

Prayer and its Methods

Om. A-sa-to ma sad gam-ma-ya. Ta-ma-so-ma jyo-tir gam-ma-ya. Mri-tyor ma a-mri-tam ga-ma-ya. Avir avir ma e-dhi. Rudra yat te dak-shi-nam mu-kham. Tena mam pahi nityam. Tena mam pahi nityam. Tena mam pahi nityam.

Lead us from the unreal to the Real. Lead us from darkness unto Light. Lead us from death to Immortality. Reveal to us Thy Resplendent Truth and evermore protect us, Oh Lord, by Thy Sweet and Compassionate Face, by Thy Sweet and Compassionate Face, by Thy Sweet and Compassionate Face.

The subject of the talk this morning is: Prayer and its methods. The general meaning of prayer is asking something from someone. In our everyday life often we have to ask something from our neighbor or friend. In a broad way this could be called prayer. Prayer suggests a need that can be a secular need, an intellectual need, ethical need, a spiritual need. So prayer is a means, is a way of fulfilling some of our want. Something which we lack and cannot obtain through any means, we resort to prayer.

Prayer can be selfish. Mostly it is selfish if it is in our practical life. We ask God to remove some of my crises. Some of my relation, dear relation is seriously ill. And the doctors cannot do anything so we then remember “there is,” they say, “there is a God, Whom I have not seen and Who I have not known, but as a last resort let me pray to him.” So he prays, “Oh God, I do not know whether you. I do not know where you are. I do not know whether you will listen to my words, but I am sincere. There is a critical situation in my family, which I cannot meet by any other means. There is a critical illness of one of my dear relations or friend and the doctors have said, ‘we cannot do anything; now if you believe in God, pray.’” That is the doctor’s last advice. So I pray in that manner.

There may not be faith, but there is sincerity. I sincerely wish that my dear friend recovers from this critical illness. And if God listens to my prayer, if my dear one recovers from that illness, I can write a one hundred dollar check in the name of God. Or, I can do any other thing. I can give, if I am rich enough, I can give some charity to some institution. So I am very grateful to God. He has done a miracle for me, though my prayer was not the prayer of a yogi or a spiritual person, it was a secular prayer, but God has listened to my prayer so I am grateful to God. As a result of this, it may be – sometimes it works like that—this man develops a strong faith in God, know[s] there is God. From his heart he believes there is God: I prayed to Him and He listened to me.

There are other cases where the same type of selfish prayer was directed to God but in those cases God did not listen. Then what shall I do? I can curse God, or I lose my faith in God and prayer. It does not work. So these different things may happen when we resort to prayer in our secular life. When the prayer is successful, that may lead to a great faith in me in God. I ... my faith in God is strengthened. My love for God begins to grow. But there are unselfish prayer[s] also. There are people who pray, not for themselves, who pray for others. He sees so much poverty, or distress around him and he prays to God. Oh God, I know, I have heard that you are compassionate. So remove the distress of these people. This is a very high order

of prayer. For the time being this person has identified himself with others, with his neighbors, with distressed people all over the world. There are people who seeing the unrest and the chaotic situation in different parts of the world, he sincerely prays to God. "Oh God, remove, it is You Who by some miracle, you can remove the distress of these people. Government cannot do anything. They are busy in political strifes and tensions. But You then, do not meddle in political affairs. So you can do... You have a free mind and You have a compassionate mind. That is why we call you Great. So do please remove the sufferings of this distressed people."

This is also another kind of prayer. It is a high order of prayer. You can call it ethical prayer. But it is a high order of prayer. This prayer if that person exercises this prayer from his heart, not just by mouth word, but sincerely he feels the sufferings of others and he prays to God to remove their sufferings. If he practices this, this a high order of spiritual practice, because you have magnified yourself. You are no longer a little person busy with your little body and your mind and your family and children. You have expanded your heart to others – to distressed people in Asia, to distressed people in Africa, to distressed people in Mexico, to distressed people in other parts of the world. You read newspapers and you are a compassionate man and your heart prays to God with all sincerity. "Oh God, remove the sufferings of these people." If he practices this prayer, he will find that there is a growth in him – a spiritual growth, an ethical growth, the growth of character. Normally our character is filled with selfishness. Whatever we do we do with a selfish motive. If we pray, that prayer is often prompted by some selfish need, by some selfish greed.

