

We don't know
to WHOM
we Pray



We don't
know WHAT
we Say

**BUT WE
PRAY!**

Discover the true meaning of PRAYER

By
AiR
Atman in Ravi

**We don't know to Whom we Pray
We don't know What we Say...**

BUT WE PRAY

By
AiR
Atman in Ravi

Discover the true meaning of PRAYER

We don't know to Whom we Pray
We don't know What we Say...

BUT WE PRAY

Discover the true meaning of PRAYER



Copyright © AiR Institute of Realization 2020

AiR asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this book.

All rights reserved.

No part of the content of this publication (except images) may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Publisher: AiR Institute of Realization

Kemp Fort Mall, No-97, Old Airport Road, Bangalore-560017

Preface

Introduction

1.	Why do we Pray?	01-08
2.	To Whom do we Pray?	09-16
3.	How do we Pray?	17-32
4.	What True Prayer Really is	33-42
5.	Realize the God you Pray to	43-49
6.	From Self-Realization to God-Realization	50-65
7.	Serving Humanity is Prayer	66-74
8.	True Prayer is Seeing Divinity in Everything Beautiful	75-81
9.	Living like a Yogi	82-89
10.	The Ultimate Goal of Prayer	90-97
11.	Don't Pray Hard, Pray Smart!	98-109
	Afterword	110-124
	Poem	125-130
	FAQ	131-139
	About the Author	141-155



Preface



Why write a book on prayer? Aren't there enough books on God, theology, and prayer? How would one more book make any difference? Even as a child, I was a staunch believer in God and I too used to pray in a certain way. But one day, when my Guru, my Spiritual Master provoked me and I went on a quest, I realized the truth about what prayer truly is. I had been praying for over 40 years, but while I had been reciting *mantras*, *bhajans*, *aarti* I realized that I did not know to whom I was praying and what I was saying. This inspired me to stop and contemplate, and to put my thoughts together and write a book on prayer.

Just as I had lived in ignorance for 4 decades, people live through life without realizing the truth. No doubt they are sincere in their devotion to God, but they don't stop to ask questions: Who is God? Where is God? What is God? Of course, God exists. We all know it. But if we truly love God, should we not go on a quest? Should we not get to the bottom of the root and realize the truth? I started writing this book because I was inspired to share with people how I transformed the way I pray. First, I used to pray to Lord Shiva. Now I pray *through* Lord Shiva. The change in the way I pray happened after I realized that God is not a statue, God is not a saint, God is not a picture that we

humans can paint. God is a Power, a Power that lives inside the temple of our heart. A Power that is everywhere. God is not only omnipresent, God is also omniscient - knows everything and omnipotent, all-powerful. Unfortunately, we pray to a God but we have no clear idea as to whom we are praying to and what we say when we pray.

The whole world prays to a God, barring a few atheists and agnostics. It seems like everybody knows the meaning of prayer. There is nothing complicated about it. Different religions have different Gods and prayer is a mode of communicating with the Divine. I stopped to ask myself the question, 'We live on one earth but how many Gods exist? If different people are praying to different Gods, then which God is the real Divine Power?' To add fuel to the fire, every religion claims that their God is the real God and their prayer is the most effective form of prayer.

But, do we even know the true meaning of prayer? Why do we fold our hands and pray to God? To some, prayer is just a thanksgiving to the Almighty, while to others, it is going to God in troubled times. Different people pray for different reasons but most people are constantly asking for something in their prayer. Is that what prayer truly is? Is it a method to ask God to fulfil our wishes? When I introspected, I found answers that made me change the way I pray and even changed my very belief in God.

PREFACE

I started contemplating and reflecting to find out the truth about God and the relevance of prayer. Was prayer just talking to God or was it also listening to our Lord? Furthermore, do we really understand what we are telling God in our prayer? Most prayers are hymns, songs, *mantra*, *aarti* – termed differently by different religions but, by and large, these are just memorized pieces of our voice to God. Not many people understand what they say when they pray.

When I realized that the world needs to wake up and realize the truth about prayer, I started writing this book. With my mission of helping people realize the truth, I felt the need for people to understand what prayer truly is. If people truly want to reach out to the Divine then to begin with, they must first realize the truth about prayer.

This book will help us open our eyes to what we say when we pray. It will help us overcome our ignorance and realize the Divine Power we pray to within the temple of our heart. It will help us discover the true meaning of prayer. After reading this book, we will not just pray, but we will understand to whom we pray and what we say.

Introduction



Do you pray? Chances are you do, otherwise, you would not be reading this book. But, do you really know the Divine Power you pray to? Most people know their God by name but where is the God that we pray to? While we pray to 'our' God, others pray to 'their' God, and this makes us ask the question, 'How many Gods exist?' There are hundreds of religions in the world and if we add up all the Gods of all the religions, there would be millions of Gods. Since we pray to a God, it is very important to know that God before we discover the true meaning of prayer. Therefore, in the pages that follow, we will not only investigate what prayer is, but also ponder on the reality of God.

Based on their belief system, followers of various religions go to several holy places of worship. Christians go to churches, Muslims to mosques, Hindus to temples, Sikhs to gurdwaras, and many others go to monasteries and synagogues. But they all go for one purpose—to pray. It is said that over 80% of the world, over 6 billion people pray. But not many know what prayer truly is. Not only are we praying to different Gods and uttering different prayers, we don't really know what effective prayer is! Is our God listening to our prayers? Where is our God in reality? We

INTRODUCTION

are quite unsure about all this but somehow, we are sure that our prayers will reach the Divine.

Different people pray differently. Some remove their footwear, some go on their knees and some raise their hands towards the sky. There are numerous methods of prayer and the irony is that everybody thinks their prayer is right. Followers of a religion are not only confident about their God and prayer but are sometimes so obsessed that they make it their objective to convert people to their religion and their way of prayer.

Why do we pray? There are various reasons why we close our eyes and speak to God. The most common reason is that we have a problem and we want God to solve our problem. Sometimes, we fold our hands in prayer, not because of a problem, but because we want God to fulfil a wish or desire. Most prayers fall under these two categories, although there are a few people who pray in gratitude or who pray just to praise the Lord. There are many people who simply pray and it seems like they pray because they are told to pray. Of course, they must pray because if they don't, then their God will be displeased! They are made to live with this fear and thus, prayers are often not just inspired by faith, but also by fear.

Despite the fact that we are not clear about the concept of prayer, prayer is very important. It is communicating with

God. It is showing our love for the Divine, the Creator. Unfortunately, we don't understand all of this because we grow up believing in mythology. We are told about Santa Claus and about different Gods who ride on different animals. This kind of prayer is fine for young children who would, otherwise, not understand God and prayer. But it is strange that as we grow up, our theological beliefs remain the same – we continue to believe in all that we believed in as kids. Somehow, we just never grow up when it comes to our prayers and God.

There is no doubt that God exists. In my earlier book I wrote, *'We don't know who God is, where God is, what God is, but God is.'* There is no doubt that a Creator exists. God is beyond human comprehension but that, in no way, can dispute the existence of a Divine Power.

We are so programmed and taught that we must fold our hands, close our eyes, and do dozens of other things, that we don't stop and question any of these practices. It is considered blasphemous to question any religion even though it may be out of love for God. If one investigates the history of religion, what will we discover? The people who questioned and did not agree are the ones who branched away to create their own religion, a subsection of the earlier one or even an altogether different one. Have all these religions ultimately helped to realize God and discover true prayer? Unfortunately no!

INTRODUCTION

Religion is only a kindergarten to spirituality. It only teaches us the ABC about God. It makes us pray but doesn't help us understand what we say. After all, there is a life purpose for us human beings who live on earth. Most religions by and large, agree that we must return to God. The goal is one though the paths may be many. But there are so many myths, rituals, dogmas and superstitions that the common man is lost in his religion. He wants to reach God, but he doesn't learn to climb the ladder to heaven. Of course, we must believe in God and move forward with prayers that are full of faith, hope, trust, and enthusiasm. But is that enough? Our love for God must take us on a quest that will help us overcome ignorance and lead us to self-realization and God-realization. However, the way to God is prayer. It is communicating with the Divine. It is understanding the truth and wiping away the darkness in which we live. God is not a distant being, living in a faraway planet. It is unfortunate that we don't realize this in our prayers. It is time to stop and reflect. It is time to discover who God truly is, to realize Divinity in our Soul. It is time to question prayers that we so often utter without realizing what we say. Life is short, and we must discover the true meaning of prayer before the journey is over. Of what use is it to pray if we don't understand what we say?

***Remember! If we pray
but we don't understand what we say,
then we don't pray, we just bray.***

01

WHY DO WE PRAY?



One of the first things we teach a child to do is to pray. The moment children are able to walk, to talk, we teach them to pray. Why do we find it so necessary to introduce them to prayer? If I look back at my life, I started praying when I was barely 5 or 6 years old. When I was 8 years old, I used to go to the temple practically every day and even used to fast on Mondays. At that time, I did not even know why I was praying. My grandfather was a devout believer and over a period of time, he made me understand the importance of prayer. Till the day he passed away, he used to constantly pray. He believed that God was all-powerful. He had complete trust and faith in the Divine Power.

Different people pray for different reasons. Some, like my grandfather, prayed because of their faith in the Divine. The world is divided into several religions as we know, and our prayers are governed by the scriptures of our religion. Whatever be our religion, the motivation for our prayers is the same. If it is not faith, then our prayer is inspired by fear. Many religions talk about how God will be displeased if we don't pray.

Why else does one pray? There are a few who pray to God in gratitude. As they count their blessings, they fold their hands to their God Almighty and express their thanks. Don't we owe a prayer of gratitude to the one who has given us life? If we stop to think of it, each human being has more than seven wonders within. Not just eyes to see, ears

WHY DO WE PRAY?

to hear, a nose to smell, a mouth to eat, hands to grasp, and legs to walk and touch, but also a heart that beats and pumps blood. We human beings are also blessed with lungs that supply oxygen from the air, a brain and an intellect, but do we ever realize this? Those who do, offer prayers in gratitude for all these gifts – for the gift of being human.

But stop for a moment and think as to why we really pray. There are some people who don't pray. Neither are they moved by faith or fear nor do they pray out of love or gratitude. This is because they don't believe in the Divine. The first step even before we pray is to believe that God exists. Although God is different to different people around the world, the God of every religion is considered to be the Creator of the universe. Those who don't believe this, don't find it necessary to pray. They believe in a theory that we human beings came from apes. But if that was true then why are apes not becoming humans today? And if human beings came from apes for whatever reason, where did apes come from? Dinosaurs?

Theories like these or the belief that everything beautiful and intelligent on earth just came out of a big bang seems strange because even if there was a big bang, then who caused it? For those who use their intellect, they believe in God and this leads them to pray. Because of the confusion in today's world with so many Gods, some people have

become agnostics. They are not sure about the existence of a Divine Power. Some agnostics believe that there is a Creator, a Power that they are not sure of.

Therefore, the first step even before prayer is belief. It is for this reason that a young child is taught to pray, and it becomes a part of our belief system, our habit and philosophy of life. But while prayer might have become intertwined with our way of life, why do we really pray?

Prayer can be broadly classified into praying by choice and praying because we have no option. It is most unfortunate but true that a large number of prayers are indeed inspired by helplessness. People go to God when they have no option. Even the so-called atheists and agnostics are often compelled to go on their knees when there is no hope but God. What happens when a doctor tells us that our most loved one will soon die? Of course, we cry, but the next thing we do is go to God and pray. We human beings instinctively know that God controls life and death, that God can grant us extended life if he desires. And so, we plead in entreaty to grant our loved one an extra lease of life. Yes, indeed it is true that many people go to temples, mosques, and churches when they have nowhere else to go. This type of prayer, which is not optional, covers a huge part of the world's prayer.

It is not fair to say that all prayers come out of helplessness.

Millions around the globe pray because they love God. They pray to express their gratitude rather than to ask for favours. But isn't it true that we all ask God for something? Of course. Very often we go to God and ask God to grant us success and wealth. It is also quite common for people to plead to God that they may win the love of their life and they may marry the one they dream of. Prayers don't stop after marriage. Do they? We often pray to God to bless us with children. Some even specifically pray for a boy or a girl. Kids in school pray to God for a good rank. Politicians pray to win an election. Prayers happen everywhere, not just by individuals, but even by groups. Doesn't a football team start their World Cup final with a prayer? What is this prayer for? They want to win the cup! How can God make them win the cup? If both the teams are asking God for the same favour, then whose prayer will work? This makes us ponder further on the magic of prayer.

People spend their entire life's savings going on a pilgrimage. Their religion teaches them that it is the ultimate goal of life to take blessings from God and so, they put everything else aside and prioritize to go to where their God is said to be. Christians may go to Jerusalem or Bethlehem, Muslims go to Mecca and Hindus will go to Kailash if they believe in Shiva or the dozens of other pilgrimages, depending on which God they believe in. While a fraction of humanity is fortunate to go to such places of pilgrimages, most of humanity prays on a regular

basis at their respective place of worship. This is only because they believe in God, and also that going to their religious institution will make their prayers work.

While there is no harm to go to God in times of trouble, and to also ask for gifts and favours in prayer, real prayer happens when we love God. A famous Indian poet, Sant Kabir Das, once said, '*Dukh mein simran sab karein, sukh mein kare na koye – Jo sukh mein simran kare, tau dukh kahe ko hoye.*' This means that everybody remembers God in trouble. Nobody thinks of God in joy. If only we loved God and shared our happiness with our Lord, why would we ever face trouble?

If prayer springs out of true love for the Divine, such prayer will work wonders in our life. When we love the Divine, we constantly pray in gratitude. Such prayer is built on the foundation of complete surrender. A true believer of God accepts the Divine will and prays to God, no matter what. This is true prayer.

While many people in the world don't know why they pray, there are some who are absolutely clear about what they want out of their prayers. Devout believers pray with purpose. They want what is popularly known as salvation, enlightenment, liberation, *moksha* or *nirvana*. They want to become one with God and their prayers are more evolved than the ordinary prayers of the world. They don't seek

WHY DO WE PRAY?

petty, material things from God. Those who pray for this, the ultimate goal of life, realize the importance of prayer.

Prayer is powerful. Although our journey of life starts without truly understanding the meaning of prayer, but the simple belief in God and the very act of prayer itself builds our connection with the Divine. Prayer is not only powerful, but it is also magical. If only we understood the true meaning of prayer, and we truly love God, our prayers would take us to the Divine, a state that is not just beyond human comprehension but promises everlasting joy and eternal peace.

***Why do we pray, have you ever thought?
Or in rituals and in dogmas, are you caught?
Don't just pray to God when troubles come,
Pray because you love God till life is done.***

TAKEAWAYS

WHY DO WE PRAY?

- People pray for the fulfillment of their desires.
- Some people are forced to pray because troubles strike them.
- Others pray because they seek something from God.
- There are a few who pray out of love and gratitude.
- A very small fraction of humanity prays for the ultimate goal of salvation or liberation, *moksha* or *nirvana*.
- Some people don't pray. It is because they don't believe in God. They are atheists.

02

TO WHOM DO WE PRAY?



While we are absolutely sure about the existence of God, and we have no doubt that there is a Power who created the universe, we are not really sure who God is. There are so many religions and so many Gods, and it is natural to become confused about who the real God is. Some people are atheists, they don't believe in God. Some others are agnostics, they are completely confused about God, whether God exists or not. But most of us who believe in a God, pray to a God of our own religion. Christians pray to Jesus, the Holy Trinity, and the Heavenly Father depending on which denomination they belong to. Muslims by and large pray to Allah. Hindus pray to Krishna, Shiva, Ganesha, Durga – the list is endless. While we understand that prayer is important, it is also important to know to whom we are praying to.

Are there many Gods in many different heavens that exist somewhere above the skies? No. This is a figment of our imagination! There is no doubt that a Divine Power exists. But we humans have fabricated the truth about Divinity to fulfil the purpose of various religions; this is a pity. God is beyond religion. God is not a statue, God is not a saint, God is not a picture that anyone can paint. God is a Power, a Power beyond human comprehension. Therefore, to make our prayer effective, we must stop and understand the reality of God.

