

PODCAST 88: "THE CORRECT WAY"

Om Sri Sai Ram. Prashanti Sandesh 88th episode. Thank you very much for your time.

In every religion, prayer is a very important activity. Every religion wants you to offer your prayers. And so, every theist or every follower of every religion prays necessarily. But how have we made it? How are we practicing prayer? How are we offering our prayers?

We made prayer almost a technique, which is not correct. Some have made prayer a ritual which is also not correct, while some consider prayer as a formality, ridiculous! So, I can say that prayer is not in any way a technique. It is not a ritual at all and not in the least a formality. So, we need to examine ourselves - how we are offering our prayers. Has it become mechanical anyway? Is it simply repetitive?

What do we mean by prayer? How are we offering our prayers? In one sense, truly speaking, prayer is a spontaneous outpouring of our heart. It is spontaneous and it is more or less an outpouring of our heart. How can we reduce it to a ritual or call it a formality? No, no, no, no! And in fact, prayer arises in the moment. It is not anything pre-planned or anything prescribed, not like that. It happens in the moment. And as we pray, anything may happen depending upon the intensity of our prayer.

Well, we know many of the musicians of the past like Thyagaraja or Annammacharya, Surdas or Purandardas. All these musicians prayed and that has expressed in the form of music. So, music is the way of their prayer. You cannot say that music is not prayer. No. Music is a form of prayer. We also know even dance also can be a form of a prayer. All the disciples of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, and we know most of the people of Hare Krishna Consciousness, they all dance. Why? Because it is their form of prayer. Well, if nothing happens, at least one enjoys prayer by remaining silent. Even silence also is a prayer.

Take for example, it is not the way how we look at it. No! Let us take that example of the container and the content. Container is not important, but the content is important. So, prayer is the content, not the container. The container is only outward and external, but the content is within. That matters much in offering our prayers. And prayer is not merely an expression either. When it becomes just an expression, it is just verbal, oral or vocal. No! It comes from our heart, beyond expression.

When I am silent, I am prayerful. You cannot say silence is not prayer. And you cannot say prayer should be offered loudly. No. Singing is a form of prayer, as I said earlier. In other words, just let everyone listen to one's own heart and feel in the moment, and then prayer arises. Don't impose prayer on anybody. Don't plan any prayer.

Sri Ramkrishna Paramahansa gives an example. When the child cries, the mother immediately rushes to help the child. If the child is hungry, the mother will come to

know. And here the mother is not concerned with what raga or tune the child is crying - whether the beat is proper or not. "Ma-ma," the child cries, that's all. There the tune or the beat do not matter at all.

In a similar way, our prayer should not be an imposition. And it cannot be planned because my mood, the demand of the moment, the situation may lead to a specific type of prayer that arises right from my heart. It arises in me. And the prayer differs from moment to moment, depending upon the mood, as I said.

Therefore, prayer cannot be a fixed prayer. No! If the prayer is a fixed prayer, it is just mechanical or false. It is just a ritualized activity. And when it becomes a ritual, it is no longer a prayer. So much so, I can tell you my friends, that an un-ritualized spontaneous gesture is prayer. Un-ritualized! Spontaneous! These two are very important. Is it merely a ritual? It is just spontaneous, arising in you.

Sometimes we feel so sad. Then out of that sadness, you pray. Then sadness is your prayer. Yes! Because I cry from my heart, and that cry becomes a prayer. So sadness becomes a prayer, and tears start rolling down the cheeks.

We also heard from our mythology certain demons like Hiranyaksha, Hiranyakashipu or take for example Ravana - they're full of hatred and anger. But if we go into the depth of their life, you will certainly come to know that their anger is also a prayer. Because they fight with God, but no one else. When you fight with God, that anger becomes a prayer. Why? Because God is yours and you belong to Him. So, you have got every liberty to fight, to be angry with Him. Because where there is love, there is anger too. So, this love knows no formality, nothing. You are so intimate, you are so close. Therefore, anger is also a prayer.

