis" as humility. In the reading, however, the term kenosis strictly refers to God. God's humility or kenosis manifests in God's willingness to descend into servile conditions for man. Levinas would go further in analyzing the concept from both the Talmud and the Bible to cite events where one experiences God's humility in being near and being found in people who suffer, such as the poor, the naked, the orphans, widows, and the afflicted. Therefore, God's humility is being near to human suffering (Levinas 1994, 114-115). The reading of *Judaism and Kenosis* compliments the first reading by seeing the cosmological-ethical structure from a different perspective, in seeing how God is also capable of descending aside from being near man.

Sean Hand gives the main gist of Levinas' idea of prayer as a summary before the actual reading in the *Levinas Reader*. He picks the excerpt that exposes the main components of Levinas' notion of prayer as the "service of the heart" without demand, therefore naming it *Prayer without Demand*. The reading finds itself in between two earlier materials, *In the Image of God* and *Judaism and Kenosis*. This material can be considered as a primer or an introductory to Levinas' thoughts on prayer as it takes two important concepts: the cosmological-ethical structure and the detailed analysis of prayer as ethical. The exposition on prayer starts with an analysis of God's association with the world to man. Insofar as it connected to Rabbi Hayyim's *Nefesh the Soul of Life*, Levinas (1989, 229-232) reiterates the reality of man being connected to God, as his creator, and being a creature created, man then is given a life, a purpose, to the world, and that is to give life unto the world. There is said to be a cosmological hierarchy between God and the world. For this to be established, God is said to need man's fidelity to the law, for it is in the law that man gives life into the world to sanctify and illuminate the world. Levinas approaches this cosmological structure from an ethical perspective by seeing fidelity to the law as a responsibility for preserving the world. Furthermore, Levinas emphasizes that while the *Soul of Life* intends to simply describe and establish a reality of God in association with the world, he compliments it by saying that while the hierarchy might seem "Being-for-itself," it can also be realized as a "Being-for-the-other" to establish unconditional responsibility of man.

One could say that Levinas' rejection of this idea of the world as Being-for-itself reflects his contentions against the Heideggerian Dasein, where he claims that his ontology is an ontology of power, an *egology* (Levinas 1969, 42-46). Jill Robbins (2005, 33) used Levinas' argument against the notion of *conatus essendi* as the tendency to preserve one's own being. Therefore, Levinas emphasizes an idea of a "cosmological-ethical" structure of the world where the condition of responsibility-for-the-Other is immanent.

From this cosmological-ethical structure comes the discussion of prayer. Here, several ideas need to be examined. First, for Rabbi Hayyim, prayer is an "elevation of the soul to God." This idea comes from the same structure wherein man has a body on earth, but his soul is near to God (Levinas 1989, 230). To pray means to elevate one's soul to God and is an act of dis-inter-estedness. It is ethical in the sense that in following the structure of him being near to God, the act of praying is never an act that asks for oneself, but it seeks for the salvation of other people. Again, Rabbi Hayyim explains that God also needs man's prayer as a way of adherence to the law. Levinas steps in to assert the intervention of the ethical in prayer. Accordingly, he prays not

just for himself but also for others so that they may be saved. Prayer, therefore, aside from it being an adherence to the law, becomes an act of salvation for others. The Other's salvation is also dependent on God's salvation for man as well. Prayer, then, is an act to connect oneself to God and God to man (Levinas 1989, 232-233). Towards the end of the discussion, there is the analysis of suffering and its relation to prayer, which ideas will be discussed in the latter part of this paper. What is important in this part is the analysis that prayer is considered a "service of the heart," that praying is dis-inter-ested-ness, and that hoping for the reparation of the world means to hope for the salvation of others.

By observing the three primary texts, we see how Levinas' idea of prayer correlates to one another. The work *In the Image of God* provides the most comprehensive Levinasian analysis of Rabbi Hayyim's *Soul of Life*. This exhaustive interpretation stands as the very basis of Levinas' idea of prayer, for it provides a grounding to describe a human relationship with God, the World, and of the Self. This cosmological-ethical structure provides the basis for how God humbles himself to man and how prayer is brought upon him as the relationship is established. To be sure, *In the Image of God* and *Judaism and Kenosis* are connected to one another as they are separated in different books. *Prayer without Demand*, however, is extracted in the middle of the two materials. The article takes the cosmological-ethical structure of the first material and the idea of prayer in the second material. Thus, this extraction is a way of elucidating the main idea of prayer while incorporating the fundamental ideas that come with it.