In India, people in the North call water *paani*. In South

India, it is called *tanni* and *neeru*. This does not change what water is. In France, it is called *eau*. In Germany, they call it *wasser* and in Japan, they call it *mizu*. Does it make the water different? It is the same water but different people call it by different names. So also, while God is one Universal Power, He may be called by different names around the globe. God is the Creator of the universe and of the earth that we live on. It is our ignorance that we believe that the Christian God created the land and the Islamic God created the skies and the Hindu God created the oceans! Religions have evolved over time, but the Divine Power is eternal. God existed much before we came into existence, and even after we die, and several generations come and go, God's presence will continue. Therefore, while it is important to pray to God, it is equally important to understand who God is.

We can't define God. God defined is God denied. God is not made of bone and skin, but until we look within and realize God, we will continue to pray to different Gods with different names and forms. Why is it that an Indian God looks Indian and a Japanese God looks Japanese? This only endorses that God is created from the imagination of man. The real Divine Power is formless. The God we pray to is Universal.

Sometimes, people foolishly argue whether God exists or not. We are like that scientist who argued with a saint. *There*

was once a conference about science and spirituality and a famous scientist debated the existence of God with a spiritual saint. They were both intelligent and after two days of deliberation, they agreed to disagree about the existence of God. Before departing, the scientist visited the saint to bid him goodbye. As he was leaving the office of the saint, he noticed a beautiful globe made of ornate marble with an intricate design in gold, on the table of the saint. He asked the saint, 'This is a beautiful piece of art. Where did you get it from?' The saint replied in wonder, 'I don't remember. One day, out of the blue, it just appeared on my table!' The scientist got a bit annoyed and replied, 'If you do not want to tell me where you got the globe from, please just say so! Do not give me a story that it just appeared on your table.' The saint, grabbed the Divine opportunity and replied, 'For the last two days, you have debated at the conference and insisted that this entire universe and this beautiful earth just appeared from nowhere! And now, you are unable to believe that this tiny globe on my table could just appear from nowhere. It must have a manufacturer, somebody who created it! Why can't you believe that a Divine Power that we call God created this humongous globe that we live on?'

The scientist left, hugely impacted by this incident. There is no doubt that God exists. The choice is ours to pray or not to pray. This whole universe is a proof that a Creator exists. You and I are further proof of God. Just like we cannot prove that the Law of Gravity exists but we believe in the scientific law through inference, so also we realize that God exists. When we throw something up in the sky, it doesn't

fly away into the clouds. It falls back on the earth. We infer this is due to the Law of Gravity. The sun, the moon and the stars, the birds and the animals, the plants and the flowers are enough for us to infer that a Creator, a Divine Power exists.

Now that we know beyond doubt that a Power whom we call God exists, we must be clear who the God is that we pray to. We teach our children that God is an old man with a long white beard, sitting somewhere up in the clouds when we know that in reality this is not true. We continue to pray to a God with an elephant head, floating on flowers and riding on animals. This is all right to introduce God to children and encourage them to believe in a God, but sadly, we continue to believe in such stories about God till we go to our grave. When will we realize the truth about God? When will we realize that God is omnipresent - present everywhere, omniscient - knows everything, and omnipotent - all-powerful? God is a Power beyond our imagination and comprehension. But our tiny mind tries to contain God in a microcosm that is not befitting of the Divine. It is like trying to empty an ocean into a bucket. Because we do not know the God we pray to, we are unable to effectively pray to God. Therefore, we must stop and not only question what we say when we pray, but also realize the truth about the God we pray to.

For 40 years, I prayed to Lord Shiva. I was a devout

believer, till one day I had my ‘moment’ of spiritual realization, my ‘Aha!’ moment of who God is. However, this did not stop me from going to the humongous temple I built. I still go! The only difference is, earlier I prayed to Lord Shiva and now, I pray *through* Lord Shiva. It was my spiritual mentor, my Guru – Dada J.P.Vaswani who inspired me to go on a quest to realize the truth. He helped me evolve from being religious to being spiritual. He helped me overcome the myth that we all believe in. Because we all believe in mythology that is carried down from generations, we tend to accept whatever we are taught. We don’t ask questions, we don’t investigate, and we don’t realize the truth.

Today, the whole world is in turmoil, primarily, because of the Gods we pray to. Religions, in their enthusiasm to promote their respective Gods, have become a cause for war, when in reality, God and religion should unify us in prayer and lead us to peace. Unless we discover the truth that God is a Power beyond religion and we know who God truly is, our prayers will remain meaningless. There will only be fanatics screaming, imagining that their fervent screaming is pleasing God when in reality, such prayers, irrespective of religion, are all leading to God-driven passions that take us further away from the Divine. It is time to stop and to contemplate the truth of who that Divine Power is whom we pray to. Isn’t God the same Power that different religions refer to with different

TO WHOM DO WE PRAY?

names? Shouldn't we respect each other's Gods and prayers, if we truly believe in and truly love the Divine?

We will never understand the true meaning of prayer, unless we realize this truth that God is a Universal Power, beyond all religions.

***God is not a statue, God is not a Saint,
God is not a picture that anyone can paint.
Until we stop and contemplate, who really is our Lord,
We will keep going around in circles, far away from God.***

TAKEAWAYS

TO WHOM DO WE PRAY?

- We all pray but, sadly, we don't know who in reality is the God we pray to.
- There are thousands of religions and millions of Gods created by man.
- However, God is a Universal Power, a power beyond name and form.
- Because we don't know the reality about God, we are unable to pray effectively.
- God is not made of bone and skin. To realize God, we must look within.
- Over generations, due to mythology, we believe in so many different Gods. We are even taught that God is an old man with a long beard sitting up in the clouds.
- Our confusion over God has led to unrest in the world, even war, instead of prayer unifying us in peace.
- To discover the true meaning of prayer, we must discover the truth about God.

03

HOW DO WE PRAY?



The most common method of prayer is to fold one's hands and close one's eyes. Universally, this is accepted as an act of prayer. But is it all-inclusive of what prayer is about? There are numerous ways people pray and it is interesting to understand why people pray the way they do.

We understand that people go to a Power we call God to solve their problems or to grant them a wish. Not only are there various reasons why people pray and numerous Gods to whom prayers are offered, the methods of prayer too are complicated and exhaustive. One wonders whether it is necessary to have such complex prayers to reach out to the Divine.

Prayers are a creation of religion. By himself, man can't do more than fold his hands and talk to God. That is the simplest way to communicate. But religions have complicated the very essence of prayer. To start, there are so many religions and each religion advocates that we must go to its respective institution to pray. Today, the world has got innumerable temples, churches, mosques, monasteries, and the like where people go to pray. These religious institutions constitute different methods of prayer. For instance, in Hindu temples, people can go and perform hundreds of *poojas*. There are *poojas* to overcome problems, for a birth ceremony and for a death ceremony. People perform *poojas* or pray for every imaginable reason. A special *pooja* is performed on New Year's Day and complex

HOW DO WE PRAY?

poojas are performed for each of the Hindu festivals. There are dozens of such festivals and so a Hindu can be kept busy performing prayers all through his life, although most of the time, he doesn't understand anything about the prayers he performs. Hindus recite the names of their Gods a hundred times, break coconuts, offer water and milk to their deities during *abhishek*, sing *bhajans* or spiritual hymns and most likely, end the ritual with the *aarti*. There are many different types of *poojas* which include the *Navagrah pooja* which is a *Vedic pooja* for the nine planets and all *Nakshatras* or constellations. If a planet is not well placed in one's astronomical birth chart, its *Shanti pooja* removes or reduces the negative effects and gives better results. While entering a new house, *Navagrahahanti* and *Vastushanti Homam* is performed to remove *Vastu dosha* or malign influences that might be present in the house. There are *poojas* for health-related needs like *Rudrabhishekam*, *Mritunjaya Homam*, and also *poojas* related to birth, death, and marriage ceremonies. People even go to the temples to do a *pooja* for a new car they just purchased.

Christians have their own way to pray. Normally, they go to a church on Sunday and make group prayers along with their congregation. Some of the noteworthy prayers amongst Christians are *Adoration* – praising God for his greatness and accepting complete dependence on him. There is another method of prayer called *Confession* which means owning up to sin and asking for God's mercy and

forgiveness. Many other Christians worship God purely for thanksgiving, for His blessings. Some pray in petition asking and seeking something from God, be it healing from a disease or simple courage and faith to face a challenge or even wisdom to make the right choices in life. Some Christians say a prayer of intercession in which they ask God to help others who are in need, be it the sick, the poor or those who are suffering. Christians also meditate and contemplate the higher spiritual love of God. They use different methods to pray. While some just recite a prayer, others use a rosary to meditate. Often, Christians light candles so that the Holy Spirit can supposedly enter their heart. Since there are many denominations in Christianity, the list of how Christians pray is endless. While most of them believe Sunday to be the day of God, there are some like the Seventh Day Adventists who believe that day to be Saturday.

The followers of Islam believe that their prayers are directly addressed to God. They pray in complete submission to Allah, although there are Muslim priests known as *Imam* who lead the prayers in congregation. Some sections of Muslims refer to this prayer as *Salat* which is performed 5 times each day. The first prayer is before dawn or sunrise. The second prayer is at mid-day. The third prayer is later in the afternoon, the fourth, just after sunset and the fifth between sunset and midnight. While Muslims prefer to pray in the mosque, they can pray anywhere, but they

HOW DO WE PRAY?

believe it is good to pray with others in a congregation. Before they pray, they have a ritual of cleansing, without which they do not pray. Even their prayers have specific movements which ultimately lead them to get down on their knees and touch their head to the ground in complete subjugation to the Almighty.

The Muslims have many festivals during which they devoutly pray. The most popular amongst them is Ramadan, also known as Ramzan. During the month of Ramadan, Muslims fast for the entire month. Each day of fasting makes them constantly remember God and pray. The fast is to encourage a feeling of nearness to God and during it, Muslims express their gratitude to Allah. They pray to seek forgiveness for their past sins, develop self-control and restraint, and help the needy.

What are the practices followed by the Jews when it comes to Prayer? They are expected to pray 3 times a day, referring to the Jewish prayer book – *Siddur*. Prayers are for thanksgiving, for praising their Lord, and for seeking help. The Jews are guided by the Jewish priests known as *Rabbis* and believe that God will respond to their prayer. They recite their prayers aloud in a synagogue along with a group as per their prayer book. In some Jewish communities, ecstatic clapping, dancing, and swaying can be part of the prayer service. Men traditionally wear a prayer shawl while women keep their heads covered as

they pray silently in the presence of men.

What about the Buddhists? How do they pray? Today there are many divisions and subdivisions in Buddhism and all their prayers may not be the same. However, the Buddhists do not recognize a God that grants wishes. Buddhism strongly advocates that what we experience in life is a result of our own actions. Therefore, they pray to develop virtue and to create one's own happiness. Prayer leads one to *nirvana* or enlightenment and focuses more on meditation and silence. Many Buddhists these days, use chanting as a popular method of prayer. Some Buddhists pray to become Bodhisattvas, those who attain knowledge but don't attain the state of *nirvana* so they can help others spiritually evolve. They light incense sticks, pray to several statues of the Buddha or other Buddhist saints, prostrating or bowing with humility and reverence. Sometimes, they use prayer beads to repeat a *mantra* or spiritual chant. When one visits a Buddhist monastery, one may see people spinning a prayer wheel while performing prayers. However, since Buddhism has spread all over the world, the way they pray vastly differs from one sect to another.

Apart from Hinduism and Buddhism, another ancient religion of India is Jainism. The Jains worship the images of Tirthankaras – people who have achieved perfection in their ideals. Through prayer, they aspire for detachment and to develop virtue. Jain prayers are to break the barriers

HOW DO WE PRAY?

of worldly desire and to achieve liberation of the Soul. Jains believe that prayers will fail if they are greedy and selfish and if their prayers seek material benefits. The Jains pray that their actions are devout and spiritual due to their strong belief in the concept of Karma.

In India, a popular religious community is the Sikhs. Sikhism advocates one God in an abstract form to whom they pray by repeating the name, 'Wahe Guru.' The Sikh prayers make them aspire to be conscious of God every moment. The entire religion is based on the concept of the importance of *Gurmat* – the Guru's word. Through their prayers, they aspire for self-realization. They believe God resides everywhere in His creation. The place of worship for the Sikhs is Gurdwara and the Guru's teachings are in the Guru Granth Sahib. The Sikh theology encourages praying in *Sadh Sangat*, the company of a holy congregation. Their prayers are a combination of singing, recitation from the scriptures, meditation, and service. In many Eastern cultures, men and women sit separately when they pray. Prayers end with *Ardaas* – an invocation to God that seeks universal blessings for mankind. One unique feature in Sikh prayer is that they cook and serve food for one and all present in the Gurdwara in a ritual known as *Langar*.

The Zoroastrians, belonging to one of the world's oldest religions, pray several times in a day often wearing a Kusti

to remind them of their core belief – good words, good thoughts, good deeds. Through their prayers that are offered facing the sun, fire or source of light to their supreme God, Ahura Mazda, they invoke His blessings. The prayers are focused to defeat the evil – the Angra Mainyu. The prayers make fire as the supreme symbol of purity, which is seen in their temples and is never extinguished. Many of them follow the ritual of praying in the 5 divisions of the day with special recitals for each prayer.

Shinto worship in Japan is highly ritualistic and follows strict protocols, be it at home or in the shrines. At home, they have a special place, Kami Dana, where they make offerings of flowers or food as they pray with amulets, which they believe will bring good luck. They visit shrines on festivals and different shrines have different deities or Kami. The Shinto's pray to Ebisu, the God of commerce for success and Tenjin, for passing examinations. All Shinto ceremonies have strong aesthetic elements with props, sounds, and dresses of the priest that intend to please their Kami. They are very particular in following a specific pattern in a sequence, like ringing the bell, bowing twice before clapping their hands twice, and then after a moment of silence, bowing again. They even write prayers for their God on wooden plaques or buy *Omkuji* at their Shinto Shrines which has their fortune written on it. Such is the way they pray.

HOW DO WE PRAY?

In and around China where Taoism was followed over 2,500 years ago, people's prayers are often to do with meditation. It is all about being in sync with the Tao, praying inward for peace. The Taoist try to accept and master circumstances through prayer, rather than fighting them, making their prayer a prayer for harmony quite different from others. Some pray making both hands balled into fists in the *Ying Yang* symbol. Others use incense sticks that are offered at the altar, symbolizing a sacrifice to their ancestors and Gods.

Paganism was originally a derogatory term for polytheism, broadly meaning the 'religion of the peasantry'. During and after the Middle Ages, the term paganism was applied to any unfamiliar religion, and the term presumed a belief in false deities. The recognition of the Divine in nature is at the heart of Pagan belief. Pagans are deeply aware of the natural world and see the power of the Divine in the ongoing cycle of life and death. Pagans worship the Divine in many different forms, through feminine as well as masculine imagery and also as without gender. Paganism is not based on any doctrine. Pagan rituals aim at making contact with the Divine that is in the world that surrounds them.

What are Wiccan prayer beliefs? Wicca is primarily a neo-pagan Western movement. Its followers practice nature worship and witchcraft. The Wiccans believe in a deity that

they call 'The One', although they also refer to the deity as God and Goddess. For Wiccans, magic is a way to bring about change for the good. Wiccans use the movement of energies of nature to help turn negativity into positivity and make positive changes. Using prayer is one way to use these natural energies to fulfill their wishes related to protection, love and health. The mind, the Wiccans believe, can receive these natural energies through prayers and rituals.

While there are so many different religions and there are so many different ways humanity prays, what is most strange is that most people don't understand what their prayers are all about. Although the saints like the Buddha or Guru Nanak directed a path for humanity to follow, instead, their followers started praying to the saints themselves.

Once in India, there was a farmer who wanted to offer prayers for the wellbeing of his crops. Out of his own imagination, he performed a prayer in the central street of his little town. He cut a part of the trunk of the tree and smeared it with Haldi Tilak and Vibhuti—turmeric, ash, and different coloured powders used in Hindu prayer rituals. He then offered some leaves as a garland to the tree and lit a few incense sticks. To complete his prayer, he lit a lamp and started singing a spiritual hymn. No sooner had he finished his prayer, a few people joined in a line, each of them anxious to repeat the prayer. None of them understood what the prayer was being performed for, but sometimes such is the effect of prayer! We human beings blindly start following rituals

HOW DO WE PRAY?

and perform any kind of prayer without even understanding its relevance and purpose. Because prayer has become irrelevant, it has also become ineffective in many ways. Prayers have power when they are performed with meaning and purpose.

