

QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION, Q. 140: WHY PRAYER?

Om Sri Sai Ram

This is an often asked question: ***When God knows all, why should we pray? Where is the need for prayer? Why? We say God knows everything. He is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. Then why prayer?*** This is asked very often. Let's spend a couple of minutes discussing this in this talk.

First of all, we should be convinced of the basic fact that all forces of the world, all forces of the universe, cooperate with us. Let us not consider the world against us. Let us not consider the universe opposed to us. So, all forces cooperate with us.

But man feels helpless. Yes, in one way he is helpless also because he thinks that he is all alone. However, he is all powerful, but forgetting that fact. Alone is nothing. Man left alone is nothing. I repeat this any number of times. Why?

In you every universal force is crossing, like the sun, air, earth, fire, and the ether. You are just at the grass roots. So you should understand that you are part of this cosmos. There is no existence without the sun or air or earth or fire or ether. These are necessary for human life. Then why do you consider that you are alone?

Don't you notice all these forces are cooperating with us, so as to make us continue to live? But, most unfortunately the modern mind thinks that man is isolated because the modern mind is not in tune with the universe. The result or what happens is there is constant conflict and struggle within everyone.

So, we should realize that we are part of this cosmos, of this universe. Maybe the western mind may have an attitude to fight with the universe, resulting in struggle and conflict. Science and technology, the atomic sciences, and the space sciences may prompt us to try to conquer the universe. Then what happens? In that process, man gets alienated from the universe. He becomes a stranger to the universe. He turns violent, and ultimately he finds himself alone. Therefore, that spirit of conquering the universe and the attitude of feeling alone are totally wrong.

On the other hand, we should cultivate the conviction that we are part of this cosmos. That's the reason why the eastern mind considers itself or finds itself in deep resonance with the universe. In fact, the eastern mind also says that I and the universe are not two. We are part of it, the same, like the relationship between the wave and the ocean. You and the universe are like that. You belong to this universe so you are not a stranger. You should develop this sense of belonging. We should also understand that no one is a mechanical part. No, I am not a mechanical part. Certainly not! I am an organic part of the universe.

So, in other words, we can conclude that the universe has become man in you. The entire universe and the five elements all have come down and have become a man in you. So the universe has become a particular individual in you. In fact, bereft of this universe, you are nobody. You are just a wave.

And in fact, if I go deeply into this understanding, we'll have the experience that the universe is flowering through you. The universe is flowering through you! What more do you want?

Therefore, prayer is a bridge. We can again feel at home. So this prayer is just creating a forgotten intimacy. We have totally forgotten that we are part of the universe so we are not intimate with the world. You know the tragedy we are facing today, be that Omicron or Corona. All hazards are because every person feels alienated from the universe. Live in deep resonance with the universe. So, in this way, prayer is a bridge.

See for example, let the sun be beneficent to us. The sun is a blessing. The sun is a great help to everybody. Truth is not yours or mine. Truth is the center of this universe. When we forget that, we get into conflict which reaches nowhere. Therefore, prayer helps us to develop deep friendship and deep intimacy with the universe. The *Namakam* and *Chamakam* or *Rudram* or *Mantrapushpam* or all the chants in any *yagna* remind you again and again that you are part of the universe, where all the elements contribute in shaping you into a total man.

In deep sleep you have no mind. Why? 'You' are dissolved. Only the being is. The mind gets dissolved in deep sleep. Only the being remains.

So, deep prayer means what? It is a feeling of the no mind state. We go on claiming, 'I am in prayer', 'I am doing prayer'. This is nonsense. No mind - N O – the no mind experience you will have when you are in deep prayer. And in deep prayer, you'll develop the spirit of oneness, only oneness. No one is separate from you. You are not separate from anyone or from the universe.

Also deep prayer helps us to have all the feelings of safety and security. It is just like a child lies happily in the womb of the mother who takes care of the child, who breathes for her, and who dines for the child. Yes, the child is so safe and secure. Likewise, when we feel a spirit of deep friendship and deep intimacy with the universe, it'll be the same feeling of security like the child within the womb of the mother.