Jill Robbins (2005, 35) provides a more comprehensive discussion of Levinas' idea of prayer within the confessional works. Robbins also observed and noted how the readings of Levinas on prayer become clustered into several essays. In her work, she realizes the importance of prayer as a collective and communal act in answering the question, "Who prays?". She reechoes the same interpretation of the readings by analyzing the notion of prayer from the cosmological-ethical structure, the function of prayer regarding suffering, etc. Additionally, she gives an important analysis that in answering who prays, God also prays with man and like man. She reemphasizes that God also wears the Tefillin² when He prays. It is also noted in the Talmud God says he, "goes in the mountain and make them joyful in the house of "My Prayer"³ (Robbins 2005, 40). The significance of the Tefillin gives a better understanding of prayer, especially how it is also worn by God, which signifies the bearing of the suffering of all of humanity. Thus one prays for God to alleviate all suffering. Robbins concludes that prayer is a form of responsibility that goes beyond the religious-binding notion. She reaffirms *Education and Prayer* by realizing the same argument that prayer is left within the synagogues. Therefore, prayer can have its collective impact when it is actualized outside the synagogues into a secular and collective activity. This stepping out comes from one's election, in which the subject is being elected to become responsible for the injustices among men (Robbins 2005, 32-47). This election to become responsible is irremissible. To reecho Robbins, to pray as a form of responsibility elected upon us is an irremissible act towards humanity.

Consistently, Michael Morgan (2007, 347-353) interprets the idea of prayer as a commitment to human action toward the reduction of human suffering, a form of responsibility for the Other. Coming from the same analysis of the cosmological-

ethical structure, Morgan emphasizes that there is a need to transform the conception of prayer from liturgical and ritualistic to an expression of generosity, benevolence, and justice, which is central to human life. Similarly, what Robbins and Morgan emphasize are two things: first, they assert that there is a need to transform the idea of prayer from a ritualistic and solitary activity, and second, doing so means realizing our place in cosmological-ethical structure of the world where subjectivity lies unconditional election to become responsible, and such action is done in prayer.

However, what makes the idea of prayer "Levinasian" is the very insinuation of the Ethical in the very act. As mentioned, Levinas reiterates that one's obedience to the Torah is also a way of becoming ethical to the Other, thus a responsibility. Therefore, to understand the fullness of Levinas' idea on prayer is to trace where Levinas starts the discourse, in understanding an ethical reality, in the Judaic or religious sense. However, it should be noted that when Levinas espouses Rabbi Hayyim's cosmological hierarchy, it may give the impression that Levinas would affirm a structure, for he might be perhaps allergic to such, especially how he does not affirm a formulaic or systematic view of ethics (Levinas 1981, 117; 1996, 103). If such is the case, I'd like to believe that despite such structure, there is always an emphasis on structures to become ethical. Likewise, it is perhaps fair to say that Levinas' analysis of the *Soul of Life* is to place the primacy of the ethical in preserving the world with a God who also prays for us.

Yet again, if indeed we are elected to become responsible in the cosmological-ethical structure of the world, it should be clear as to how prayer is understood to seek for the other's salvation in a more concrete sense. How can it be a "collective" that goes beyond the corners of the church? How can it express one's generosity and benevolence and assert justice? I hope to answer this through Levinas' concept of language in the following part of the paper.

RESPONSIBILITY AS THE ESSENCE OF LANGUAGE

This part of the paper shall simply analyze the ethical nature of language that brings the subject and the Other in the way of discourse. Levinas noted that the very utterance of the Other's message is the expression of his absoluteness and an invitation to discourse. The importance of this chapter is to emphasize that while prayer has a communicative function, it can be related to Levinas' notion of discourse. This also provides an exposition where Levinas describes the response in discourse as a form of prayer in "Is Ontology Fundamental?".