Centuries ago, man used to pray but at least then prayer was performed with innocent devotion. When civilizations started in ancient times, people used to pray to deities of nature. People prayed to the sun God, the rain God, and the God of the winds and fire. To them, these were the forces of nature and they linked these natural forces with God, the Creator. Somehow, with the passage of time, we have complicated the way we pray and today, there are so many rituals and superstitions that most of us don't understand what prayers are all about.

As time passed, these Gods of nature took a back seat and different religions created different Gods for people to pray to. Because we human beings seek happiness, just as we hate the sight of pain, we go to God through prayer because we believe that God controls our happiness.

Further, as religions evolved, they guided people to pray in order to please their respective Gods, which in turn, we have been told, paves the way for us to go to heaven one day. Nobody knows where heaven is but the whole world believes that prayers will take us to heaven.

If one stops and introspects, there are broadly 3 types of prayers across all religions. The simplest prayer is using the body and the mind along with the voice to pray to God. This prayer seems to be the most complicated one, but is the easiest way to pray. Because it engages the body and the mind, we tend to get less distracted while we pray.

The second kind of prayer is a prayer where the body is still. It has only utterances, reciting, singing or talking to God. It does not involve any specific movements of the body, but just the mind and the voice.

The third type of prayer is said to be the most difficult. It is prayer in silence. There is no action, nor is there any voice. A human being uses his mind and consciousness to pray to God. Although this is the toughest way to pray, it is said to be the most effective way of prayer. It is for this reason, in today's world, meditation or silent prayer has become so popular.

Different people choose to pray in a way that they think is most appropriate based on their customs, traditions, religion, and society. But what we sometimes miss to appreciate is that only human beings are blessed with the gift of prayer. Animals don't seem to pray, at least as we see them live. It is only human beings who are given the gift of the intellect and who can realize the presence of God and offer prayers to their Almighty. We should be grateful for

being human and for being given this gift of prayer.

Ignorance plays a big role in how we pray. We wait for God to come and bless us in our dreams. We don't use our intelligence to understand who God really is.

All religions believe in myth in some way or the other. Religions start with praying to God and loving God but beyond that, religions become theologies that practise so many rituals, dogmas, and superstitions that the prime focus on God is lost. We get so overwhelmed by the act of performing the rituals that we forget God. Our goal is God, but religions make that second to the practices that we are made to follow. Whether it be going to church on a Sunday, a mosque on Friday or a temple on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday or celebrating Easter or Maha Shivratri or Ramadan, be it celebrating the birthday of Jesus or fasting during Navratri or Ramadan, religions have many rituals that seem to be an act of faith but unfortunately, they take away our attention from our ultimate goal of realizing God.

Sometimes, it is not the saint who starts a religion but the followers who institutionalize the rituals. However, the rituals are now not just a part of the religion but a priority for its followers. Unfortunately, we get caught in this maze and we remain distant from realizing God. We teach children certain things that make it a core part of their belief system. As they grow, they are unable to get out of it. They

become prisoners of these myths and this stops them from realizing the Truth. Hindu families teach their kids that Lord Ganesha loves *Laddoos* or Indian sweets. There is no harm in praying to a God but believing that these are the real Gods that we must pray to, offering them *Laddoos* and other things that are said to please the Gods, are acts of ignorance. We can offer God anything with our love but we must be conscious that our God is all-powerful and needs nothing, not the sweets or other offerings that are in any case sourced from His creation. Although we know that several superstitions and rituals are meaningless, we still follow them hoping they will bring us 'good luck'. In the end, we become miserable because of our own ignorance that is triggered by religion.

At least a few of us are blessed. We pray to God with gratitude, thanking God every day for His blessings and grace that He pours upon us. Some of us are blessed to count our blessings and thank God for whatever we have. We pray to God out of love for the Divine. It is these types of prayers which create devotional magic and can help transform our life.

Very few people evolve in the way they pray. Most people live and die, asking their God to solve their problems and fulfil their wishes. Very few grow in their belief to live with trust. They are the ones who accept the Divine will. They pray in surrender, asking God for nothing, but rather,

HOW DO WE PRAY?

letting him choose what is best for them.

While the world has thousands of ways to pray, ignorance across the globe is common. We don't really know who exactly we are praying to or where our God is nor do we understand the real purpose of prayer. What we say when we pray makes no sense to us. But still, we pray. Of what use is such prayer? Is it not important for us to discover what true prayer really is?

*Some people pray in silence
Some people scream and shout.
But most of us who are alive,
Don't know what prayer is all about!*

TAKEAWAYS

HOW DO WE PRAY?

- People pray in different ways.
- The most common way people pray is to close their eyes, fold their hands, and talk to God.
- There are many religions, and each has its own religious practices.
- Even within the same religion, prayers vary.
- Prayer today has become so full of rituals that it has become very complicated.
- Effectively, prayer can be divided into 3 types – prayer that involves body, mind, and the voice; prayer that involves only the voice and the mind; and prayer in silence which is supposed to be the most effective form of prayer.
- While there are many methods of prayer, it is a pity that most of us don't understand what we say when we pray. Just because everybody prays in a certain way, we follow the same.

04

WHAT TRUE PRAYER REALLY IS



The real meaning of prayer is communicating with the Divine. It is understanding what we are saying and to whom we are praying. It is, first of all, accepting that there is a Divine Power that is beyond human comprehension. It is realizing the truth about God. It is going beyond the God that we were told is God. Therefore, the first aspect of true prayer is complete acceptance and surrender to a Universal Power whom we call God. God is beyond religion and far bigger than the institutions we go to. Realizing the myth that we have lived with opens the first door to true prayer.

Human beings are blessed with an intellect. If we analyze, we will discover that the Divine Power is not made of bone and skin, Divinity is the power that is present within. The Divine Power is immortal, eternal, and omnipresent. While we are incapable of knowing what God is, at least we should know what God is not. While most of us are incapable of comprehending God, at least we should understand that our limited perception about God is incorrect when we confine God to some pictures, human-body forms, saints, or statues. This makes us pray to that Power that the world calls God.

The majority of the world religions accept that God is within us. The Bible says, *'The Kingdom of God is within you.'* The Quran says, *'Wherever you are, I am.'* The Upanishads, the Hindu scriptures say, *'Neti Neti,'* 'Not This, Not This.' *'Tat Tvam Asi,'* 'Thou Art That.' It means that neither are we

this body nor this mind, we are the Divine Soul. True prayer is feeling the presence of the Divine and being constantly connected and communicating with the Divine.

It is unfortunate, that the world has been taught to pray in a way which it doesn't understand. When we follow a ritual while we pray, most of us don't know why we are performing that ritual. And the worst part is, we do not have the courage to ask. We follow rituals and traditional practices, taught by our religious heads or our elders, and somehow, we believe that this is true prayer. A small minority has the courage to question each action, trying to understand the relevance of what they are doing in prayer. The others think that following scriptures blindly is showing devotion to God. Some people think that just repeating the name of God is enough to go to heaven. When will we understand the meaning of true prayer?

Followers of all religions devoutly go to their place of worship and unquestioningly follow what they are told to do. How many people question the priest as to why we are having this bread and wine at the altar? People break coconuts at temples, but nobody asks the question, 'Why?' If we have to wear a particular attire when we pray, what is the relevance of the attire? It is a pity that we don't understand our own actions and we are least concerned to find out. The bigger problem is that the leaders of most religions aren't able to give a convincing answer to why we

pray the way we do. This is more so because over the centuries, the reasoning, the sequence, and procedures have got lost due to the changes that have kept on creeping in, just like in the game of 'Chinese Whispers', an original message is distorted by being passed around in a whisper.

Once there was a man who asked a monk, 'Why is it that we pray to the cat that is made out of stone?' He was lucky that the monk was both honest and devoted. With due sincerity and integrity, the monk explained – 'Many years ago, there was a monk who used to walk up to the monastery and because he wore a warm overcoat, a cat used to nudge him and walk with him right up to the monastery. And while the monk sat in prayer, the cat also used to sit as if it was praying. One day the monk died, but the cat continued coming up with another monk. Finally, one day, the cat died, and the followers built a stone cat as it had become a ritual to pray not just along with the monk, but also along with the cat.' When will we overcome the myth about the stone cat and resort to real prayer?

Sincere believers in God do a lot of talking to God. They share their darkest secrets and do not hide anything from God. They talk to God every day in prayer, sometimes, many times a day. But the question is, 'Is prayer just talking to God or more importantly, does it also involve listening to God?' True prayer is an effective two-way communication. It is not only communicating our feelings, our fears, our gratitude, and our love, but also listening to God's voice

that may come to us as an instinct, an insight or a message from somebody. God knows how to communicate with us provided we are listening. But what if we are not bothered about what God is telling us? What if we believe that prayer is just about us blabbering things that we don't even understand? This is the worst-case scenario where we talk to God in a language that is unknown to us. One step better is talking to God from our heart, but real and effective prayer is a two-way communication where we also listen to God.

We know the purpose of prayer, don't we? It is a method or act of communicating with God. We need to know who we are talking to. What would you call a person who is walking in the garden and talking to nobody? You will consider him to be psychologically ill. In prayer too, if we just talk without knowing whom we are talking to, it makes no sense. Therefore, real prayer is all about building a relationship with God. It is about feeling the Divine presence and experiencing God. Then, we are not praying to the air that surrounds us, but rather to the Power that controls everything around us. Once we have a good relationship with God, through constant communication, our prayers strengthen our connection with the Lord. True prayer makes our love for God bloom.

The truth is that God is not somebody who is living far away. God is with us all the time, but we don't realize this

truth. Even though we don't realize God, if our faith and love for God is strong, we can experience the Divine presence and pray effectively.

Isn't it sad that most of us are looking for God in the wrong place? We get carried away by the myth and live with it. *There was this young boy who was told by his mother to go and feed the priest with bread. The child asked the mother, 'Why should I do that?' The mother told the child, 'Whatever you feed the priest, your grandfather in heaven will get it.'* The boy was very fond of his grandfather who had just passed away. The priest was a vegetarian, but the grandfather used to love roasted chicken and so, the child questioned the mother, 'Why should I take bread when my grandpa used to love chicken?' Because he was an innocent little child, she told him, 'If the priest eats bread, your grandpa will get chicken in heaven.' The child in love with his grandfather went and served the priest believing the story. We may laugh at the child, but don't we all follow superstitions that make no sense? We are told so many fairy tales about God, but instead of questioning them, we innocently accept them, either out of being naive or in fear of blasphemy, questioning our religion.

If a child is taught that Mickey Mouse lives in Disneyland, he will grow up believing in the story of Mickey and Minnie. He will fantasize about Donald Duck! But while it is fine for children to enjoy the Disney cartoon characters, we should grow up to realize the truth. If an 80-year-old

man still believes in the existence of Goofy and Pluto, then it is a pity. These are just comic characters created for the sake of children's entertainment. While many religions around the world portray God with a name and a form that is fancy and attractive, is it difficult for us to use our intellect to realize the truth that God cannot be an imaginary character with an elephant head or somebody who lived with bone and skin and died or even still, somebody who lives up in the skies or rules from a distant planet? We must overcome these fantasies about God if we want our prayers to be meaningful and effective. Let us realize the truth about God.

Therefore, true prayer is realizing the truth about God. It is not mumbling or chanting something that we don't understand. It is not just praying to a statue or a saint without realizing what we are doing. True prayer is a two-way communication with the Power who has created this universe.

True prayer, therefore, consists of two important things: 1) knowing whom we are praying to and 2) understanding what we are saying. Unless a prayer does both of the above, it is not true prayer. In fact, the moment we understand the truth about God, the way we pray will change. What we ask for in prayer will no longer be the same. Our innocent prayers are foolish because of our ignorance about God. Thus, we continue to say things in prayer, which, on

contemplation, we realize make no sense. Prayer becomes true prayer when we know the God we are praying to, when we experience the Divine, and when we ultimately realize God.

While God-realization is not easy, it starts with devotion to God. To begin with, one must believe in God, but it is with faith, trust, hope, and enthusiasm that one moves forward in their journey on the spiritual path. Most people do not go further on this journey. Their love for God does not make them so passionate that they go on a quest in search of God. There are a rare few who go in quest of God. They are the ones who are able to truly pray, who effectively communicate with the Divine. Because they get to know God, they understand God, they recognize God. This is what makes prayer, true prayer.

Just going to a temple, a mosque or a church and reciting scriptures in a beautiful voice, in a choir, in a large gathering does not make the prayer effective true prayer. It only remains a part of religion. It is just like children in kindergarten who recite a nursery rhyme. Do they understand what they are reciting? They are young, innocent children who are simply repeating what they have been taught. We human beings are grown up. We should not behave like children in a kindergarten. When we recite a prayer, we should know what it means, we should understand what this prayer is being recited for. And if we

don't, we are no better than little children in a kindergarten praying to God.

When two-way communication in prayer starts, we start receiving inspiration from God to take us forward on our journey. Most of us have no time to listen to God. We are too busy telling God what we want, complaining about what we don't have and mumbling what we have been taught to say when we pray. When will we realize that this is not true prayer? True prayer is Divine. True prayer is talking to our Father, our real Father who has given us this life.

At this point, we may not understand what true prayer is, but at least we must understand what prayer is not. It is not mumbling something to somebody we don't know, it is not simply reciting excerpts or psalms from scriptures. It is not screaming, singing or repeating things that make little sense. Let us stop and realize the truth.

*True prayer is not
mumbling something you don't understand.
True prayer is talking and listening
to God who is always holding your hand.*

TAKEAWAYS

WHAT TRUE PRAYER REALLY IS

- There is a difference between prayer and true prayer.
- Blindly following scriptures is not showing devotion to God.
- True prayer is an effective two-way communication. It's not only talking but also listening to God.
- True prayer builds a connection with God. It makes us love God.
- Prayer can never be true prayer unless we realize the truth about God.
- True Prayer is knowing who we are praying to and what we are saying.

05

REALIZE THE GOD YOU PRAY TO



Prayer can be true prayer only if we realize the truth about the God we pray to. God is all-powerful. He is the Creator of the universe, of life on earth. We may not exactly know who God is, where God is or what God is, but we know beyond doubt that God is. You and I are proof of God's existence. If there are Samsung mobile phones, we don't need to prove the existence of the company Samsung.

While there is no doubt that God exists, the problem lies in our ignorance about realizing the truth about God. In the world today, new Gods appear like new multi-dollar corporations. And then, they don't go away. Their followers keep on promoting their 'God' leading to a world in which we have thousands of Gods. This is not about criticizing or condemning any God or religion. It is about going beyond religion to realize the truth about God.

Religion is only a kindergarten that teaches us the ABC of God. It helps us start our belief system and teaches us to pray. But it doesn't make us realize the truth about God. Thus, our prayers remain shallow as they are built on a weak foundation of ignorance and myth. All religions are good. But we need to go beyond religion. We need to evolve spiritually to realize the truth about God to make prayer truly meaningful.

When we are told about God, we need to ask questions - is God mortal like you and me? If God can die, then what

makes him God? God is immortal. The names and forms that we create continue to enhance our ignorance about God.

For prayer to be true prayer, we must be absolutely clear to whom we are praying. And this is not possible until we realize the God to whom we pray.

Sam was excited when he was given a bungalow by his father-in-law. As soon as he took possession of it, he started renovating the bedrooms, the bathrooms, the kitchen, and the lawns. He spent his entire life's earning on his beautiful new house. It was undoubtedly the best house in the neighbourhood. Shortly thereafter, his father-in-law died. He was looking for the documents of the house when in horror he realized that the house actually belonged to somebody else. His father-in-law had just leased it and had been paying the rent for him to use. His entire life's savings were wasted because he had to leave the house.

Don't we too live like this? We spend our entire life praying to a God who is not truly the God that we seek to pray to. Can we relive our life and redo our prayers? While we can't, at least we can realize the truth now and discover our ignorance about the God we pray to. If Sam had realized the truth, would he have invested his entire life's savings in a house that did not belong to him?

