

OM SAI RAM

Welcome to Prasanthi Sandesh

PODCAST 252, “PRAYER IS MUCH MORE... ”

August 1, 2024

*The following text contains excerpts from Prof. Anil Kumar’s book
“Sai-Chology,” pg. 19-25.*

Prayer is also something more than humility, surrender and submission. Prayer is bliss – spiritual ecstasy. Not the worldly type – it is beyond the five senses and the mind – it is a state of non-duality, of no pain or pleasure. One should not confuse this with happiness, which can loosely be called “worldly bliss”. Bliss is spiritual in the real sense and prayer transports one to bliss.

Prayer is also total dependence on God, total reliance and faith in God. These days, life is one long saga of dependence, right from electricity or lending money to people, all of which are not at all reliable and can let us down. The people on whom we depend can turn into traitors; money can be lost. But when one depends upon God, one is confident of not being let down and the responsibility for our welfare and protection rests with Him. We establish this connection of reliability through prayer, even if we have faltered at some place at some time. We are secure in the knowledge that God is our Saviour.

Baba gives an example: A child was walking along with the mother. The mother held the hand of the child as she was taking the child around the garden for an evening walk. While they were walking, a strong grown-up boy came and said to the child. “Hey! I’ll beat you! Take care!” He said it just for fun. The child also said, “Come on! I will also beat you.” How can a child fight with a grown-up boy? The child said, “I am ready to fight with you!” Why? How? “My mother is here. I am safe. Come on, I’ll beat you, you useless fellow!” Because he held the hand of the mother, he was ready to challenge the grown-up boy!

When we talk of total dependence on God, the incident of John Hislop (whose name is quite familiar) comes to mind. He was to attend *Sivaratri* celebrations at Puttaparthi. While proceeding to Puttaparthi, his car broke down in the middle of a thick forest. Being knowledgeable, he wanted to repair the car himself, but could not do it. Local help also did not fix it. Ultimately, as a last resort, he called on Baba: “Sai Ram, Sai Ram!” Just then, a lorry passed by and stopped. The driver alighted, enquired what the problem was and repaired the car. When Hislop was about to pay some money, he did not find the truck or its driver. He had vanished!

Hislop managed to reach Puttaparthi on time and sat for *darshan*. He thanked Swami when He passed by and said, “Thank you Bhagawan! A truck driver came and helped

me, so I could be here on time.” Swami said, “Driver? I am your driver. I am the driver! Why do you say driver?” Needless to state, Hislop was flabbergasted.

Then Bhagawan went, stopped, looked back and said, “Had you called for the driver earlier, you would have been here one hour before! You called for Me in the end, one hour or two hours later! What can I do? I was waiting here. You never called for Me. You wanted to repair it yourself. All right, manage, manage! I have other people to look after.”

This incident shows how total dependence on God is one’s birthright, given by God Himself, and prayer is the means to total dependence on the Lord.

We must also understand that prayer is not a one-time activity, or one that has daily time slots or is linked to some routine. One is in prayer all the time; it is a ceaseless process. Prayer means being centred on God all the while; it is timeless. But modern man has relegated prayer to time slots like Sunday or Friday or Thursday being “days of prayer,” and the rest of the time we forget God.

There is no particular place for prayers to be offered. People keep a particular spot or room for prayers. But then, what does one do elsewhere, in other rooms? It should not be so. Every inch is an altar, a holy shrine for God to reside in and receive your prayers.

Bhagawan says, “Faith in God is your *swasa*, your breath. So one should pray ceaselessly until the breath stops – prayer is beyond time and space.”

Prayer is a private conversation with God. The Holy Bible exhorts us to pray in private, away from the gaze of others, because it is one’s personal talk with the Lord. Even in mundane life, when one wants to talk about personal matters, one does it in private. Similarly, our prayers should be conducted in secret. Hence, there should be no show or pomp in prayer, for others to see.

Who else, (other than God) could be dearer? Who else could be more intimate? Who else could be more personal than God, in life? Let us understand this. God is so intimate, so near and dear that He takes us into His confidence. We can just share whatever happens.

Prayer is personal, whereas *bhajan* is collective. Singing *bhajan* is a community activity. But prayer is personal, where you alone open your heart to Him. “Oh God, this is the thing...” And you talk to Him openly.

A simple example: Some people who are privileged to have interviews tell, “Swami, I have committed a mistake. It’s my mistake. I confess, Bhagawan. Please excuse me.”

Swami: “Eh! Past is past. Forget about it. Past is past. Why go into it? Finished! Don’t bother about it!” Why? God forgives. But man neither forgives nor forgets.

If there is anyone who forgives unconditionally, it is God. Not only that, one can confide one's innermost details of one's misdirected deeds, fears and phobias, and not be humiliated or disgraced in the process. Again, through prayer we get guidance and protection under trying conditions and crises.

Another of Swami's examples illustrates how the good Lord protects His devotees' dignity and honour: A scholar was very much patronised and appreciated by the king. In scholarship and intellectual pursuits, there is competition, pride and ego. Hence there is always much disagreement and disunity amongst scholars, even on trivial matters. The preferred treatment given to this scholar was greatly resented by the other scholars in the kingdom, who hated him and soon challenged him to a debate to prove his superiority.

The king's favourite scholar was well balanced in the true sense – equal-minded and without complex or ego. He responded to their challenge by accepting defeat and also admitted that they (the others) were superior to him. He went further and gave all this in writing to them in a sealed envelope to be given to the king so that the latter would stop patronising him.

The scholars were very happy. This man wrote on paper, "Oh Lord, I lost at the hands of the best of the scholars. I am nothing in front of them." He gave that letter signed and put it in a sealed envelope. "Show to the king", he said.

In the evening assembly, the other scholars told the king about the scholar's surrender and handed over the letter. The king read the letter, which said: "Oh King, all these pundits are defeated by me. I won this morning. This is for your information." In fact, in the beginning, he had given the letter stating his defeat. But God in his infinite fair play and compassion (to uphold the dignity of His devotee) re-wrote the letter as read by the king! The respect, prestige and dignity of a devotee are the respect, prestige and dignity of God. He will never allow you to be humiliated or put to shame.

Prayer is a personal affair with God wherein one can take Him in total confidence, confide the entire story of one's life with all its details. When we pray with such openness and faith, with true repentance of one's actions, it brings forth the gift of forgiveness and compassion from the Lord.

Bhagawan also adds another dimension to prayer – prayer is togetherness. What is togetherness? At Prasanthi Nilayam, the boys chant *Vedic mantras* before the Divine Discourses and say, "Let us move together. Let us grow together. Let us grow along the path of wisdom and intelligence. Let us grow in love and harmony; in strength, affluence, plenty, prosperity and friendship."

In other words, prayer fosters unity and togetherness in society, peace on earth and goodwill amongst mankind. This attitude results in togetherness and makes people considerate towards others.

Prayer is universal, and it embraces all mankind: At the end of *bhajans* we pray, “May all humankind be happy” – “*Loka Samastha Sukhino Bhavantu*”. Universal welfare, not narrow, individualistic welfare and prosperity, is the all-embracing aspect of prayer.

Prayer is multi-dimensional in approach. It is all-embracing, hence the words “*Loka Samastha Sukhino Bhavanthu*.” The word “*Loka*” means the entire creation in which the Lord has manifested as matter, plants, living beings, humans, etc. We pray: May all of His creation be happy and comfortable.” Hence prayer has to be viewed as such and not as a conditional approach, or to be vocal and noisy.

More of Sai’s Divine wisdom will be brought to us by Prof. Anil Kumar in the next session.

Thank you for your time.

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