In *Totality and Infinity* (1969, 207) Levinas notes that the formal structure of language is the pronouncement of the otherness of the Other that signifies its ethical inviolability. The face-to-face is an expression where the relationship with the Other is established. However, Levinas also mentions that the very establishment of this relationship does not necessarily come from the Self but rather from the Other, which puts the Self in question. The relationship that starts from a spontaneous interaction with the Other disrupts the tendencies of the subject's consciousness to contain the Other. Another word that Levinas describes this encounter is the term "Discourse" (Levinas 1969, 194-196; 198-199; and 1988, 169). Following such discourse with the

Other comes its ethical insinuation, the *Ethical Resistance*. The *Ethical Resistance* comes when the Other speaks to us with the message, "You shall not commit murder." Levinas notes this pronouncement is the primordial expression of the Face, the Other's first word. This expression establishes the relation of the subject to the Other in discourse. And since the message is conveyed to the subject, he then must respond to him. His response is at a crossroads between murder and responsibility, for which the former take in consideration the idea of having power upon the subject, to murder, to remove his otherness, while the latter, responsibility is welcoming the Other, in being responsible to him. The guiding principle to become responsible in the discourse is the idea of the Infinite in the Other. The Infinite that appeals to us, and resists the temptation of power. As language is already manifested as the first message said by the face, the Other solicits a form of response.

Therefore, the underlying idea of language and responsibility in the book of *Totality and Infinity* is how Levinas (1969, 207) defines language not as a system of words and its construction to convey coherent messages but to establish the ethical significance that creates a relationship of the subject with the Other that speaks to him. It is by hearing the very message of the Other that speaks to us that materializes the Ethics that Levinas imagines. Ethics then, is more concerned with the discourses and encounters that happen in the material world.

What compliments the idea of discourse is the idea of the Saying and the Said. Here, Levinas analyzes the very nature of the message of the Other. While the concepts discussed a while ago analyze the nature of discourse as to how it happens, here Levinas goes deeper into understanding how appealing and effective the message of the Other is as it comes into discourse with the Other. In the interview with Philippe Nemo in "Ethics and Infinity," Levinas (1985, 88) encourages the subject to pay attention to the Saying rather than what is Said. He differs the two by describing the Said in relation to laws of institutions that bear the Saying, while the Saying is the very message. What he emphasizes here is how Said becomes a basis from which the Saying may stem. The Saying, on the other hand, is where the subject listens to the Other and responds to the message. If the message is, "You shall not commit murder," the subject then listens to the very Saying conveyed. Furthermore, this is the reason why Levinas emphasizes the Saying, as a disturbance to a person and that person cannot be silent in the presence of someone speaking. Therefore, what Levinas proposes here is how the first message of the Other appeals to the subject.

Following the thought in the interview, in "Otherwise than Being and Beyond Essence," Levinas (1978, 48) further elaborates on his ideas on language through the concept of the *Saying*. Accordingly, the *Saying* is what establishes the relation of the subject to the Other. The *Saying* goes beyond time, the consciousness of the ego, and the notion of epistemological truth. Therefore, Levinas asserts that *Saying* is a communication that is not necessarily an exchange of messages of truth but rather an exposure. It is only through this condition of exposure that one can understand that the idea of the Saying refers to the quality of the message that allows the message not to become epistemological nor become an object of the consciousness. Thus, exposure is the very condition of communication. For it is through exposure that one can realize that one's discourse does not necessarily consider ontology as a condition for communication. The main thought that Levinas emphasizes in the book is that

encounter with the Other through communication is possible without the conditions of ontology. Levinas wants one to imagine that there are instances of communication that happen spontaneously or even in their purest. Purest in the sense that sometimes, people talk to each other because they simply need to talk, without any preconceived agendas and ulterior motives. Perhaps, one can understand how people talk to one another for long periods of time because the subject of their conversation does not necessarily need to be fixed, just as how ontology suggests. However, Levinas would continue to discuss the concept by analyzing the relationship with the Other that comes to the subject as a surprise. Robbins(2005, 32-33) would even reiterate Levinas by saying that even in everyday language, there is an ethical insinuation, especially in the greetings of "*Bonjour*" or famously in Levinas, "*Après vous, monsieur* (After you, sir)" (Levinas 1981, 117).

In a later work, *Is Ontology Fundamental?*, Levinas (1998, 1-13) describes the relationship with the Other that goes beyond consciousness and epistemological thematization with the term "Religion". The essay consists of Levinas' criticism of ontology as solely an experience of the subject to comprehend the world through his consciousness. Levinas noted that such an ontology does not elicit a reflective notion of philosophy or a philosophy of life. Levinas, therefore, asserts that there is more than living life beyond intellectualism. Thus, it is through ethics that the subject is related to the Other as established through language and expression. Consistent with the earlier works, the relationship with the Other is established through speech and expression. What is unique in this work is how Levinas described the relationship as "Religion" and the essence of discourse is prayer insofar as the relation is described as invocative, just as how prayers are uttered to be in relationship with God. It is worth noting that in the usage of the term religion is how Levinas alludes to the idea of God to the idea of the Infinite that is found in the Other. Since God is uncontainable to a single thought, like the Other, a relationship is established that goes beyond intellectualism.