Actually, there is no harm in praying to any God as long as

we eventually realize the truth about God. Then those prayers are not wasted. I prayed to a God for 40 years, only to realize that God is not a statue or a saint. I changed my paradigm. Instead of praying to that God, I started praying *through* that God to the Power that is everywhere. Those who don't realize the truth about the Divine Power, may find this to make no sense, but the fact is that we do not truly know who the God is that we pray to. From the time we are children, we are taught to blindly believe in God, not to ask questions, and we live and die without realizing God.

If we stop for a moment, we will realize how God has created each human being so unique that we have our own individual fingerprints. Each of us has over 30 trillion cells. The human eye has roughly 125 million retinal cells. If the eye was to be compared to a camera, it would be a whopping 576-megapixel camera. It can see 1 million colours. The nose can smell 1 trillion different types of smells. There are 200 different types of cells and 35 billion skin cells. There are 100 billion neurons in the brain. And our brain produces up to 60,000 thoughts per day. Our body holds a capacity of 6 litres of blood, and our blood vessels stretch up to 60,000 miles. Every day, approximately we take 23,000 breaths and our heart beats 1,15,000 times. There are around 1 lakh hair follicles on the human head. The body produces 23,000 litres of saliva in a lifetime, enough to fill a humongous swimming pool. Our

brain's electricity when awake can light a small bulb. The heart creates enough energy daily that can drive a truck for 32 kilometres. The heart pumps 1.5 million barrels of blood in a lifetime. Our taste buds are replaced every 10 days. It is astonishing to know just how ignorant we are about the greatest machine ever conceived - the human body. And there are 8 billion such human beings. Then there are trillions of animals, insects, birds, and other creatures. How powerful that God must be who has created all this! The Sun, the Moon, the stars, the birds, the animals, and the flowers, must make us realize how powerful the Divine Power truly is.

And instead of realizing this, we quarrel with each other about whose religion and whose God is more powerful. When will we realize that God is one Power, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent? Unfortunately, we human beings are slaves to our own minds. The mind is a monkey. It is a rascal. It keeps jumping from thought to thought. It does not permit us to contemplate God. It stops us from remaining still in silence. Thus, we don't discover the truth about God. Unless we use our intellect to take control of our mind, we cannot realize the truth about God.

God cannot be discovered. The way to God is known as realization. It starts with self-realization and ultimately goes on to God-realization. The truth is that God exists in each one of us. God is in you and in me; God is in

everybody! But because we are covered by layers of ignorance, we are unable to realize the truth about God and we continue to pray to the God that we have been praying to for decades.

If you look at me, you will say I am wearing a T-shirt. The truth is that I am not wearing a T-shirt. It appears to be a T-shirt to you because you do not see the hundreds of threads that are knitted together to create the T-shirt. So also, we human beings are not able to see deep into the truth and realize God. We don't realize that God exists in each of the trillions of cells in our body as Divine Consciousness. God is what creates life in us. When God or Divine Consciousness departs, there is no breath and we are dead. Although this is the truth, we do not realize this because of the cosmic illusion that projects a myth and hides the truth. When we realize the truth about God, then our prayers will become profound. But this will not happen until we go on a quest that will take us from self-realization to God-realization.

***I prayed to God with tears,
When I realized the truth
of who God was, after 40 years.***

TAKEAWAYS

REALIZE THE GOD YOU PRAY TO

- To make our prayer profound, we must first realize the truth about God.
- Throughout our life, we live with myths and we do not realize the truth about God.
- All religions are good. They teach us to pray to God.
- However, to realize the truth about God, we must go beyond religion.
- Religion is only a kindergarten to spirituality. We must graduate in the university of spirituality.
- God is a Power that exists in each one of us, but we are unable to realize this truth.
- To realize this truth, we must go on a quest that will take us from self-realization to God-realization.

06

FROM SELF-REALIZATION TO GOD-REALIZATION



For those who come across these terms for the first time, self-realization and God-realization, doesn't make much sense. Further, it makes us wonder what the connection between self and God is. While it may be practical to talk of God-realization when it comes to discovering the true meaning of prayer, how does self-realization come into the picture? If we want to realize the truth of God, first it is necessary to realize who we are. Only then can we discover the true meaning of prayer.

Prayer is important. It strengthens a human being's life. Especially at times of tragedy in our personal life, or a global catastrophe or pandemic, people don't have any alternative but to pray. When we pray without meaning, then those prayers don't really work. For prayers to work, we must know whom we are praying to and what we are saying. Thus, praying to the Divine without knowing the truth about both prayer and the Divine makes no sense. Let us first attempt to realize the Divine Power as we also discover the truth about ourselves.

We do not doubt that God exists. The simple fact that the Earth rotates on its own axis once in 24 hours and it revolves around the Sun causing seasons, makes us realize that the universe has a Creator who has created universal laws by which the Universe is preserved day in and day out. We know of several such laws. They include the Law of Gravity, the Law of Cycles, the Law of Opposites and the

Law of Action and Reaction, often known as the Law of Karma, amongst the many other laws. While there is no doubt about the existence of God, we need to go on a quest to realize the truth about the Divine.

How do we realize the truth about God? No doubt it is important to believe in God and to pray. This creates hope, faith and trust. But unless we really love God and yearn for God, we will not go in search of the truth about God. We may not realize it now but those who go on a quest, start their journey of enlightenment with realization of the self. This self-realization leads to God-realization. How does one achieve self-realization?

Self-realization is knowing the truth of who we are. We human beings think we are a body-mind complex that has a Soul. Most of us believe in this and we live and die with this ignorance. Because of our ignorance of who we are, we do not realize the truth about the self. The way to realize the self is to go on a quest, to ask and to investigate until we get to the bottom of the root. Most often, it is essential to have a Spiritual guide, a Master or a Guru who can lead us to the realization of the truth. This is because while knowledge is important, and it will make us know whom we seem to be, it will not let us realize the truth. Realization is an intuitive experience and we need the help of a Spiritual Master.

What does the quest help us discover? The quest starts with

finding out who we are not. Are we the body? No, we are not the body that we wear. We are the ones that wear the body. The body lives and dies, but we don't. We are the ones who are alive in the body.

Many people are fortunate to reach level one of this realization. Level one makes us realize, 'I am not the 'I' who will die. I am the ME – the Mind and Ego. At death when the physical body dies and the life or Soul inside us departs, the ME will continue to live in a new body based on our past actions or Karma by taking rebirth.'

The world today believes in the Law of Karma, the Law of Action and Reaction, or the Law of Cause and Effect. The law works like a boomerang. What we give is what we get. This law is universal and we see it operational all around us. Have you seen apples growing on a mango tree? Impossible! The universal law doesn't permit it. Ancient scriptures state the law, *'As you sow, so shall you reap.'* So how does this law work?

When somebody dies, the body returns to dust. But the one who was alive moves on. We human beings often say – 'Tom passed away, he departed, he expired. Let us pray for the departed one. These are only the mortal remains of Tom.' What do we infer by this? We infer that the one who was Tom has left the body and moved on. Tom will never be reborn because his body will return to dust. But the one

who was Tom will carry his Karma or unsettled actions only to be reborn in a new body.

This logic of the Law of Karma and rebirth gets ratified when we look at how children are born in this world. Some children are born in fortunate circumstances while some suffer. Some are born in rich families, but others in poverty. Why would a new-born child be born blind? Is God cruel? No! This is the Universal Law of Karma unfolding, the Law of Cause and Effect which executes the principle *as you sow, so shall you reap*. The infants who are born, seem to be the babies we see, but within them, lies the ME – the Mind and Ego that has completed not just one life but probably several lives and is carrying Karma, good or bad, due to the unsettled actions of the past.

Therefore, in the quest for self-realization, we realize we are not the body. There are many methods of realizing this. Earlier, it was only spirituality that advocated that we are not the body. But today, even science declares that though we appear to be a mass of flesh of human cells, in reality, each cell is nothing but energy. Based on the famous equation $E=MC^2$ and new findings in quantum physics of the principle of Wave-Particle Duality, scientists have discovered that a human body that seems to be made of cells is actually not just made of atoms, electrons, neutrons, protons, but also tiny particles called quarks which appear to have mass but are in fact only energy. These were the

findings in what was called the Higgs boson experiment and what scientists termed, 'God Particle'. If one were to study modern science, one would realize we human beings are nothing but energy!

There are several methods of realizing the truth about the self. While there is no doubt that we are not the body, the surprising fact is that we are not even the mind. Several centuries ago, a Hindu prince Siddhartha Gautama left his palace, his wife and young child in the quest of enlightenment, to realize the truth. In his quest, he wondered, 'Why must we human beings suffer on earth?' While there is no doubt that we experience happiness, nobody who is born can escape from suffering. The prince went on to become the Buddha, the Awakened One when he woke up to the reality of life. He himself attained the state of enlightenment and he called this self-realization as *nirvana*. *Nirvana* is nothing but *mukti* or *moksha* of Hinduism. It is what the Western world refers to as 'Enlightenment,' which then leads to salvation. Different religions call it by different names. Those who are evolved in theology and climb the ladder of spirituality, arrive at this state of self-realization.

What is enlightenment? It is the realization that while the body dies, the one that is alive takes rebirth in a new body, and this happens again and again. Each time one takes a new birth, one has to suffer. There is triple suffering — suffering of

the body, misery of the mind, and agony of the ego. This cycle of suffering continues again and again until one overcomes their ignorance by the realization of the truth. As long as we are ignorant and believe we are the body, mind, and ego, we will continue to suffer in this cycle of death and rebirth, referred to as transmigration. The ultimate goal of life is to escape from this cycle through self-realization.

What is the state of self-realization? It is when we realize that we are not the body, and we are not even the mind and ego that is born again and again to suffer – this, in turn, makes us realize that we are the Divine Soul, the *Atman*, the spirit that actually gives life to us. The realization of this truth is self-realization.

How does one achieve self-realization? One achieves a state of self-realization when one continues their spiritual contemplation with deep love and longing for the Divine. In that state, one realizes the truth of who they are. There are several methods that one may use. One such method is to find the mind. Can you find the mind? You can find your eyes, your nose, your ears, and several parts of your body. If you would like to find your heart, brain, kidneys, and lungs, you can see them on an X-ray or MRI. But has anybody seen the mind? You can't find the mind because it doesn't exist. The thoughts seem to come from every part of the body. It is an illusion - something that appears to be but

is not. Have you seen a rainbow? It appears when the white light of the sun splits through droplets of rain, creating the seven colours of VIBGYOR. But you can't catch a rainbow. It is *Mithya* – illusion, something that appears but in reality, is not.

The Mind is a bundle of thoughts. Together, it captures our attention and holds us to ransom. It is our biggest enemy and stops us from self-realization and beyond. The Mind along with the Ego, ME, is the cause of our suffering as we are born again and again on earth. To escape from this suffering, we need liberation from ignorance or what we call, enlightenment.

Those who go on a quest for self-realization, realize the importance of a Spiritual Master or Guru. It is a Spiritual Coach who can help us realize the truth. Realization is not an act of just reading or listening and discovering the self. Self-realization happens in 3 steps. The first is reading or listening, the second is contemplating and the third is realizing the truth. For this, we need a Spiritual Master. It was my Spiritual Master who made me understand that just like a computer has hardware, software and a power supply, we human beings too have the gross physical body or the hardware and the subtle body or the software comprising the mind, memory, intellect, and ego. Without the software, the computer cannot work. So also, without the subtle body, human beings cannot act. The gross or

physical body is a slave to the subtle body. But most important is the Soul. It is just like the power supply to the computer. It is the Soul that creates life in us. Unfortunately, we don't realize this truth. Unless we use our intellect to transcend the mind and be the master, we will continue to be slaves imprisoned behind the bars of ignorance.

Self-realization, ultimately, leads us to the truth that we are the Divine Soul, not the body and not the mind. Although we appear to be a body-mind complex, we are just effects of the cause. The cause is the Soul. Just like a wave is nothing; it appears from the ocean and goes back into the ocean, so also, we human beings are only effects of the cause. Without the Soul, we are nothing. In a jewellery shop that sells pure gold, we may see bangles, rings, chains, and so many fancy gold ornaments. In reality, these are not the ornaments that we see. They are just gold. If we remove gold, nothing remains.

To realize the self, we human beings must know the Law of Causation. It is based on 3 tenets:

1. Every effect has a cause.
2. The effect is nothing but the cause in a different form.
3. If you remove the cause, there is no effect, nothing remains.

Those who realize the truth that we are the Soul, realize that we are born when the Soul appears. Without the Soul we are nothing. The Soul is the cause. We are mere effects.

Self-realization is very important in discovering true prayer because it is self-realization that leads us to God-realization. When we realize God, then we discover what true prayer is all about.

How does one go from self-realization to God-realization? The moment we realize we are not the body and mind that we appear to be, we realize we are the Divine Soul. The Soul in me is no different from the Soul in you. In our homes, we have many electrical appliances and fixtures — televisions, toasters, hairdryers, refrigerators, bulbs, lamps. By themselves, they are different appliances or fixtures. But what about the power? Do they have a different source of power or do all of them get energized by power from the same source? If we switch off the main switch of our house that supplies electricity, all the appliances and gadgets become powerless. Those who realize the self, go on to realize that we seem to be different human beings, but the truth is, the power inside each one of us is the same. In reality, we are the Divine Soul, not the body and mind that we seem to be. We all emerge from one source of power. The Divine Soul in me and the Divine Soul in you is one. It is part of that one Universal Divine Consciousness that is everywhere.

How does one realize this truth? If we take two different rubber balloons, one red and blue, they seem to be pieces of dead rubber and are lifeless. Now, we inflate them with air. Suddenly, the red and blue balloons start bouncing with life. What happens if we deflate both the balloons? Can we recover the air of the red balloon separately from the air of the blue balloon? This is impossible! The air from both the balloons has merged with the air that is everywhere. So does our Soul. At death, our Soul merges with the Universal Soul that is omnipresent- present everywhere.

Don't we see that when a person dies, there is no change except, that the Soul, Spirit or Life Energy which is within departs? It leaves from each of the over 30 trillion cells that we human beings have, and we are pronounced dead. What exactly happens? The person was alive but the moment the Soul departs, the person becomes lifeless. This is because without the Soul we are nothing. Where does the Soul go? The Soul is Divine Energy that merges with the Universal Energy that is everywhere. The Universal Energy is none other than the Power we call God. It is the Power that energizes everything in this universe. It appears and departs at its own free will.

Because we human beings do not overcome ignorance and achieve a state of self-realization, we are unable to reach the ultimate truth of God-realization. When we first realize that we are not the body and mind, but the Divine Soul, this

self-realization builds the foundation for God-realization. It makes us realize that the Soul that we are, is nothing other than the supreme Divine consciousness that is everywhere. How much ever a person reads this, he will not understand it because it is not something we can discover by reading and knowing. It is something that we must realize from the inside. It happens when we open our 'real eyes'. Then only we will realize the truth that we are not the body or mind but the Divine Soul. In reality, we are nothing. The Soul is everything. The entire universe is nothing but a manifestation of the Divine.

Of course, man must use his intellect and knowledge to reach the state of realizing the self and God. But unless man is committed to this, he will never live a life of discrimination, of dispassion and detachment, of discipline, with the desire for the Divine. These are the 4 pre-requisites for one who wants to start the journey of realization. Man is lost in this world of attractions and distractions. He is a slave of his own mind and ego and of the senses of his body. He lives and dies, desiring, craving and seeking sensual pleasures. Alas! He doesn't realize the Divine. How then can we expect man to discover the true meaning of prayer?

Let us try to analyze some truths that will help us in this journey of realization. We all celebrate our birthday because we were born on that day. But this is a lie! Does it

mean we were not alive the day before when we were still in our mother's womb? If we ask our mother, she will vouch that we were very much alive and kicking, before we were delivered on earth. So, when then did we come alive? Days before we were born or was it weeks, or even months? Mother Teresa contemplated this and shared the truth that she had realized. She said that life is created when two cells merge in a Divine fusion to become a zygote. Thereafter, the cells multiply, and the body grows around it to become an embryo and finally a baby. This life that appears in a tiny zygote, is the beginning of what you and I are, and it is so small that it can hardly be seen by the human eye. Still, it is the Divine Energy in it that finally creates the magical human being that we are. This endorses not only self-realization, that we are that energy, what we call the Soul, the spirit or the *Atman*, it also begins our journey towards God-realization. This energy appears from God and goes back to God. The mind of man, however, will not agree. It will ask a million questions only to stop us from realization. What is the reason? The moment we realize the truth, the Mind and Ego, ME, ceases to exist and doesn't continue its journey of being reborn again. It is this very Soul energy that leaves us when we die. The body remains but the life inside departs causing death.