But one thing is necessary - that we should not be insincere in our prayers as in other walks of life, keeping one thing inside and expressing in a different way outwards. On the surface I may be praying, but there is no iota of prayer within. So, prayer should be most sincere, very necessary. It should not be inauthentic, particularly with reference to God. It is even said that great devotees like Paramahansa, they talk to the deity. Paramahansa talks to Kali, Mother Kali, a direct dialogue. And Paramahansa behaved like a child in front of her. That's why Jesus said, "One should be a child to enter into the Gates of Heaven." Child stands for all innocence, for all the truth. Yes, nothing less than that.

So that truth of the moment should be our prayer. When the truth of the moment becomes our prayer, we'll find tremendous beauty, tremendous beauty over there. And this prayer is part of the path of the devotee. Any devotee necessarily prays. Without prayer one cannot be a devotee. And devotee enjoys in praying, in praising Lord, in describing the divine sport or *leela*. Yes! He wants to enjoy God's play, the divine play, *leela*. That is a prayer.

And then another thing is also this. This prayer is a path of devotion and there is another one, what we call 'enlightenment'. For enlightenment, meditation is the only path. That's a different channel altogether. Because in prayer, a devotee is very much attached to his God, or chosen God, or presiding deity. That is a kind of

bondage. Whereas in enlightenment, when you follow the path of meditation, there is no bondage at all.

Mahavira never prayed. Buddha never prayed. They only meditated. They are enlightened and their enlightenment is the cause for the spread of their philosophy, for spreading their message far and wide. Therefore, on one hand the path of a devotee is a prayer, while the path towards enlightenment is meditation. And then, as informed earlier, that prayer may be a kind of bondage also because you are so close and very much attached to your God.

And then in prayer there is one thing. Some people ask, "How to pray? When to pray?" These are silly questions. Instead of putting questions like these, pray first of all. Pray straightaway. You don't have to ask anybody. You don't have to know the procedure either. No. Start praying. You will come to know the beauty of it and the need also will help you. When some people ask for somebody's help, it is really meaningless. A prayer is a romance between you and your God. You don't need anybody's help at all. No. It is just a matter that is so confidential between you and your God.

We know many situations of some of the devotees, when they are blessed with interview, they speak such intimate matters with Swami which are not known to their family members. They take Swami into such a confidence. They confide with Him all that they want to share with Him, where most of these details are not known to their family members. Therefore, prayer is a conversation, is a direct dialogue between the devotee and God. This is very important. And this is our experience also.

And then, as I said earlier, nobody needs to guide you. You have to guide yourself. Be a light unto yourself. You have to be your own light. Don't look forward for any other help. And there is nobody to stop you, nobody. The time and space have no place in prayer.

It is something like this: You go on worrying that the door is locked and that you are not able to get out of the room. You go on shouting and shouting, feeling helpless because you are locked inside the room. But actually speaking, when someone says the door is never locked, but you feel that it is locked. Therefore you cry and therefore you feel helpless. How meaningless it is! You are worried about the door that has never been locked. It's only your imagination.

In a similar way, anybody coming in our way of prayer, they block. They block. We don't want it. It is a straight path between me and my God. I don't want anybody to be there in between. But we have to develop that kind of spirit, that kind of understanding.

And then the prayer and enlightenment may not be the same. Paths may be different, but yet destiny is one and the same. It may be British airline or American airline or any other airline, the destination is one and the same. The destination is being one with God, one with God. That's what it is.

At one stage, we'll come to know that all these experiences are not real, but the experiencer is real. Experiences happen, they come and go, but the experiencer remains all the same. We observe in our day-to-day life many, many things around. But you, the observer, remain the same. What comes to your notice, those that are observed, are different. So, all those observed are different, but the observer is one and the same. Just as experiencer is the same, experiences are different. So, we have got to concentrate on the experiencer, the observer, not on the variety of experiences or those that are observed by us. We should know that consciousness, awareness, is the only reality. It is only reality. And that is the witness which comes to our knowledge, comes to our experience, through meditation.