Diego Fonti (2015, 19-40) maintains the same discussion of analyzing Levinas' notion of religion as a relationship with the Other, and how Prayer becomes the essence of discourse by analyzing the notion of language. In a way, he reiterates that prayer is a form of communication with the Other. The significance of his argument in regard to Levinas' idea of prayer is how he incorporates the idea of Prayer as a communicative discourse with the Other in the cosmology within the *Soul of Life* and the idea of Kenosis as being associated with the Divine. He recognizes it as "his share as a human" in his association with the Divine and the world. In his way of argumentation, he understood that prayer as a communicative discourse also falls within the encompassing idea of responsibility wherein one is even elected or becomes a hostage to the Other who demands the subject's responsibility which is infinite in demand. Therefore, as part of a Jewish tradition, or experience, the very utterance to the Other of "here I am" is the prayer at work. With the discussion from the scholars mentioned above, they all share a commonality in seeing the ethical side of prayer in its communicative aspect in the attempt to overcome the challenge of ontology. They both emphasize it by using words such as "after you," "bonjour," or "here I am," which these words, within their context, explain that ethics is not understood as a system of the good. Still, it happens in our daily lives and our usual conduct with others.

PRAYER, SUFFERING, AND ETHICS

Levinas (1981, 51-54, 15, 18) asserts the radicality of responsibility by analyzing the notion of suffering as something that the subject is subjected upon. According to Levinas, due to one's corporeality, this condition allows him to be sensible to the Saying of the Other in his message. This sensibility would go as far as being introduced to as vulnerability, wherein the condition of becoming a subject is to become vulnerable to the Other. Vulnerability, thus, allows one to be sensitive of the suffering of the Other. To be sensible to his suffering is also to carry the suffering of the Other as an expiation. Therefore, being responsible to the Other bears the consequence of suffering for the Other. But this bearing of suffering is not actively done but passively. Levinas also assesses that in the condition of passivity, which goes beyond intentionality and egoism, to suffer for the Other is something that is done for the Other in the course of responsibility.

Simply put, Levinas' analysis of suffering (1981, 15-16; and 1969, 213) implies consequences that a subject experiences in his responsibility to the Other. Suffering, as a condition of the Other, is sensed because of one's corporeal nature. Such sensibility, as Levinas examined, emphasizes the subject's unconditional election to become vulnerable and to bear the Other's suffering in his passivity. Levinas' tone in this book becomes radical in the sense that he illustrates experiences that strike the heart of every subject who becomes elected to be responsible. If one understands that the Other is described as poor, nude, and destitute in *Totality and Infinity*, then our corporeal nature reveals our ethical sensibility to respond to his suffering.

Following *Judaism and Kenosis* in the second part of the paper is the idea of suffering and prayer. Although *Prayer without Demand* would already mention this, *Judaism and Kenosis* emphasizes the relationship between prayer and suffering. As mentioned earlier, prayer is never for oneself but for others. However, Levinas (1994, 129-132) echoes a problem of prayer regarding the subject's suffering. According to Levinas, he poses the question of whether prayer for a suffering self is possible when suffering is said to be the very atonement of the self who sins. Therefore, Levinas discusses a new way of understanding prayer in light of the subject's suffering. Following the structure that Rabbi Hayyim proposes, Levinas reechoes that the subject's suffering is expiated or lessened when he prays to a God who also suffers on their behalf. God's suffering on their behalf is a manifestation of his humility in also suffering in proximity to persons in distress. To pray for one's alleviation of his own suffering is also to pray for the alleviation of God's suffering. In the same way, praying for the suffering of God is understood to be greater than that of man. Therefore, if one understands that God is also suffering a greater suffering on man's behalf, his suffering is alleviated when he prays for alleviating the greater suffering that God bears. It is understood that Levinas proposes another dimension of prayer. The dimension of praying to God is "For whom" than being "addressed to." While one can understand that praying to God in "addressed to" is to simply tell one's suffering to God, "For whom" is a way of praying that acknowledges God Himself.