So unselfish prayer can be of this type, which was mentioned, that is from the bottom of your heart, you feel the distress of people. You see with your eyes a particular young man who is going astray, who has been captured by temptations, by evil desires, and you feel for this young man. And you pray to God. Instead of sending the young man to a psychologist, he prays. He sends him to God. He prays for that young man to God. "Oh God, please deliver him. Where heaven is I do not know, but this I know, that if this man gets rid of his present evil tendencies, evil temperaments he will be... there will be a real renewal of his life. He will be happy. When he is acted by temptation, when he is acted by evil motives, by hate, by greed, by lust, by anger, then he cannot have happiness. If you take his blood pressure, his blood pressure is always over two hundred. [audience laughs] If there is inner tension, that affects the mind.

So these kinds of prayer, when you pray unselfishly for others, you extend your personality. You have become greater than what you were. Normally we believe, we have firm faith only in our body, in our mind, in our family. But beyond that my thoughts or desires do not go. I remain little all through my life. I may have, I may succeed in my business, I may succeed in my intellectual activities, but I remain as man – I remain very little: a selfish, body bound, a selfish man. Though we feel sometimes at least that there is an element of greatness within us, we are not really little, we are really connected with a great reality, which is, who is God. And that God, the scriptures say, is hidden in the heart. The human heart is the best place, dear place of God. The whole universe belongs to God. He cannot... He can go anywhere, free. He does not need an aeroplane ticket. [With] free will he can go

anywhere. He can go to the high space. He can go to the stars. That is why he is God. God means: All-Powerful. In Sanskrit, we call God, Brahma, Brahman. Brahman means the Great, the Great in all respects: the Great in love, the Great in power, the Great in wisdom, the Great in love-compassion. God is great in all respects and He is everywhere. That is what the scriptures say. If you remain material in your behavior and thoughts, you lose, but [you win] if instead you substitute the inner greatness by God who is omniscient... God is timeless. Even when nothing was born, there was God, so says the Bible, the first book of the Bible. There was nothing, but God was there. God is self-existent. So also declare the Upanishads. God is self-existence. It is difficult for us to understand what is self-existence. Self-existence means you are uncreated, you are unborn, you are present eternally, and you have no death. You have conquered time. For us, we are slaves of time. Time is always manipulating us. We cannot run a race with time. Time is always the gainer.

We want to do a certain work within today, tonight, but tonight when we find even when it is twelve o'clock, I have not yet been able to finish even half of that work. And next day, I made the same resolve. This, today, I am surely going to finish this stack of letters, before I go to bed, but Oh, God, there are so many phone calls, there are so many distractions, so when I go to bed I said, "Yesterday I finished half, but today I have not been able to do even one-third." That is time. Time is running on, running on. [It] does not wait for anybody and we are always behind time but not so for God. God is self-existent. That means He has no birth; He has no death; He has no change. Everything is changing. But God does not change. Such is God. And by this you find, in the scriptures you can find, in the Upanishads, in the Bible, the Great God.

So sometimes our mind is drawn to this great reality, which is God, Who can be realized in the depth of our consciousness. In the depth of our heart we can find this great reality. And we can establish a personal relation[ship] with God, though God is so great. In our practical life, in my office, my superior, my boss is too high for me if I want, "Sir, I want to talk one minute with you." The boss does not look at me. He is so proud. This man, probably he draws just a few thousand dollars, but a boss draws [a] hundred times more, and steals a lot of that money. So he is an ideal boss. [laughs]. How can I hope to talk with him and be friend[s] with him; he does not care for me.