Like that, the entire universe shows us a kind of motherly concern, a motherly involvement. So we should have a deep trust that the sun will be beneficial, the air will be beneficial, the earth will be beneficial, and that everything is beneficial in this entire universe.

So, let us know that no one can help you. No. No one can help us. So, what we can do is create a trusting prayerful attitude. A trusting and prayerful attitude in all its simplicity and humility establishes that forgotten bond between you, the individual, and the universe.

It is prayer that creates that bridge, the bridge between you and the universe, yes. When in that happy communion, all the barriers are withdrawn, so you are no longer in any fighting mood. Prayer demands you be ready to surrender. You no longer want to conquer anyone, no, and you are ready to withdraw your ego. These are all the values of prayer. Otherwise we consider that prayer is only a petition or a memorandum or letter of request submitted to God to fulfil our desires. But it's not that.

Prayer is a bridge between you and the universe. Prayer brings back the friendliness, that friendship between you and the universe, so that you'll never feel that you are isolated or alone. All the problems, barriers, hindrances that were bound to be created by the ego, will not be created anymore because the ego is gone. It's not there anywhere because of prayer. So, you will not be your own enemy.

It is said, ‘*Vasudaiva Kutumbakam*,’ meaning ‘the entire universe is your home’. When you feel that you are in this home which is universal, the fighting attitude dissolves, and the conflicting mind dissolves. Ego and violence and every effort to become something, to be this or that, in fact that feeling of becoming dissolves. You will have no ego then, and you will develop a prayerful mind with full awakening so that even if you fall into deep sleep, you will have that same awareness.

So, in *samadhi*, in ecstasy, you are the conscious awareness. It is a phenomenon. Yes. You may say that conscious awareness or *samadhi* or ecstasy may all mean the same as you experience in deep sleep. In other words, the experiences in deep sleep are very much the same as the experiences in *samadhi*. We don't conquer anyone. Truth will allow and truth will conquer us. You are not going to conquer truth. Allow the truth to conquer you. That is what surrender is.

Prayer allows us to surrender. Prayer makes our life simple and humble. Bhagavan gave an example long back in His earlier talks. It seems two spiritualists were passing by a forest and they were very thirsty at one moment. They could not find any water in the vicinity. Walking and walking throughout they noticed a well nearby. These two went close to the well. There is water at a depth in this well. Above the water, it is full of thorny bushes.

These two are spiritualists, *yogis*. One is a man of prayer, *nama yogi*. The other is a man of wisdom, *jnana yogi*. These two are *yogis*. But one is repeating the name, *nama*, while the other has faith in *jnana* or wisdom. This man, this *nama yogi* or Namadev you may call him, prayed, prayed and prayed. So he is in a deeply prayerful mood; whereas, the *jnana yogi*, the man of wisdom, Jnanadev, could transform himself into a bird because of his *jnana*, wisdom and mystical powers, and so he could get into the well.

As the bird was going deeper and deeper to quench its thirst, as the water was available at a depth, the whole bird's body was injured because of the thorny bushes. As the bird was coming out, it was also hurt by these thorns. So its whole body was bleeding. But somehow the bird came out and returned to the normal shape and form of Jnanadev, the man of wisdom.

The other man, the man of prayer, Namadev, *nama yogi*, who has got all trust in *nama* went on praying. Standing there up close to the well he prayed, ‘My God! I have no *jnana* or wisdom to transform myself into any form to get into the well and quench my thirst. O God! You should help me.’ Surprisingly enough, the water from the depth of the well started coming up like a spring, like a fountain, so that Namadev could quench his thirst.

This story was narrated by Bhagavan in the late 50's. This is enough to say that prayer is surrender. Prayer is simplicity. Prayer is humility.

Therefore, in this short talk I could share with you what prayer is. The bottom line is to feel one with the universe, in deep intimacy and friendship.

Sai Ram. We'll meet again.