Let us perform a virtual experience. Let us take an airtight room and virtually peel a human being. We start the virtual experiment by removing the eyes and keeping them on the

table. Can the eyes see? No, they are like glass marbles once they are removed from the body. But the human being continues to live though blind. Now let us remove the nose, the ears, the teeth, the hands and the legs. The person is still alive, although he is deaf, he can't smell, can't walk or talk. Now we take the virtual experiment one step further. We peel the skin and safely preserve it on the table, just as we keep the blood in beakers, and muscles and flesh in bags. Each of the organs is carefully preserved. What are we now left with? Just the skeleton! Somewhere during this virtual experiment, the one who was alive escaped into the airtight room. Now, with the help of the best surgeons and scientists of the world and with special equipment that can put everything back into the skeleton, we refit the body, just like we would remove every part of a car and then refit it. Can the scientists and the surgeons put back life into that body? Impossible! We human beings know that once life leaves the body, it can't be put back into the body. But where did the life go in the airtight room? The Life Energy merged with the Divine Consciousness that is everywhere. This is God-realization. It is only self-realization that can lead us to God-realization.

What is God-realization? It is realizing that we are not the body and mind, we are the Soul which is nothing but the Divine energy of God. The moment we realize this, that we are all manifestations of the Divine, our entire philosophy of life will change. Our paradigm about God and religion

will transform, and so will our prayers.

All along, we have been searching for God outside, but God-realization will make us know that God is within. Doesn't the Bible say, 'The kingdom of God is within you'? The Quran says, 'Wherever you are, I am.' Doesn't the Upanishad say, 'You are the Divine truth'? When we realize that we are nothing but the Divine Soul that powers our existence and we realize that God lives in the temple of our heart, then our paradigm of life changes. So does the way we pray!

At first, we must overcome ignorance...

We are not the body and the mind.

The Soul that we are, is the Divine,

On realization, we will find.

TAKEAWAYS

FROM SELF-REALIZATION TO GOD-REALIZATION

- True prayer is only possible when we move from self-realization to God-realization.
- We can realize the truth of the self only when we overcome ignorance.
- We overcome ignorance when we go on a quest for the truth.
- It is important to have a Spiritual Master to help us realize the truth.
- The first step is to realize we are not the body or mind. We are the Divine Soul. This is self-realization.
- Self-realization leads to God-realization. The Soul in me and the Soul in you is one Power. It is nothing other than God, Divine universal consciousness.
- Just like the air inside two balloons merges with the air that is everywhere, so does our Soul. It merges with the Universal Soul that is omnipresent.
- This is God-realization. Realizing that we are all manifestations of the Divine.
- The moment we realize God, it opens the door to true prayer.

07

SERVING HUMANITY IS PRAYER



Having come this far, how does one pray? Realizing that prayer has more significance than ordinarily thought and God is not someone who lives on a distant planet and further still, prayer is not about holding a rosary or a coconut in hand and letting the mind wander – what then is true prayer? True prayer is realizing the truth that God is right here and now. God is everywhere. We don't have to search for God. We don't need complicated rituals to pray. All we need is true love for God, sincere gratitude to the Divine.

It is not necessary that everybody will actually realize the truth. But even if we have the knowledge of realization, it is good enough to start the journey of true prayer. While it is not difficult to realize that the temple of God is within us, most of us are looking outside. The Sikh Guru, Guru Nanak, said that we human beings are given 9 doors, all opening to the outer world. We have 2 eyes to see, 2 ears, 2 nostrils, a mouth, an organ of procreation and organ of excretion. None of these openings which he called doors are looking within. He said that we should open the tenth door that looks within. Then we can truly realize God within and pray.

Once we realize that God lives within each human being, then, there is no rocket science needed to find out the way to true prayer. It is simple. We must be kind and compassionate to everybody we meet. We must love one and all. That is

why, if we carefully study all the religious scriptures, they abundantly use the word, 'love'. Modern man has never been able to understand why the word love is so freely repeated in religious scriptures.

Most of humanity does help and serve the poor on some occasions, if not regularly. But why do they reach out to the discarded and downtrodden? They do so because they want to invest in good deeds or good Karma. Their service to the poor is motivated by the fact that the good they do will come back to them. While it is a commendable act to serve the needy, it is not true prayer. True prayer is being able to see the Divine in the poor and destitute. We need to make a paradigm shift and serve them, not because of Karma, but because we have realized the truth that God dwells in each living being.

Serving humanity is prayer! Yes, there is no doubt about this. When we realize that every orphan child is a manifestation of the Divine when we reach out to those who are physically challenged or mentally unstable with the realization that God dwells within them, that is true prayer. Every act of service is no less than sincere worship to God. One who realizes the truth knows that every person is a picture of God. To serve them is to worship God.

While this is the absolute truth, most of us cannot see through it as reality. We question: How can a human being

be God? Our mind convinces us with compelling and contradicting thoughts. It tells us – ‘This man is a thief, how can he be God?’ ‘These people are suffering because of their own past deeds. We must not interfere with God’s plan. Let them suffer as per their Karma.’ These are contradictory thoughts of the mind that wants to take us away from the Divine. That is why it is important to realize the truth of who we are and who God is. It is unfortunate that over generations, mythology has ruled. Rituals and superstitions have overtaken the truth. In the process, people with selfish interests have developed ulterior motives and they would much prefer that the human race doesn’t realize the truth about God. But this is a pity. All scriptures endorse the fact that God lives in each one of us. Scriptures also emphasize the importance of serving the poor, but we are unable to live with the realization that true prayer can be performed by serving suffering humanity.

Swami Vivekananda said, ‘He who wants to serve the Father must serve the children first. He who wants to serve Shiva must serve His children — must serve all creatures in this world first.’ Around 1898, Swami Vivekananda had acquired some land at Belur and constructed the Temple of Sri Ramakrishna and the Math for *sannyasin*. Soon after, the plague broke out in Calcutta, and panic overwhelmed the city. People began to leave Calcutta in fear. Many died and there was no one to take care of the ailing or dispose of the bodies of the deceased. Swami Vivekananda was not in

Calcutta but upon hearing the news, he immediately returned to Calcutta and urged the *sannyasin* of Belur Math to be of service in taking care of the affected. Many protested, saying, 'This is not our work; Sri Ramakrishna had never told us to do social service. Our main aim is to seek God and perform *sadhana*.' Swami Vivekananda addressed them saying, 'O my brothers, have you forgotten the *mantra* of our Sri Ramakrishna: '*Shiva Jnane Jiva Seva*'? By serving human beings, we are serving the highest expression of God on this earth. Love the Lord in these suffering patients. I appeal to you to come forward in this calamity and serve the living God.'

The monks were surprised, when they heard these powerful words of their leader but some still protested, 'O Swami, from where would the money come?' To this, the Swami said, 'If need be, sell off the Belur Math. The money thus gathered would be put to the service of these men. I care not for home or shelter for ourselves; we are *sannyasin*, and we have taken the vow of poverty. Tree shade would be our roof and a loin cloth would be enough for us to cover our bodies.'

Thus, the monks, the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, and the inmates of Belur Math became actively involved in looking after the afflicted. In fact, the British authorities in their report on the epidemic had recorded that it was because of the timely help from the Math, that mortality was less and the epidemic could be brought under control quickly.

The challenge for us is to realize that each human being is a manifestation of the Divine. We are not praying to the outer surface or body covering. We are praying to the God within. Such prayer is true prayer when it does not discriminate on the basis of caste, creed, religion, gender or financial status. Nationality or how one appears on the outside is immaterial. True prayer is knowing that inside every human being, there is Divinity.

Outside a church, a little girl went up to a man selling gas balloons. She saw him fill a red balloon with helium and tie it with a long string so that it bobbed up and down in the air and attracted other children. He then filled a blue, a green, a yellow, an orange and a white balloon. Seeing all the colourful balloons filled with gas, swaying in the sky, the innocent young girl asked the man, 'If you fill a black balloon with gas, would it also fly in the sky?' The man laughed and replied, 'Of course, dear child, it is not the colour of the balloon, it's what's inside it that matters.' Sometimes, we behave like this little child and we get carried away by the colour of the skin or the profession or status of a person. We need Divine grace to see through the outer surface and see God within.

How else can we really pray to God? There is no other way! The only way to truly pray is to experience God's Divine presence in each of His manifestations and there can be no better option than to serve suffering humanity. When we help a blind man cross the street, when we give a hungry

child milk to drink, when we go to an old age home and comfort the aged, these acts are the acts of Divine prayer. Unfortunately, because we don't realize God and we don't realize that we are the Divine Soul, we are unable to see the Divine Soul in the sick and the suffering.

Some people are yearning to talk to God, to see God, and to meet God, not realizing that Divinity appears in front of us every day. He gives us innumerable opportunities to love Him, to serve Him, and to experience His Divine presence.

In ancient India, there was a saint who had realized the truth about God. One day, he was making chapatis, a kind of Indian bread. Just then, a dog passed by. It snatched the bread and started running. The saint started running behind the dog. Somebody then asked him, 'Why are you running behind the dog and calling it back? It's hungry, let it go.' The saint replied, 'I have not yet applied butter. I want to apply the butter on the chapati so the dog can enjoy its meal.' This saint is a true example of one who has had God-realization. He not only saw God in every human being but even saw GOD in the DOG.

Do you truly want to pray to God? Don't wait for God to appear in a vision and in a form that you have been praying to since you were a child. Let go of the myth and realize God that appears in all his creation. All of creation is actually not God's creation, but rather Divine manifestation. While all of creation appears to be created by God, it is actually God

appearing as different beings. The next time you see somebody suffering in pain, realize that it is time to pray. God is calling out to you, taking the form of the one who is suffering. Go, serve and love the God that appears as a human being. See God in suffering humanity – that is true prayer!

Don't lose an opportunity to serve anybody who comes to you. It may be a member of your family, a neighbour, somebody who works with you, somebody who prays with you in your institution or somebody who works for you. Each of these people is God disguised as a human being. See beyond the surface and realize the Divine. More importantly, when God appears to you in a situation, when somebody is suffering, somebody is in pain, is crying, is in need, is lost, is hurt, this is God giving you an opportunity to pray and to love God. Do not ever miss this opportunity!

***God doesn't live on faraway planets,
God is here, very near.
When we serve the sick and the suffering,
That, in reality, is prayer!***

TAKEAWAYS

SERVING HUMANITY IS PRAYER

- True prayer is serving suffering humanity.
- Every person is a picture of God. To serve them is to worship God.
- We search for God all the time. We seek God, call out to God.
- God appears to us disguised in all of creation. We should not miss the opportunity to help people. This is true prayer.
- We should not look at people depending on the colour of their skin, religion, caste or financial status. God is inside each one of us.
- When God gives us an opportunity and appears as somebody hurting and suffering, we must not lose the opportunity of service. This is true prayer.

08

**TRUE PRAYER
IS SEEING
DIVINITY IN
EVERYTHING BEAUTIFUL**



We now have a glimpse of what true prayer is. We have left behind traditional ritualistic prayer, although no prayer is bad. Every prayer makes us connect to God. Prayers that are not meaningful, that are just rituals are not as effective as realized prayers.

We know that God exists, and we know that prayer is communication with God. But when we realize the truth about God, then we can feel the Divine presence and feel truly connected to God.

God is in you, God is in me. God is everywhere on earth. God is in every creature, in every being that takes birth. Therefore, true prayer is seeing God in one and all. When we realize the truth that everything on earth is a manifestation of the Divine, then we don't pray only on a Sunday, a Monday or a Friday, when we go to our church, temple or mosque. We pray every day. We pray all the time. How is this possible?

Thousands of years ago, the sages in the Himalayas wrote a *mantra* '*Satyam Shivam Sundaram.*' This became a very famous Bollywood movie. But very few people realize the truth in the meaning of this Vedic chant. It means, 'The Truth is God is Beautiful.' How does one explain this? Let us take the instance of a beautiful butterfly. It is so exotic, so lovely as long as it flies. The moment the Life Energy or the Soul within it leaves, it dies, dries and withers away. Where

did the beauty go? Just as the Divine left, the beauty left.

Have you seen a little baby rabbit that is barely a few days old? It is the most adorable white tuft of hair that you can hold in your palm, and through it, you can feel the presence of beautiful Divine Consciousness. The Divine appears in everything beautiful and when the Divine Consciousness leaves, the beauty also, leaves.

It could be a beautiful bird or an exotic fish. The same holds true for you and me. Human beings are beautiful only as long as the Soul exists. The moment the Divine Consciousness leaves, the beauty leaves and our dead body starts to deteriorate and decompose only to become so unpleasant to our senses that even our near and dear ones want the dead body to be disposed of as soon as possible. The dead body or dead plant decomposes to the 5 basic natural elements - Air, Water, Earth, Fire, and Space. These too are manifestations of the Divine. Upon the death of a living thing, the Divine Consciousness from the dynamic body leaves turning it immobile and then the beauty of the gross body ceases to exist.

It should also be clear that if something is beautiful or ugly, it depends upon our perception. For a Realized Soul, God is within every conscious living being. God is the Divine Consciousness in all, be it a reptile, a strangely shaped sea creature, an insect or a person suffering from some kind of

physical ailment that may not look pleasant to our eyes but there is Divinity – there is beauty because, 'The Truth is God is Beautiful.'

What do we learn from this *mantra*? It is very simple. It is the truth. God manifests as everything beautiful in this world. Therefore, if we want to pray to God, do we need to go anywhere? No! We can open our eyes and see the Divine in a beautiful tree, in a butterfly or a bee, in the waves of the sea and in you and me. The Divine exists but because of our ignorance, we are not able to see the Divine. Thus, we go back to pray to idols, to pictures and even to our ancestors, when in reality, the Divine is all around us. When will we open our 'real eyes' and realize that this is true prayer? God is everywhere. The fact is, only God exists, nothing else. To the human eye, we see all the beauty, just as we also see ugly things. But we don't see God Power in all that makes them 'dynamic' and thus 'beautiful'. The moment we realize God's presence in all His manifestations, then we achieve a state of being in a prayer mode all the time. This is how a true Yogi lives and prays.

This is true prayer. Feeling the joy of God's Divine presence, staying ever-connected, communicating with the Divine all the time. There can be no better prayer than this.

How does one reach this state? There is only one way. It is to overcome our ignorance. As long as we don't, we will only

see the beautiful sky, lovely clouds and amazing sunset or a gorgeous sunrise. We will see nature as exotic flamingos, magnificent tigers, cute dolphins, and unbelievable penguins. We will keep wondering at the magic of creation when we see geese flying in a 'V' shape across the sky from one country to another. We will be amazed by wild horses, just as our little pet dog will make our hearts skip a beat. And what do we think? All these are beautiful creations of God. This is true, but it is not the ultimate truth. The ultimate truth is that all these are not just creations of God. They are manifestations of the Divine, nothing else. Divinity appears as all the beautiful creatures we see. It is just as gold appears as a beautiful ring, a bracelet or a chain. It is just as mud appears as a pot, a plate or a statue. So also, God appears as all His beautiful creations on earth, in the skies and below the waters. God is the cause; all his beautiful creations are just effects. When we realize this, we will realize the truth behind '*Satyam Shivam Sundaram*.' 'The Truth is God is Beautiful.' If we reverse this *mantra* or chant, we realize that 'The Truth is everything Beautiful is Divine.' This is the secret that unlocks the door to true prayer.

The next time you are in a garden and you see a beautiful rose, realize that it is God that blooms amongst the trees. When you see little birds chirping as they hop from tree to tree, feel the Divine presence of God in these birds, in fact, in everything. God appears as that butterfly or bee that

moves from flower to flower. The Divine appears as the lush grass that carpets acres of land. All this is God's magic. It is God hiding behind all beautiful creatures and creation. It is only when we truly seek God, that we will win in this hide and seek game of life. Only then will we truly pray in the real sense as we realize the Divine presence all the time in everything that surrounds us.