But we have also got to think that the past has no place either in prayer or in meditation. Past is past which is beyond recovery. We brood over the past. We are very crazy about the past and sometimes all the wounds we recall and recollect - the way in which we were hurt. That's all past. Forget the past. That has no place in prayer and meditation. This has got to be borne in the mind.

And the prayer is a path towards Truth. It does not take you to a fact, but it takes you to the point of Truth. Truth is different from a fact. Facts change, but Truth remains the same. Baba gave an example long back. Today you may wear one dress. Tomorrow you are going to wear another dress. Yesterday you had a different dress. The dresses that you wear, the attire that you have, they change; but you are one and the same and that is Truth. The dresses that you wear are only facts.

So prayer or meditation takes you to the Truth, that's all - not to a fact. The facts change. In the dream state, we dream so many things, but they remain as a nightmare thereafter. Some begin to tremble. They sweat heavily even in a dreaming state. When once they get up and are made fully aware of what is the situation around, they are no longer worried. They are no longer in a state of dream. The dream ends once you are awake. But the dream experience remained a fact at that moment. Like that, fact changed but you remained the same. That is the Truth.

And then we have to bear in mind another important point. We go on saying something to God. 'Oh God! Give me that. Oh God! Grant me that. Oh God! This is my problem.' We go on saying something to God. But we should learn to receive message from God. We should learn to listen to God. Yes! Not simply speaking to Him, not only one way. Because prayer is nourishment. The inner voice or conscience tells you, 'Please listen to your conscience.' That is what Swami says, "Body is a water bubble. Mind is a mad monkey. Don't follow the body. Don't follow the mind. Follow your conscience." So when you follow your conscience, you will certainly have to listen to the inner voice and your conscience. Then we'll know that prayer is nourishment.

And we also think this way - that in prayer I have got to do something with God. You don't have to do anything or something. No! You allow God to do with you. It's not your doing with God, but allow God to do with you. In other words, I have got so many devices or so many things that I need to pray or worship. You think that it is a procedure, that it is a formality; it is a ritual and this paraphernalia is very much needed. Not necessary! Not necessary! You just allow God to do with you. You don't

have to do anything with Him or for Him. Allow Him to do with you. It means let God's will prevail. 'Oh God! You know what I need. You know much better than what I know. You know what is to happen in the best of my interests. You know that.' Leave it to Him. That's what is called 'surrender'.

So, we are so busy in saying something to God, but we don't listen to Him. And we want to do something for God, to God. But the correct thing is allow Him to do with you. It means completely surrender to Him. Let Him decide. Let His will prevail. That's what it is. In other words, prayer is receptive. Prayer is receptive, it receives, that's all. There lies the beauty of it.

Above all, prayer is not merely a memorandum submitted to God. When a minister or some VIP comes, we submit a memorandum saying that we want this, we want that, we want this, we want you to do this, we want you to do that. It's not a memorandum of appeals or requests or demands. No!

What is a true prayer? Prayer is gratitude. 'Oh God! We are very grateful to you for all that you have given me, for all that you have done for me. For this moment that I am alive, I am very grateful to You, God.' Gratitude is prayer. 'I am very thankful to You, God, very thankful to You because how can You say the number of things that You have given to me, the number of opportunities You have provided in this life, the number of chances that have been extended to me. You made my life a blessing, a benediction. So, I have got to be thankful to You.'

So, prayer is gratitude. It is thankfulness. Prayer is just receiving a gift from God. Yes! And so, in this state of gratitude and thankfulness, you are lost in your God. You are no more there. Your God remains. The seeker is the sought. The drop disappears in the ocean. In a similar way, you are lost in ecstasy. You are lost in bliss. Only He remains. That is the culmination, the climax of prayer.

Therefore, this talk should open our eyes that prayer is very personal. Prayer is spontaneous. The prayer arises from one's own heart. It is not merely a demand - that's gratitude and thankfulness. More and more we'll come to know in future weeks.

Thank you very much.

Sai Ram.