But God, though He is so great in every respect, all the wealth of this world, it belongs to God. I may have a beautiful mansion, but that mansion may catch fire one day and be burned to ashes. But not... This kind of catastrophe does not happen to God. Everything belongs to Him. What we call great, the great sky, the forests, the mountains, the oceans, the people.... So many kinds of people are in this world-- the races, variety of objects are in God's world. Such is God and the difference between my boss and God is: God does not steal anything. He is very truthful. He is the personification of truth and honesty. And everything belongs to Him. At His will He needs...whatever He needs comes to Him. Millions of human beings are born; they live here for a period and they disappear from the scene. But another cycle begins. Another generation of human beings appear[s] on the scene and they play their part and they also disappear. And God is the silent spectator of this play. It is

His play. It is His play -- what we call creation and preservation and disappearance-- all these three together is God's play. And God is everywhere. He has a vision of equality. He had no discrimination between the races, between colors, between wealth, between wisdom, because everything belongs to him. From the lowest insect to a high blessed person, it is God there.

Now these subjects, when we read in our scriptures or sacred books, we are in a mood, a mood of prayer. This is another kind of prayer. This is a prayer – spiritual prayer. This is a prayer for spiritual wisdom, self-purification. We pray to God. We can establish a personal relation with God. We can look upon God as Father, as Mother, as Friend, as Master, as Beloved. If we can establish a human relation with God, then prayer becomes easy. So we can pray to that God, that You are my Father, You are my Mother, You are my Supreme Treasure, Wealth. And You are my Power. I pray to God, not for any earthly things, but for spiritual understanding. I see within myself a dirty mind, the mind full of lust and greed and hate and temptation. I want to get rid of this kind of mind. I want a pure mind. And that can be possible with Your Grace, so I pray to You to remove the blemishes of my heart. Let my heart be as pure as the heart of a child. And when the heart is pure, I can find You. I can find You first in the depth of my soul, in the depth of my heart. And then I can find You – everywhere.

Then such a person tries to practice regular contemplation, meditation. That includes prayer; that includes meditation, contemplation of the glory of God. When we open our eyes, if we are in a secular mood, we see it is sunlight. It is moonlight. It is the sky. It is the bird singing. All our thoughts are material thoughts. We do not connect God with the wonders which we see. But a man of devotion, a man who is seriously trying to lift his mind from the impurities of this world to the splendor of God, to the wonder of God, he sees the world in a different way. He looks upon human beings in a different way. He feels, just as I feel the presence of God within my heart in my period of meditation, so the same universal God is in every person, man or woman, white or black. There is no question of race. There is no question of learning or wealth – the same God. In this way we practice prayer, spiritual prayer. Spiritual prayer. And to that God within the heart we pray for purity, we pray for devotion, we pray for dispassion, we pray for spiritual knowledge, we pray for love. So that is spiritual prayer.

By spiritual prayer, slowly our heart becomes more and more purified. The restlessness of our mind gradually goes away and our heart is filled with a peace, with a calmness, with an equanimity. When I am praying the mind has gone to the depth of my consciousness within the heart. There I am not conscious of the external world. The external world has merged in my heart. What we call external-internal is a function of the mind. It is the mind which creates the idea of external or internal. So when I go and practice meditation and prayer, then the whole world is forgotten. Even I lose sense of my own body. The mind is no longer restless. When I am thinking of the great God within me, the mind is ashamed to be restless. All the reckless, mean thoughts go away-- go away by themselves-- and I feel a sense of unity: unity with the whole universe external and internal. Both merge into an unity, the unity of God. That unity is in every person. It is by ignorance, the basic ignorance of life, which in Vedanta we call maya, that we see so much difference.

But by the practice of prayer and meditation, our mind becomes more and more calm and we feel that inner unity, as if the whole world, the all humanity, everything has been unified in my heart. My heart has become a great heart, like a Heart of God. These are spiritual desires, spiritual ideas and these need not be in books.

We can practice this in our everyday life. In our everyday life, we can try to experience this real greatness in us. Jesus Christ said in the Bible, "What shall a man profiteth if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?" The soul of man is that God in us. That Infinite God when he comes, responds to our prayer, He comes within us and we feel Him as Brahman, as the Great. Seen this way, this is the spiritual prayer – with a personal relation, and that personal relation becomes deeper and deeper. You really feel that you have a real father, and He is God. You have a real mother, and Who is God. You have a real friend, the friends of this world may show their friendship for two years or three years, but God's friendship is never lost. He is our eternal Friend; He is our eternal Companion. So with these we should bring this personal relation and devote them, apply them to God.