To some extent, Levinas became silent on giving an ethical dimension to suffering in this part of the reading. He answers the problem by saying that to pray for

one's suffering is still possible. However, throughout the concluding parts of the reading, it is unclear how Levinas concretizes prayer as a responsibility to the Other in the form of action. The closest analysis that Levinas gave is the stories of Moses as he performed actions that reminded of God's divine salvation to the Israelites that reminded everyone to pray to God, for it is in this reminder that prayer as a "service of the heart" is always directed upward toward the Divine. Perhaps, it is Moses' invocative power of prayer that calls everyone to pray that makes it ethical in a collective manner. And in such a way, one could understand here that prayer was translated as adherence to God. Moses, in his responsibility for the Other, invited everyone into communion with God through prayer. It is ethical in the sense that it is collective. Levinas tries to discuss this, perhaps from a more theological sense, insofar as Levinas emphasizes the effect of prayer within his commentary. However, one must give credit to the significance of understanding the notion of suffering and prayer in Levinas that he gave an alternative manner of praying or another perspective that even in praying for one's own suffering cannot become ego-centric, for these prayers are not only addressed to God but also for God.

Matthew Del Nevo (2011, 183-198) understood the notion of suffering in relation to prayer by analyzing Levinas' article *Useless Suffering* vis-à-vis the interpretation of the *Soul of Life*. The striking argument that Del Nevo emphasizes here is how he would most likely consider Levinas to be a cosmologist, given his reinterpretation of the *Soul of Life*. From the standpoint of the "end of theodicy" as stated in *Useless Suffering*, Del Nevo understood to put theodicy into question by pitting it against the reality of the Holocaust, paves the way for Levinas to establish the term "messianism" as a form of responsibility for the Other. For messianism to persist, it is through a *Prayer without Demand* in which he asserts in prayer with relation to the cosmological structure it is transformed into a responsibility as one is responsible to the world, to the Other, in relation to God. In another aspect, Levinas (1986, 31) uses the term "messianism" as a way of vigilance in the context of society. It is vigilance in the sense that there is a need for a struggle for a more human society, just as how the Talmud states that "doctors of the law will never have peace... for there is always more to be discussed". In such a way, prayer takes a political aspect. Prayer, as our responsibility for the preservation of the world, also means a constant reevaluation of society in order to assert itself as a world founded upon "being-for-the-Other".

To synthesize, suffering from the two dimensions of Levinas' writings pertain to the very experience of human suffering, their trajectory, however, differs. Suffering in *Otherwise than Being* refers to the experience of sensibility and carrying of responsibility of the Other that allows the subject to become responsible. *Judaism and Kenosis*, on the other hand, explains the appeasement of the suffering self in praying to God who suffers. They agree on the idea of how suffering is sensed or acknowledged. However, there is a lacking discussion in *Judaism and Kenosis* as to how suffering in prayer can be such a way to allow the subject to become ethical or perhaps to allow oneself to have an encounter with the face of the Other. It has limited itself to understanding prayer as not for oneself. Thinking with Del Nevo, prayer has to redeem itself as alleviating the Other's suffering.

As an attempt to close the gap, if one understands prayer as never for one's own, then praying for the appeasement of the suffering of the Other can become ethical. To be able to have this sensibility towards the suffering of the Other, one may opt to pray for that such person may soon be alleviated from the pain that he experiences, thus praying (while Levinas said that praying for one's suffering is allowed), can also be for the alleviation of Others. In another sense, if one understands prayer as the essence of discourse, to be responsible, responding to the Other in discourse becomes a prayer that alleviates his pain by carrying it.

PRAYER AS THE SERVICE OF THE HEART: A CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, aside from the usual understanding of prayer as a form of communication towards the Divine, there lies another dimension in its communicative aspect, it has an ethical dimension of becoming responsible to the Other. One way to understand the connection between language and prayer is by understanding Levinas' ethical responsibility in a religious sense. Religious, not in a way that a person subscribes to a doctrine of a particular religion, but understanding how becoming religious is a way of commitment to the Other. Here, the relationship with the Other becomes synonymous with religion, ethics and responsibility becomes synonymous with prayer. If one is to substitute these terms, one can see that they apply to each other. Prayer in the Judaic sense as the Service of the Heart, as the elevation of the soul becomes synonymous with one's responsibility for the Other without the ego. Due to its synonymy, the act of becoming responsible in the face-to-face alleviates the suffering of the Other, which is a function of prayer. Responsibility becomes a pious discourse. And in the same way, the act of praying as a form of communication to God, in praying to God, and for God in the alleviation of his suffering becomes ethical. For human beings according to Levinas in the "Image of God," humanity is called to pray, not only for one's salvation but for others. Commonalities can be drawn; Levinas (1969, 213) would mention that the epiphany of the Face opens the whole of humanity that looks at us. If both the confessional and the philosophical would ground the idea of prayer in the Ethical, prayer has a radical aspect wherein it answers to the whole of humanity. To pray for the Other, is also to pray for the Third, just as how one is responsible for the Other, and to the Third.