***A beautiful butterfly or a bee...
An exotic flower on a lovely tree...
True prayer is when we see,
the Divine in them and in you and me.***

TAKEAWAYS

TRUE PRAYER IS SEEING DIVINITY IN EVERYTHING BEAUTIFUL

- True prayer is realizing the presence of the Divine at all times.
- Everything beautiful in this world appears beautiful because of God.
- *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* – The Truth is God is Beautiful.
- Because of our ignorance, we think all these are beautiful creations of God.
- The truth is that everything beautiful created by God is none other than God.
- When we realize God's Divine presence in everything beautiful, then we can be praying all the time.
- This is how a true seeker is always connected to God, living like a Yogi.

09

LIVING LIKE A YOGI



Who is a true Yogi? To understand this, we must understand the true meaning of Yoga. Yoga is a popular word all over the world today. But unfortunately, the world doesn't understand the true meaning of Yoga. The word Yoga comes from the Sanskrit word 'Yuj', which means union, and therefore, actual Yoga is living in union with the Divine. Somehow, the word Yoga has been popularized in the world as the union of body, mind, and Soul more through a set of body exercises known as *Asanas* and breathing techniques known as *Pranayama*.

By themselves, these are not harmful, and they may promote the wellbeing of our body and help in silencing our mind. But they are not responsible for being in Yoga. These seem to have originated in India over thousands of years ago by the famous saint, Patanjali who introduced the 8 limbs of Yoga. *Asanas* - body postures and *prayanama* or breathing exercises are just two of the 8 limbs of Patanjali Yoga. Even the original Patanjali Yoga was intended to achieve the objective of uniting with God, with the ultimate steps of *dhyana*—contemplation, reflection and meditation, *dharana*—concentration, introspective focus, and *samadhi*—or becoming one with the Divine. These practices are meant to control the mind, to help meditate and experience the state of Divinity through *yamas* or ethical rules and *niyama* or the virtuous habits, behaviors, and observances. Without investigating the history of Yoga, humanity has started practising certain fashionable body postures because they

all want to improve the health of the body, as well as temporarily quieten the mind through breathing techniques. Without doubt, we can lose weight and gain body flexibility with *asanas*; we can also overcome stress to some extent with *pranayama*. But these by themselves will not lead to Yoga, a Divine Union which is the objective of a Yogi.

What then is true Yoga and what is it to live like a Yogi? True Yoga is a thirst for the Divine. It is knowing that we are not the body and the mind. Ultimately, it is realizing that we are the Divine Soul. Even before one realizes this truth, one can try to live a life of Yoga or live in constant union with the Divine. It starts with a dedicated prayer as a believer. Then we evolve on the spiritual ladder and because of our faith, hope, trust, and love, we develop a passion and obsession for God. This makes us a true seeker who tries to practice Yoga. Sometimes, it is the practice of Yoga that leads us to God-realization just as it is possible to experience constant Yoga after realization. In a state of true Yoga, we are like a good SIM card that is always connected to the network through the satellite. Yoga is a spiritual connection with the Divine. Once we develop a strong union with God, we are in a state of constant prayer.

An aspiring Yogi will practice 4 types of Yoga. *Karma Yoga*, or the Yoga of action; *Bhakti Yoga*, or the Yoga of devotion. *Gyana Yoga*, or the Yoga of education, knowledge, and

wisdom, and *Dhyana Yoga*, or the Yoga of silence and meditation, also referred to as *Raja Yoga*. Every moment that he lives, he tries to be in Divine union. He starts his day with silence, contemplating the Divine. He doesn't leap out of his bed and jump into the world, tapping away on his laptop and mobile phone. He remains in Divine silence, communicating with God and more importantly, listening in silent Yoga. This can't happen for very long. But the moment the Yogi receives instructions to act as a Divine instrument, he moves on to *Karma Yoga*, or the Yoga of action. In this Yoga, the Yogi realizes he is nothing. The Divine is everything. He is only an instrument of the Divine. He seeks no fruits for the actions that he performs. He expects no results. Whatever is the result, a true Yogi offers it back to the Divine. The Yogi spends the rest of his time either in *Bhakti Yoga*, in devotion, singing hymns or in prayers. Once free, a Yogi moves into a state of *Gyana Yoga* - reading spiritual texts, listening to Spiritual Masters or reading relevant scriptures that help in God-realization.

It must be understood that an aspiring Yogi who lives in constant Yoga can attain God-realization, just like one who attains God-realization becomes a true Yogi, constantly living in the cycle of the 4 methods of Yoga.

It is understanding Yoga, realizing God and living like a true Yogi that leads us to ultimate and true prayer. This may sound difficult but everybody in this world is not

going to be fortunate to realize God. If we are really seeking God and wish to love God and pray, then this is the way. It is realizing God's Divine presence and then living our life ever connected with the Divine.

What is the truth? The truth is that we human beings are the Divine Soul embodied in a body-mind complex. We don't realize this. We think we are the body and mind that has a Soul. We think we are human beings having a Spiritual experience. We don't realize that we are the Divine Spirit that is imprisoned in a body-mind complex. In fact, the ultimate goal of life is to realize this truth and be liberated.

How should we live and why are we existing on earth? Both these questions may inspire us to live like a true Yogi. We are given this human life so that we ultimately realize God and unite with the Divine. We are not supposed to just exist and then die, only to be reborn based on our Karma and suffer. We should learn to live in constant Yoga. We should not get entangled in the illusion of this world. After all, nothing is real. It is all a projection, just like a movie. We must observe the show on earth, living as a Divine Soul, being conscious and aware of the truth that we are nothing but the Divine. A true Yogi is ever conscious of this. The Yogi realizes that he has to be liberated and ultimately unite with God. He, therefore, transcends his ego and his mind. He lives like a boat that does not sink in the waters of the world. However, being embodied till he has breath, he

floats on the worldly waters to reach his ultimate destination. Life and death are in the hands of the Divine. We don't know how many times we have been born and we don't know what will happen after death. Human life is a gift. We are the only unique beings who are blessed with an intellect and who can realize the truth. When we live a life of Yoga, we become free from the sensual desires and attractions of the world. We become liberated from the distractions of the mind. Yoga helps us transcend the ego as we live with true and Divine prayer all the time.

We must beware! In this world, there are many people who behave like Yogis or saints, but internally, they are not genuine lovers of God. A Yogi is not recognized from his outer appearance, his attire, his long beard or his flowing hair. One can recognize a Yogi from his Divinity, his Spiritual awareness, his wisdom, his Divine Consciousness and his Godly connection. We must not be carried away by fake people who pretend to be Yogis of the world. We must aspire to be a true Yogi, who seeks nothing but the Divine, knowing that we come with nothing and we take nothing with us when we go.

It is living like a Yogi that will help us transcend prayers that are but a formality. When we become a Yogi, we know whom we are praying to, because we experience the Divine everywhere, all the time. We are constantly expressing our gratitude, our love and seeking nothing but the Divine. This is true prayer.

***True prayer is living like a Yogi,
In this material world, he doesn't sink.
He is ever-connected with the Divine,
And worldly thoughts, he doesn't think.***

TAKEAWAYS

LIVING LIKE A YOGI

- To discover the true meaning of prayer, we must live like a Yogi.
- A Yogi truly loves God and seeks God and nothing else.
- The true meaning of Yoga is 'Yuj' or union with the Divine.
- Yoga is not just *Asana* – physical exercise or *Pranayama* – breathing techniques.
- A Yogi is always connected to the Divine just like a good SIM card never loses connection with the network.
- The Yogi lives in the Yoga of action, devotion, education or meditation.
- If we want to discover true prayer, we must aspire to live like a true Yogi.

10

THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF PRAYER



What is the ultimate goal of prayer? Or does prayer have no purpose? Is it a ritual that has been passed down to us from our ancestors and just because our parents prayed and our grandparents went to the church, the temple or the mosque, we too continue to do so? Why do we pray? Stop and think about it for a moment. Doesn't prayer have a purpose? Isn't there a bigger meaning in our prayers? For a moment, one would instantly react and respond, 'Of course! I pray because I have problems.' 'I go to God to make my dreams come true.' 'I close my eyes and remember God in prayer because of my faith.'

There is no doubt that we don't pray unnecessarily. Prayer is both important and essential in our life. It is instrumental for our happiness and wellbeing. But what is the ultimate goal of prayer? Is God sitting on a throne in the kingdom of heaven, listening to each of our prayers and then answering them one by one? Is it remotely possible that the hundreds of prayers of billions of people are being individually answered by God? No! God lives within the temple of our heart and God has created Universal Laws that respond to each of our prayers. Every single appeal that we make to God is replied to, one by one. This is because each one of us has the presence of the Divine or rather, Divinity appears in billions of people uniquely, individually, and personally. But we don't realize this truth that the Divine is present within each one of us. We want to pray to our Heavenly Father. We want to reach out to the God who lives in the

mountains. We raise our hands to the God that is up in the skies. These prayers become ineffective and have little meaning.

However, when we realize the truth that we are nothing but a manifestation of the Divine, when we realize that we are embodied Souls and the Divine is within, then our prayers become profound. There is great meaning and purpose in our prayer. Our prayers are meant to recognize the God within. Our prayers are meant to make us realize that which we are not, and realize who we truly are. Our actions in serving humanity are an indication that there is Divine meaning in our prayer. Unless we discover the true meaning of prayer, we can never achieve its ultimate purpose.

But how many people actually pray with purpose? The vast majority blissfully enjoys religious prayers without realizing whom we pray to, the true meaning of what we say and why we pray. Isn't there an ultimate purpose? Are prayers not meant to achieve a specific goal?

Yes, the first purpose of prayer is to believe in God. Then, to live with faith, hope and trust. Our enthusiasm must make us love God. Once we truly love God, then our prayers evolve into true prayer. We seek God and want God passionately. We become obsessed. Our prayers vibrate with energy as we go in quest of God. Our prayers seek the

blessings and grace of the Divine to overcome ignorance. Our prayers seek a Spiritual Master or Guru. Our prayers appeal for strength to live with dispassion and detachment, to discriminate, to live with discipline. Now our prayer has real purpose and meaning. But is that all? It's still not the ultimate goal.

True prayer is yearning for the Divine. Yearning must appear in a triple formula. Our yearning must be like how a miser yearns for God; a lover yearns for his beloved and a young child who has just lost his mother, cries to find her. When our prayer has this triple yearning, we truly seek the Divine and we start on that quest, on that journey to so-called 'heaven'. Once we discover the meaning of true prayer, then we go towards achieving its ultimate purpose.

Through prayer, we live in Yoga or Divine union, always connected to God. It may be through our action or meditation or simply through our devotion. We keep educating ourselves about the truth as our Divine prayers achieve progress on the path to God. True prayer seeks purification. The prayer evolves into illumination, but the ultimate goal is unification with the Divine.

How can prayer create unification with God? True prayer does not continue without questioning. Not only do we ask questions about God, heaven, life and death, Karma and rebirth, we investigate every thought and contemplate

possibilities. True prayer moves from the traditional noisy prayer to a prayer of complete silence. Then we discover God within. We can't explain that in words. It is not just about knowing God and feeling the Divine, but it is realizing the truth that we are manifestations of God. True prayer makes us see God in one and all. True prayer makes us experience all beauty as Divinity. True prayer liberates us from the petty annoyances of life. We transcend the triple suffering of the body, of the mind and the ego. Still, that is not the ultimate goal of prayer. Having reached this far, our prayer has become powerful. We live with everlasting joy and peace. We live without being affected by the trials and tribulations of the world. We live in a state of bliss, as we become conscious of the truth.

However, the ultimate goal of prayer is unification. Our ultimate goal is not just enlightenment and liberation. It is escaping from the cycle of death and rebirth. It is being blessed to drop all Karma or past actions as prayer makes us realize that we are not the body and mind that we seem to be. We are the Divine Soul.

The ultimate goal of prayer starts at the kindergarten of religion and makes us graduate in the university of spirituality, where we realize we are not the body that we wear, we are the ones that wear the body. While we are actors on this humongous stage called the Earth, true prayer makes us observers knowing that we come and we

go. This is just a show and the ultimate purpose of prayer is to never return in another role through a rebirth. The ultimate goal is to be liberated and become one with the Divine.

Just like the wave becomes one with the ocean, we too must become one with God. It is true prayer that will stop us from continuing to splash as another wave, in another life, life after life. This is only possible if our prayers are genuine; if we realize the truth about the Divine Power and prayer; if we overcome our ignorance and live as a realized Soul.

There is a big challenge for those who realize the truth. They are a rare minority who have achieved this great feat, but it is still not over. The challenge is that there is a war within. The senses of the body and the wandering of the mind attack an embodied soul to fall to the temptations of this world. The constant onslaught of desires and cravings continue to pull a genuine believer who prays, but this does not affect a true yogi, one who lives and prays with a Divine connection. Our ultimate goal is to win this war within and to become one with God. This is not possible only by human efforts. It needs the Divine grace. It needs the guidance of a Guru. It needs us to be on the right path. But above all, it needs constant prayer. Prayer is instrumental in achieving our ultimate goal of liberation and unification with the Divine.

Therefore, let us learn to pray, not just bray. Let us know what we say in prayer and whom we pray to. It is time not to pray hard, but to pray smart so that we achieve the ultimate goal of prayer which is also the ultimate goal of our life.

***Prayer leads us to the Ultimate Goal,
To realize that we are the Divine Soul.
It starts with Purification and then Illumination,
But our destination is Divine Unification.***

TAKEAWAYS

THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF PRAYER

- True prayer has an ultimate goal. It is unification with the Divine.
- It starts with the realization of the truth, as we overcome ignorance.
- Realization will lead us to liberation from suffering.
- It is true prayer that will make us experience the Divine at all times as we live in joy and peace, in Yoga.
- However, the ultimate goal of prayer is beyond all this. It is the ultimate goal of our life too – unification with the Divine after liberation.

11

**DON'T PRAY HARD,
PRAY SMART**



Have you seen people pray? Some people pray so hard. They wake up long before dawn and they pray. They stop doing all their work several times a day to pray. They spend several hours every day praying to their God. They travel to distant shrines, go on pilgrimages and perform complex prayers and *poojas*. These are not only time consuming, but expensive and taxing. Then there is another section of people who perform penance in prayer. They roll on the floor, pull hair from their chin, and fast for days and weeks together without food and water. These are instances where people try hard to pray. But like they say, 'Work smart, not hard to succeed', we must 'Pray smart, not hard' to achieve our ultimate goal of prayer.

In his quest for the Truth it is said that, Siddhartha Gautama happened to meet some of the followers of Mahavira, a sect that followed the Jain Tirthankaras. To them, life was all about *tapasya*, letting the body suffer physical pain and living with deep austerities. Siddhartha Gautama became a *tapasvi*, living a life of sacrifice and deprivation. He even gave up eating fruits and drinking water to deprive the senses of the body. He gave up all desires to achieve liberation. It is said that he nearly died as he deprived his body of food and water. One day, a young maiden exclaimed, 'You have become like a stick where your front and your back have become one. What is the use of such a life?' She asked the prince who was in search of the truth, 'How would such deep *tapasya* and austerity help in

realization and liberation?' She gave him an analogy saying, 'If you make the string of the sitar very loose, you cannot extract music from it, just as tightening too much will snap it.' The Buddha realized that such extreme austerities would not help to achieve the goal of life. He realized that one cannot realize the Truth by making the body suffer. It is through the body that one achieves liberation. He then coined a new way known as the 'Middle Path' philosophy for people to live a balanced life. Prayers, he advocated, must be for the purpose of realization.

However hard we may pray, will that bring God to us or take us to heaven? This is our utter ignorance that makes us think so. We foolishly believe the Divine to be like one of us made of bone and skin. We do not realize God is a Power that lives within. We may pray for hours together, even pray for days in entreaty, but we will not realize God. To realize God, we must pray smart. We must use our intellect as we go on a sincere quest yearning to realize God.

Why does most of humanity continue to go around in circles without achieving the ultimate goal? Because we don't pray smart. We just get engrossed in ritualistic prayers and we don't take the trouble of finding out who God is, where God is, and what God is. But we just pray! On top of it, we fumble and mumble prayers that make no sense to us. We chant *mantras* and recite prayers that we don't understand. This is not smart prayer. It can't be

effective. We must stop to realize the truth. We must ask questions and investigate, only then we will realize God.

The biggest question is this – are we sincere in our prayers? Are our prayers genuine? There is no doubt that our devotion may be full of faith, hope, trust, and belief. But just devotion will not get us to our destination. Prayer is profound. It is communicating with the Divine. It is not only talking, chanting, and singing, but also going within in silence and listening to the Divine voice.