While we pray we can have a God without any form as some religions teach, or we can have God with a form. We can pray to God through a picture, through a form of God. Some religions have created many forms of God, the ancient Greeks, the Hindus, and the Buddhists. They worshiped and prayed [to] the visible form. That form to them was not a material form; it is a spiritual form, which can be experienced in meditation. When you are working in the everyday life, you cannot understand that spiritual form. But if your love grows, then that picture, or the statue, or the symbol becomes something living. You feel that you are sitting before a living God, a living picture and that brings great peace, great love and harmony in your life. And you become a different person.

Externally you may be the same person, living in the same family, but your mind has changed. Your mind has become universal mind. Your mind has become filled with the love and truth of God. So you are a treasure in society, because society is filled with evil persons with evil desires. A truly honest and truthful person is very rare, but a person who is practicing these prayers, he becomes a different person. He becomes an asset. He has no hate to anybody. He can love all people. He is ready to help; he need not sit idle in a mountain cave. He can be extremely busy but he knows: all this work that I am doing, the power is God's power. I am living in God's world and I am working with God's tools. God has entered into his life through his prayer. And this man will radiate peace wherever he goes. The peace that he has gained by his prayer and contemplation cannot remain concealed in his heart. Wherever he goes people feel that this person is a different person. Though externally he is a human being like us, but inside him there is light, there is light of God, there is love of God. There is no hate, no meanness, no tension.

Such is the spiritual effect of prayer. Unselfish prayer can change our life and we are not afraid because we know God is our friend and God is our eternal companion. He is full of love and compassion and beauty. So this person by his faith, by his love, becomes an angel in this world. Spontaneously our love goes to him, to such a person, yet that person may be a man or a woman, but that person is

truly great in the spiritual sense. He does not lose anything, but he gains a great deal. He gains the wisdom of God, the reality of God, the truth of God.

There have been persons who out of the depth of their love and feeling have written wonderful songs, songs of prayer to God. If we read those songs, if we sing those songs then our love for God is strengthened. So there are these ways, spiritual ways of purifying ourselves and the goal... Sometimes you ask: what is the meaning of our life? When you are in a secular plane, there is no meaning. You are laboring hard, like a donkey, like a horse, but to no purpose. And one day, death comes and takes you away. But a spiritual person, a person who has experienced the presence of God in his heart, he feels this life is full of meaning, because all meaning is connected with God. This is God's world; this is God's work; this body is God's; these eyes are God's. He feels that God is playing in this frame of my body-mind.

So this cannot be really be described: the joy of a godly life, the joy of a holy life. But it is true. Just as there are many life patterns we see in this world, so this is a special pattern of life, the spiritual pattern by which we become free from the bondage of this world, the bondage of life and death, the bondage of our passions and prejudices. We become really free. We become really blessed.

Thank you.

[Next Sunday, the subject of the lecture will be: Madhuri, the sweetness of the Divine. Madhuri is a Sanskrit word. It means: the sweetness of the Divine. So that will be the lecture title next Sunday, and I shall be the speaker. Madhuri, the sweetness of the Divine. And 22nd [must be 25th] of November, this Wednesday, the Upanishads class will also be conducted by myself. And 28th of November, this Saturday, and the Saturday class will also be conducted by myself. Swami Prapannananda, our assistant Swami has gone far away to India, to the place where he was [where] he lived twenty-one years and the Swami in charge wrote a very appealing letter to me and as also to him: please let him come here and join our celebration. We shall be very happy. So for three weeks he has gone and that is why a little extra burden is on my head. I do not mind, but people remind me, "You are an old man of eighty-six. Don't do too much. One day you will fall down." I say, "What does it matter if I fall down or if I sit or... all these years I have heard these wonderful things and if one day that comes, what we call life or death, it does not matter to me." So with this assurance I have allowed him to go home. So Sunday lecture, Upanishads class and Saturday class. Then there will be December. In the meantime there will be the great American festival. (Teases.) What is the name of thd festival? (audience laughs) "Thanksgiving." "Thanksgiving and thousands of turkey birds are crying... Our day is coming, our day of liberation is coming." (He laughs and audience laughs.)]

[Closing chant not included on this tape.]