What is worth emphasizing about Levinas' notion of kenosis, or God's supreme humility, is the idea of how God would come down to the people to heed their sufferings. However, when it comes to the notion of Forgiveness, God's supreme humility, as noted by Michael Saint-Cheron (2010, 139), talks about how God does not intervene in the conditions of forgiveness, as Levinas (1990, 12) explores in "Towards the Other" in the "Nine Talmudic Readings."⁴ While God plays a role in forgiving everyone, God does not intervene in the forgiving process between the offender and the offended. This opens a dimension of Kenosis as interpreted in two different readings. However, when one discusses the notion of God's Supreme Humility, it would likewise be concluded that responsibility is left to man's election. Hutchens (2005, 84) notes this to be God's challenge after Auschwitz pertaining to His "absence" during the Holocaust, and Robbins(2005, 43-44) notes that the negative

theology of God's retreat indicates the human election of responsibility for the Other. Therefore, in relation to prayer, the human subject must realize his place in the world and the value of prayer as an ethical action for the preservation of the world that rests on him alone. While God may pray for all the suffering of man, God would still need man's prayer to sustain the world in being responsible to him.

Returning to the discussion on *Education and Prayer*, the prejudice against prayer as being left inside the synagogues or within the corners of the church is evident because precise one usually thinks of prayer in the monotonous, liturgical, repetitive sense. It may even go as far as becoming esoteric that prayer is simply a language for a few that understands it. Yet Levinas realizes the special merit of collective prayer, as Robbins (2005, 39) again would put it, an opening of a community. The Levinasian conception of prayer asserts another dimension where it allows religious experience to thrive beyond its prejudice in secular and modern times. Understanding the very ethical dimension of prayer is to see it as an act towards responsibility for the Other, in becoming sensible to his suffering and alleviating it. Unfortunately, one sees prayer as a form of escapism from responsibility, and one would rather offer time in their solitude to pray for a person who is suffering rather than help them at the very instant. There is perhaps truth to what Levinas (as mentioned in Hutchens 2005, 116) says that "prayer is insufficiently ethical if it represents an avoidance of responsibility; to away from the Other person and towards god is a movement of an ontology of power." While the act itself does not necessarily mean that it is bad, it simply renders prayer as insufficient. Thus, one should realize that prayer would also require action. In the very suffering that happens within the here and now, our ethical sensibility will always put one into prayer. Our responsibility to the Other becomes a prayer when we respond to the Other in discourse. As Levinas (1990, 269) again says in "Education and Prayer," adoration towards the Lord God is never a shying away from humanity but rather a pouring of one's heart towards a humanity that is unique but united.⁵ Therefore, the very signification of prayer is to become ethical, pertaining to a heart that hopes to serve.

NOTES

1. Entretiens Emmanuel Levinas–François Poirié. In F. Poirié, Emmanuel Levinas. *Qui êtes-vous?*, Lyon: La Manufacture 1987, pp. 62-136. Since this is a text in French (for the sake of being accurate and specific), the statement is quoted by Roger Burggraeve (2002) *The Wisdom of Love in the Service of Love: Emmanuel Levinas on Justice, Peace and Human Rights*, p. 188.

2. The Tefillin are pieces of cloth that are worn in the head, and in the hand for young male adults during weekday morning services in the Judaic Tradition.

3. Robbins quotes from a translated text, "R. Johanan says in the name of R. Jose: How do we know that the Holy One, blessed be He, says prayers? Because it says [in the words of Isa. 56:7], "Even them will I bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in the house of My prayer." It doesn't say, "their prayer," but "My prayer"; hence [you learn] that the Holy One, blessed be He, says prayers".

4. Levinas talks about forgiveness within the topic of the annual colloquium of French-Jewish Intellectuals, the *Ecole Normale Israelite Orientale*, in 1963. It is in

this talk that he made a commentary on the Talmudic notion of forgiveness in relation to German Guilt.

5. See Emmanuel Levinas (1990, 270), *Education and Prayer*.

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