Haven't you heard of 'blind faith'? Millions around the globe live and die with blind faith. To them, all that matters is their scripture. They don't even stop to reflect whether their scripture is authentic or not. Over a period of time, the scriptures have diluted the original message of their messengers of God and may not even appear in the pages that they consider as God's laws or commandments. But they pray! These people who seem to be so devout and religious, follow the word of their religious priests as if they are superhumans, angels, special nominees of God who have spiritual powers beyond the ordinary. Why are we so naive in our beliefs? Genuine prayer is something else. It is the realization of the truth—realizing the truth about ourselves and then about Divinity. This is praying smart and it will open the door to heaven—which is nothing but the state of unification with the Divine.

Unless we discover the true meaning of prayer, our prayers will never work. We can't fake it in our prayers. The purpose of prayer is to communicate with the Divine, not to impress the ones who see us pray. We may spend loads of money in making offerings to God, even dress very special when we go to our temple or church, but does that matter to God? That is our own Mind and Ego, the ME, that is making us go around in circles as we pray hard, but not smart.

Is it so difficult to realize what God expects? The Divine wants that we yearn to be liberated and united with God. God manifests as all those who live around us. But instead of being kind to God's manifestations, we are cruel and indifferent to the Divinity that is all around us, and in sheer ignorance, we work hard to please our God in heaven.

In this world, there are millions of people who work very hard. Sometimes, they work 18 hours a day, 7 days a week to fill their stomach and feed their family. But they achieve little success. They don't use their intellect. They slog day and night but achieve very little. So will it be with those who pray diligently but without praying intelligently. It is those who pray smart, that realize God. Of course, just like the most successful people are those who not only work smart but also work hard, we should not only be very focused on our prayer but also be consistent. Prayer is not a casual 'once in a way' thing. It is living in constant union with God. But if we don't know the truth about the Divine

Power and we don't understand our prayer, how can we expect success with our blind faith?

If we are highly religious, and we think we will achieve God in heaven, this is a myth. It is just like somebody who studies for years together in a kindergarten. In fact, they spend their entire life in a kindergarten, learning ABC. Can we expect them to become a genius? They have been studying so hard, but that hardly matters. If these very people who studied, evolved from religion which is a kindergarten to the university of spirituality, they would realize God within the temple of their heart. Let this inspire us to break free from our set pattern and belief-system. Let this motivate us to climb the ladder to heaven to be one with the Divine. Let this inspire us to make our prayers not just prayers of belief, of faith and hope, not restricting our prayers to trust and enthusiasm that loves God. Let our prayers create a passion that leads us on a quest. Let us cry to the Almighty in our prayers – ‘O Lord, I seek thee and nothing else. Enlighten me with the truth, O Lord. Pour thy grace upon me so that I can overcome my ignorance and realize the truth.’ While praying, let us stop to listen to God. Let us make our prayers effective by remaining silent in meditation. Then we will receive God's Divine message, and we will be enlightened and liberated from the illusion of this world.

Smart prayer that will make us realize God is not about

following all the rituals and dogmas of our religion without understanding a word of it. It is not about going every week to the institutional abode of our God and talking about our God to all. It is not about converting people to believe in our religion. It is not about crossing all the 't's and dotting all the 'i's of the endless superstitions created over generations. Smart prayer is about realizing God. It is about being conscious of God's Divine presence all the time. Smart prayer is serving humanity as God. It is seeing God in everything beautiful infused with Divine Consciousness. It is treating one and all as God. It is living with kindness and love, with compassion and grace, giving and forgiving, knowing that everything is God. There is nothing else, only God. This seems easy, but it is very difficult to do because we are slaves of our mind and our monkey mind jumps here and there without letting us contemplate the reality. The ones who pray smart, a tiny fraction of humanity, are the fortunate ones who transcend ritualistic prayer. They pray incessantly, being ever-connected to the Divine.

As long as we allow ourselves to believe that we are the body, mind, and ego, we will continue praying hard. Smart prayer is going on a quest and realizing the truth. Then, there is a formula, a path to follow, a discipline that is needed to realize God. Only the sincere seekers of the Divine will be able to take this road less travelled. The majority of mankind is busy seeking the ordinary pleasures of the world. They offer God money, gold, and diamonds.

They donate to their religious institution. Do you think God wants our money? Do you believe God needs our wealth? When will we overcome our gross ignorance and learn to pray sincerely? When will we go beyond the human form and pray from the Soul within? When will we transcend the ego, mind, and body and truly start praying to God? This is our biggest challenge in life.

We human beings have 9 doors as we know, doors that are looking outward: the eyes, the ears, the mouth are some of these doors. Real prayer is opening the tenth door, a door that looks within. This is the toughest challenge in prayer, not to search for God outside, for God is within. Once we realize this, then we will experience God everywhere. Then, we will be praying all the time. Our life will be a seamless journey of prayer as we live moment by moment, in Divine union. One who is blessed to be thus, observes his mind as it wanders away from this Divine journey. He prayerfully and gently brings back the mind to restore the Divine connection. This is the most profound way to live prayerfully.

We may live our entire life going to and ringing the temple or church bell for God. We may break coconuts and light candles. We may chant and sing the name of God a thousand or a million times. But this will not make our prayer effective unless we pray from the Soul. Unless we realize we are the Divine Soul, our prayers will be very superficial.

Can a dead man pray? Won't you laugh at this question? But think about it. What does it mean? It is the Soul that prays. It is the Soul that we truly are, and it is the Soul that is nothing but the Divine. As we live, if we realize this, then we have discovered the right way to pray. Then we will stop trying to please God through our prayer. We will not think that offering God something that we collected in this world is prayer. Instead, we will build a beautiful relationship with God - if we realize the truth and pray. Finally, a test of this, whether we pray hard or pray smart, is a simple litmus test. If our prayers are inspired by fear, we have not understood God, nor learnt the true way to pray. If our prayers are inspired by faith, where we accept the Divine will and surrender to God, then, we are actually and effectively praying. We can perform this self-test to realize what inspires our prayers.

Currently, as we are aware, the world has changed because of Coronavirus. Along with everything else, all the religious institutions are also locked down to contain the spread of the virus. So, should we stop praying? No. Because Divinity resides everywhere not just in temples, mosques, churches, synagogues, and other holy places. The places of worship, specifically dedicated to perform prayers are indeed blissful, but sincere believers evolve beyond religion and ritualistic practices to realize Divinity in the temple of their heart. Out of ignorance, we confine the Divine Power to some statue or saint but we should realize

that God is everywhere, in all living beings, in everything. It is up to us to live with fear or to live with faith.

Let us make a change today. Let us stop praying as another one of our daily chores and rituals. Prayer is Divine. Let us not make it a formality and further still, not invest our time and life in praying so hard. Let us transform the way we pray. Let us change our paradigm about prayer. Let us seek God, the truth about God, and start our quest. This is truly loving God and living with God.

Most of the people in this world exist till they die. Of course, they think they pray! But it is like that little child who was taught to walk an hour every day to the hill where everyone said that God lived. He would spend an hour looking up at the mountain, talking to his God who lived up there, asking for things and walking back. The little child grew up doing this and did it all his life. Finally, he died. But he did not realize the truth about God. He lived with his mind believing the myth. He did not use his intellect to realize the truth. He did not ask questions like — Where was his God on top of the mountain? Who was the God that lived up there? He just believed this folklore that also prohibited him from climbing the mountain. If he had truly loved his God, he would have climbed up in search of the Divine. He would have then realized that no God was living up there and whatever he had believed about God was just a story. God is not confined to mythological tales. God is

everywhere, in everything.

Most of us live and die; we merely exist till our time is over. We don't discover the truth about God and thus our prayers are shallow. However hard we pray and whatever we say, it will not take us to our ultimate destination, God. Of course, it is better to pray this way, than not to pray at all. But let us go beyond the basics. Let us pray smart and achieve our ultimate goal of life. Let our meaningful prayers liberate us from this world and unify us with the Divine.

What would it gain us if we prayed so hard?

Is this the right way to realize God?

Unless we seek God, and the truth we ignite,

We will remain on earth and with God never unite.

TAKEAWAYS

DON'T PRAY HARD, PRAY SMART

- Prayer is all about praying smart, not just praying hard.
- Of course, we must have faith and trust, but we must realize the truth about God.
- We may offer God everything that we have, but that is not what God needs.
- We must love God, seek God, and yearn for God.
- Our yearning must take us on a quest to realize God. This is the way to pray, to feel God's Divine presence at all times.
- True prayer is going within, it is listening to God's voice.
- Let us change the way we pray. Let us pray sincerely, realizing the truth about God.

AFTERWORD



AFTERWORD

I too prayed in ignorance for 40 years. As I reflect, it was a long period of my life that was spent praying to a God I believed in. I didn't know what I was saying in the rituals that I followed, although I was clear in my intentions and my devotion was sincere. Let me share my story.

I started praying even before I was 8. Although I did not understand what prayer meant, I used to go to the temple as a child holding my grandfather's hand. I grew up in an atmosphere of faith, devotion, and prayer. I started fasting when I was 8 years old, as a mark of my love for God, although, in hindsight, this must have been inspired by my faith in my grandfather who taught me to pray.

My grandfather was a staunch believer in Lord Shiva, and he would visit the temple near my home frequently. On Mondays, we would both start and end the day at the temple. My father too followed my grandfather's footsteps and as a family, the prayer ritual had significant importance.

As I look back on my prayer life, I realize that I have been praying to Lord Shiva for 40 years. I always thought that He was the real God and as the scriptures said, I believed that He lived in Mount Kailash. The religion I followed, and the associated mythology with it kept me ignorant for over 4 decades. As per mythology, before praying to Lord Shiva, we must pray to Lord Ganesha, the son of Lord Shiva who

has an elephant head! How did this happen? The story reveals that when Goddess Parvati, the consort of Lord Shiva was once having a bath, she created Ganesha, her son, out of mud. She told Ganesha to guard the door as she was taking her bath. As the tale goes, Shiva wanted to enter and Ganesha refused. Becoming furious, Shiva cut off his head. Hearing the commotion, Parvati hurriedly came out only to be distressed and agonized at the horrifying scene. To cut the story short, on the insistence of Parvati to return life to her son, Shiva put an elephant head on her son, Ganesha and bestowed him with life again. The Gods pronounced that no prayer would be performed without first praying to Ganesha. While this is mythology, and like millions of Hindus, I too followed it, I never realized that I was living in ignorance. Do millions of Christians realize that Santa Claus is a myth? Although we know it, we tend to believe in such myths out of respect for our religion and scripture.

My faith grew stronger by the day and I must admit that it gave me power. My belief in God, and my prayers truly worked. My strong devotion in God made all my dreams come true and I achieved success after success, as I continued to live in gratitude, with faith and enthusiasm.

Just like every religion has a special day - Christians consider it to be Sunday, and for Muslims, it is Friday - Lord Shiva's day was Monday. Not only would I fast for 24 hours with one meal that was allowed during that period, I would

also pray, perform *poojas*, *abhishek*, *aarti*, and sing *bhajans*. *Bhajans* are spiritual songs or hymns that we sing in praise of God. *Abhishek* is a ritual where we pour water, milk, honey, sugar, and curd on the Shiva lingam, a uniquely shaped cylindrical pillar rounded on the top placed on a large base made of stone. For years together, I too believed that I was giving a bath to God, until one day, I realized the truth. *Abhishek* symbolically means that we cleanse ourselves when we pour water, milk, honey, curd, and sugar on the lingam, the symbol of Lord Shiva. But people understand this ritual very differently. They think it is us giving God a shower. Ridiculous! But that is what myth does. While the purpose may be positive, a ritual is misunderstood and this makes religion impractical. If the ones who teach religion and who explain it to us were careful, then we would understand the true meaning of prayer and God. Millions of people repeat religious slogans known as *mantra* and say 'Om Namah Shivaya,' 'Om Ganapatyae Namah,' and 'Om Namo Bhagvate Vasudevaya' but they don't know the meaning of these chants. They chant these spiritual and religious *mantras* for decades and die repeating the *mantra* without understanding its meaning. In 'Om Namah Shivaya,' 'Om' is a symbol of the Divine, 'Namah,' is *Namaskara* or bowing down, and then the name of God. It means 'O Divine! I bow down to You as a manifestation of Shiva, *Om Namah Shivaya*.' 'O Divine! I bow down to You as a manifestation of Ganesha, *Om Ganapatyae Namah*.' 'O Divine! I bow down to You as a

manifestation of Vasudev or Krishna, *Om Namho Bhagvate Vasudevaya*.' When will we stop praying without understanding what we are saying?

Before realizing the truth, my blind faith made me continue my prayers without understanding what I was doing. Of course, I was not the only one who was involved in rituals like the *aarti*! We held a plate which had a lit *diya* or lamp on it and as we sang, we also clapped, rang the bell, and offered this prayer to our God.

The problem was that nobody stopped to ask the question, 'Why are we doing all this?' Billions of people around the globe pray without understanding what the meaning of their actions is. I was just one of them. The only difference was that I believed in God. There was not an iota of doubt that God created this world and everything in it and my prayers were a mark of my gratitude, just as they were used to ask for favours amongst many other things.

I was consistent in my prayers. I don't remember a phase of my life from my teenage years till today where I stopped praying to God. As a child, my prayers were innocent. I would go to God and ask that I pass in my exams. I would fervently pray to come first in class. Thereafter, as I became older and started facing challenges and problems, I used to go to God so that He would solve my problems and it worked! I grew up with the belief that praying to Lord

AFTERWORD

Shiva was magical, that He heard my prayers and He solved my problems. Doesn't the whole world fold their hands and seek all this from God? That is what the majority of us think prayer is.

There were many positive affirmations that formed the strong foundation of my prayers. When I prayed, I used to say, 'When God is for us, who can be against us?' This gave me faith just as it eliminated fear. I believed that God's delays are not God's denials. This thought in my prayer created hope. To me HOPE was Having Only Positive Expectations and FAITH – Full Assurance In The Heart. As I grew up, I built a strong relationship with Lord Shiva. I used to tell him in my prayer, 'Oh Lord, help me to remember that nothing can happen tomorrow, that you and I can't handle together.' These affirmations only built power in my prayer.

After 20 years of faith and devotion in my God, one day I had a flash of inspiration - an inspiration that came from God. Lord Shiva was directing me to build a huge temple. The vision, as I clearly remember, depicted a huge statue of Lord Shiva with the Ganga river flowing from His head, with the backdrop of Mount Kailash, the abode of the Lord. It would be a place of peace and tranquillity, a temple of faith where dreams would come true. To anybody else, this would just be a dream. But I believed it was a vision from God. While at that time, I only had the vision, no money, no

land, no architect, nothing that could help me make it happen, I realized that it was God's will, because no sooner than I had got the vision, that He gave me all the resources I needed to make it into a reality. On the 27th of February, 1995, on the auspicious day of Maha Shivratri, the festival of Lord Shiva, the temple was inaugurated by none other than His Holiness Shankaracharya of the Sringeri Shankar Mutt in Sringeri. As he consecrated the Shiv Ling by performing *Prana Pratistha*, the energy of Lord Shiva seemed to flow out of the Ling midst the chanting of *mantras* by dozens of priests. As if by magic, lakhs of people appeared to take blessings from the Divine.

This was the turning point in my life with God. It strengthened my connection with Lord Shiva exponentially. Without even realizing it, God became 'the' priority of my life. My prayers increased as I would spend hours in the temple every day. As my life transformed, I achieved success after success. However, I feel I was blessed because the Lord led me into doing both humanitarian and spiritual work. As I prayed to God, I used the temple as an institution to spread the power of faith. I did everything possible to make people believers as I myself grew in my connection with God. Inadvertently, I was led to doing humanitarian work. Before the temple was built, as if it was God's wish, I had already started serving the poor and the destitute on the streets. But after the Shiva temple was built, a lot of money started coming in through

devotees as an offering to the Lord. Since all the money belongs to God, I decided to spend it on God's work. Over the years, I set up many charitable homes, one after the other, that reached out to those who were suffering. We had ambulances and executives would go around the streets, identifying people who had no home, no food, or were suffering from some disease. We would bring them to our home – clean them, feed them, and take care of them like our family members. Undoubtedly, this was the work of God which I did not realize. Initially, I just thought it was good Karma. These good actions would reap me a good destiny.

At about this time, with the grace of God, I was blessed to meet my Guru, Dada J. P. Vaswani. He was my Spiritual Master, my mentor for about 25 years till he left this earthly plane. His guidance made a tremendous impact on my life as I evolved from being religious to being spiritual. Without Dada, as we fondly called him, I doubt very much that I would have reached where I am, let alone writing a book on prayer! He shaped my thoughts, guided my footsteps, and showed me the way to God. Whenever I had questions that had no answers, I would go to him. Ultimately, one day, it was my Guru who provoked me to go on a *talaash*, a quest – a search for the true meaning of life. It was in 2012 that I started the quest. I set out with several questions for which I had no answers.

1. Who is God? Where is God? What is God?
2. Where are heaven and hell?
3. What is the real secret of our birth? Where do we actually come from?
4. What is death? What happens after death?
5. What is the Soul?
6. Does the Law of Karma exist, the law that states, 'As you sow, so shall you reap'?
7. What is reincarnation and is it real?
8. What is the meaning of enlightenment, also known as *moksha* or *nirvana*?
9. What is the Ultimate Goal of life?

With these 9 questions, I retreated into the mountains. After 2 years of contemplation, I experienced my spiritual 'Aha!' moment as I realized the truth. God gave me answers to all these questions on the 31st of August 2014. It so happened that I was trying to put the pieces of my spiritual jigsaw puzzle together and 'Eureka!' It was solved! It was then that I realized the truth about God and what true prayer was all about. It was my love for God that led me on this quest, just as it was God's Divine grace that led me to my Guru, one who took me from 'Gu' – darkness to 'Ru' – light.

How did I realize the truth? I took hundreds of books with me. I started with the scriptures of religions and scanned each of their theologies. Then I went through documents and commentaries of the sages and the saints that the world

has witnessed over the centuries. First, I read, then I analyzed until I finally realized the truth. For 40 years, I blindly believed in Lord Shiva. But when I questioned where He was, then I found my answers. My search led me to first discover who I am. It was only when I realized the truth about myself that I finally realized the truth about the Divine. First, I realized that I am not the body, nor the mind but the Divine Soul. For 4 decades, I lived as an ignoramus, not knowing who I was praying to and what I was saying. When I realized that God is not a statue or a saint, God is a Power that no human can paint, I changed my paradigm. God could not be defined. God is beyond human comprehension.

After realizing the truth, I changed the way I prayed. I no more prayed to Lord Shiva, rather I prayed through Him. I realized that everything is a manifestation of God, that we are all God particles that appear as human beings. He is the cause; we are just the effects. This further made me change the way I pray. I started seeing God everywhere and in everyone. I even changed my name to AiR, *Atman* in Ravi. My birth name was Ravi, but my realization that I am the Soul inspired me to make the change. What's in a name? It is just an identification of our outer appearance. We are all actually Divine Souls. The moment we realize this, we will be liberated from the triple suffering of the body, the mind and the ego. But it is sad that most of us live and die in ignorance.

One day my Guru explained, 'So what do we do after we realize the truth? Do we stop praying to the God we prayed to for so many years?. Of course not! We human beings must realize that we cannot have freedom from action. We must have freedom in action. Therefore, even after we realize the truth that God is within, we don't have to stop praying to our God. Only we must realize that God is not in that statue that we pray to. God is omnipresent, God is everywhere. What will we do if we stop praying to our God? We cannot live without any actions, and it is far better to continue our devotion in whatever way we are used to with the realization, rather than to do nothing, which as human beings, we cannot avoid anyway. We must choose our actions to be *sattvic*, or pure not *tamasic* or lazy or even *rajasic* or passionate. This is the right way to live.

The entire story of my life revolves around my faith in God and my prayers which are already covered in this book. Everything I have shared is my personal experience, not some theoretical knowledge. Having realized that I lived in ignorance for 40 years, I was inspired to share my story and to help others pray with meaning. We all love God, but what should we do as we love our God? Just pray! How will that help us achieve God? How will it make us realize the truth about God? Out of the 6 billion people who pray, not even 1% go on a quest to realize the truth about God and prayer. When I realized this, I made it the mission of my life. I too would have just lived and died. At best, I would do

good Karma, acts of service, prayer, kindness, and compassion. But I would not overcome my ignorance. With Divine grace, I realized God is not a person that is made of bone and skin. God is a Power that lives within. I realized that we are all Divine Souls. We all appear to be different human beings, but in reality, we are one. We are like those thousands of waves in the ocean that come from the ocean and go back into the ocean. Sadly, most of us don't realize this truth.

On realization of the truth, I transformed my life and the way I pray. I live in Yoga or Divine union all the time. What does this mean? It means that I am actually praying all the time. Whether it be through my prayers and my devotion or through my action or silent meditation, or even gaining knowledge through education, I do all this as the Divine Soul. I am nothing, God is everything. I realize this and thus I realize how insignificant I am. This 'I' is an illusion and the moment I realized this, I started experiencing a state of unending happiness and peace day after day - something I had never experienced before. Now I live in a state of uninterrupted bliss and tranquility, conscious of the truth that everything is Divine.

I don't see beauty as beauty. Everything beautiful is Divine. Therefore, whenever I look at something beautiful or dynamic, infused with consciousness, I pray in admiration and adoration of God. In the past, I thought that all these

were God's beautiful creations and I experienced God's Divine presence, but now I realize, all the natural wonders are not created by the Divine. They are the Divine! They are manifestations of Divinity. It is because of the Divine Consciousness that beauty exists. But I could not realize all this as long as I lived in ignorance. The moment I realized that I am not the body or mind, I am the Divine Soul, this self-realization made me realize Divinity in all.

How does one who realizes the truth about God, pray? When I realized the truth, I transformed the way I prayed. Now, I pray all the time, but I don't follow any ritual blindly. There are no superstitions and dogmas. After overcoming ignorance, I dropped everything, even my own Karma that belonged to the body and mind. My prayer now gives me Divine peace and everlasting joy and bliss. This is because I feel the presence of the Divine at all times. I feel God within me, just I feel God in every human being, in every animal, in every plant, and in everything that seems to be a creation of God. When we pray like this, it not only gives us tranquillity that is unknown to the world and happiness beyond measure, it also liberates us from all suffering. It eliminates fear, worry, stress, anxiety as we accept everything that happens as God's *Leela*, the Cosmic Drama. Realization makes us overcome the illusion of *Maya*, a projection of this entire universe which is not real. All we see is God. We experience nothing else but Divinity once we realize the truth. This is the ultimate goal of our life

AFTERWORD

- to realize the truth about God, to communicate with the Divine, be in His constant presence, in Yoga or union. This is the true meaning of prayer.

***I prayed in ignorance for over 40 years,
In sorrow and in joy, I shed tears...
Till I went on a quest for the truth to realize,
And the grace of the Divine opened my 'real eyes'.***

TAKEAWAYS

AFTERWORD

- I too lived in ignorance for over 40 years not knowing the truth about the Divine Power and prayer.
- I was very religious and trusted God completely.
- However, I followed rituals, superstitions, and the scriptures without questioning it.
- My Spiritual Master, my Guru, Dada J. P. Vaswani provoked me to go on a quest.
- Finally, I realized the truth about God and prayer, and I transformed the way I live and pray.
- My realization has given me eternal joy and everlasting peace and liberated me from suffering.
- Today, I live in Yoga, in Divine union as I pray to God all the time. Not only do I feel the Divine presence within, but also everywhere and in everything.

POEM

By
AiR
Atman in Ravi



*O God! Will you answer my prayers?
O Lord! Will you take away my tears?
O Divine! I am so worried about my fears
We pray, but don't know the meaning of our prayers*

*Of course, most of the world does pray
Not many of us know the meaning of what we say
We just fold our hands and close our eyes
And call out to the one who we think is above the skies*

*If we pray, but don't understand what we say
Then we don't pray, at best we bray!
It's time to stop and find out the truth
What is prayer? Get to the bottom of the root*

*Who is God and where is He?
Aren't our prayers for God meant to be?
If we don't know God, but still we pray
Then who is listening to what we say?*

*We pray because we have some desire
Or because of problems that consume us like fire
Isn't there a reason we go to God?
Or just for fun do we pray to our Lord?*

POEM

*Some people pray because they truly love God
There are others who pray out of fear of the Lord
A very few pray to express their thanks
They evolve in life's journey and cross to God's banks*

*Prayer has a purpose, to God we do talk
Some stop to listen, they don't just walk
Prayer that works is a two-way communication
A tool that leads to ultimate liberation*

*There are rituals and superstitions in every religion
They make us get confused and cloud our vision
We are so controlled by what our scriptures say
That we just blindly follow, day after day*

*Is prayer all about mumbling something to God?
Is it about praying, not knowing who is our Lord?
Unless we first know who God truly is
We may say many prayers, but the main point we miss*

*Therefore, in quest of God, we must go
We must ask questions until we ultimately know
God is not someone made of bone and skin
He is a Power that lives within*

*How do we know that God is a Power?
When will we stop praying at some religious tower?
If we must realize the truth about God
First know, who is the one that's praying to the Lord*

*Self-realization marks the beginning of our quest
It asks questions putting every belief to test
Then we realize that we are not ego, body, and mind
We are the Divine Soul, this truth we find*

*What is the Soul? Is it different in you and me?
The Soul is a Power, different it cannot be
It is one Power that gives life to everything on earth
It goes when we die and it comes at birth*

*What is the Soul and where does it go?
Fill two balloons with air for this truth to know
When you deflate the balloons, where goes the air?
It merges with the air that is everywhere*

*So is the Soul, it's not just in us
It's in everything that moves on this earth, and thus,
Man, beast, plant, bird or fish, whatever it be
The Soul creates the life, the Soul is the key*

*Then we realize that everything is God,
We are all nothing, without the power of the Lord.
God is the cause, only effects are we
We would be nothing in the absence of He*

*When we know this truth, it changes our life
We live in bliss, without misery and strife
When God is within, then there is no fear
The Divinity in us wipes out every tear*

*Realization changes the way that we pray
For now, we know who is the one to whom we say
The Divine is not someone sitting up in the sky
He lives within each one of us, right till we die*

*When we know that God lives in every human being
He lives in every animal and every living thing
Then we realize serving humanity is prayer
Our love and compassion, God will surely hear*

*Prayer becomes simple seeing everything beautiful as God
True prayer is not seeing the beauty, but the Divinity of our Lord
Then we not only pray when a temple bell we ring
But rather, at every song that the little birds sing*

*True prayer is all about being connected with God
Being disconnected with the world, being one with the Lord
Transcending cravings of the senses and desires of the mind
True bliss and peace being with God we find*

*Some people pray hard, but they don't pray smart
For many years they pray, but they never learn the art
True prayer is first knowing to whom we pray
And then understanding exactly what we do say*

*If we rumble and mumble a few words in prayer,
Is this communicating with God? Will this prayer He hear?
When we discover the true meaning of folding our hands
Then we are liberated, and go to God's land*

*What is our life's ultimate goal?
It's to realize we are the Divine Soul
Overcoming ignorance, that leads to God-realization
Liberation and ultimately, Divine unification*

*There is a purpose for us human beings on earth
There is a reason why we pray after we take birth
Prayers create faith, trust, and love for God
And ultimately make us unite, make us one with our Lord*

FAQ

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON PRAYER



1. Is it necessary to pray?

Ans: Of course, it is! It expresses gratitude to the one who gives us life. It connects us to a Power and helps us overcome suffering, just as it unites us with the Divine as we experience peace, joy, and bliss.

2. Does God answer our prayers?

Ans: In the final analysis, yes. It all depends upon the sincerity of our prayers and our love for the Divine. However, on a day to day basis, we are governed by the Law of Karma that is constituted by God and we are rewarded based on our actions.

3. Which prayer is better – silent or vocal?

Ans: It doesn't matter as long as we are able to connect with God. Whatever works best, we should do that. However, as we evolve in our prayer, a silent prayer is the most effective.

4. Is it better to pray alone or in a group?

Ans: In the beginning, we must pray in a group. But once we develop a relationship with God, it is better to pray alone. This makes our prayer intimate and personal.

5. What to do when the mind wanders during prayer?

Ans: It is common for the mind to wander during prayer. We must not get upset or disturbed but gently bring the mind back to focus on the prayer. Slowly, but

steadily, we will overcome this.

6. What is the best time to pray?

Ans: While it is ok to pray at any time of the day, the most effective time is when there is no disturbance. Thus, it is often believed that prayers before dawn or sunrise are the most effective.

7. Are prayers performed in temples, churches, or mosques more effective?

Ans: In our journey of life, we must begin by going to our religious institution where we pray in groups. This helps us build our faith, just as we experience the vibrations of so many people praying together. Once we spiritually evolve, where we pray doesn't matter.

8. Is it wrong to ask the Divine for something in prayer?

Ans: Every child asks God to fulfil his or her wishes. Then, as we grow, we go to God for the resolution of our problems. This is natural. The ultimate goal of prayer, however, is to lovingly communicate with God, not asking for anything but accepting everything that God gives to us.

9. When we pray, what should we do? Close our eyes, bow down?

Ans: As long as we are sincere in our prayer and clear in

our communication, what we do when we pray hardly matters. Our consistent connection with God will lead us forward in our journey to God.

10. How do we know the Divine Power is listening to our prayers?

Ans: Generally, humanity doubts how God could listen to the hundreds of prayers of billions of people. Those who realize that God lives within each one of us, also realize that it is simple for the Divine. Every prayer that we utter is known to the Almighty.

11. Why doesn't Divinity, sometimes, give heed to our prayers?

Ans: While we may feel that God is not listening to our prayers, actually He is! The Divine Power answers our prayers in 4 ways –

When the idea is not right, God says, 'No!'
When the time is not right, God says, 'Slow!'
When we are not ready, God says, 'Grow!'
But, when everything is ready, God says, 'Go!'

Then miracles happen and the impossible becomes possible. However, we are impatient, and we want God to respond like an instant camera or a fast food joint. We want instant results for our prayers, and we want what we desire, without trusting God.

12. How can God listen to billions of prayers?

Ans: Since God is within each one of us, He can listen to each of our prayers. Unfortunately, we do not realize this truth, although every religion advocates it.

The Bible says, 'The kingdom of God is within you.' (Luke 17:20,21)

The Upanishads say, 'Not this, Not this. Thou art That!'

The Quran says, 'He is with you wherever you are.' (Surah 57:4)

13. Is it necessary to have a priest to pray?

Ans: As children, don't we need a teacher to guide us? So also, in our relationship with God, we initially need a religious master. Once we build a connection, then, more than a religious mentor, we need a Spiritual Master to help us go forward towards God.

14. Will our sins be forgiven if we pray?

Ans: Prayer builds our relationship with God. It gives us the strength to face the trials and tribulations of life. It also teaches us to live righteously with ethics and values. All this helps us battle our sins. However, the ultimate goal of prayer is unification with the Divine, which is the way to be liberated from all sin.

15. How often should we pray?

Ans: Some religions recommend that prayer must be done 5 times a day. Others prescribe it to be done before each meal and when we wake up and before we go

to sleep. But prayer need not be restricted or counted. The best form of prayer is to be constantly connected with God, just like a SIM card is constantly connected to its network. Therefore, the best form of prayer is to feel God's Divine presence at all times. This is known as Yoga.

16. Does prayer have a purpose?

Ans: Unfortunately, people don't understand the purpose of prayer. This is because their prayers have no meaning and they don't understand what they say when they pray. In reality, the purpose of prayer is to connect with God, to communicate with the Almighty and to ultimately unite with the Divine.

17. What is the best way to pray?

Ans: The most effective form of prayer is transcending the senses of the body, the wandering of the mind, and the constant erupting of the ego. A prayer that transcends the three and communicates with the Divine, is undoubtedly the best form of prayer.

18. Is it necessary to pray before we eat?

Ans: Not many people pray in gratitude before a meal. However, think about it – shouldn't we be grateful for the food we eat? Should we not be thankful for a healthy body and digestive system? Should we not have gratitude for the energy and life that the food

gives us? Then why should we ask if it is necessary to pray before we eat? Praying before we eat is also a magical way of systematically remembering God. When we make it a habit to pray before breakfast, before lunch and dinner, then not only are we showing gratitude but we are also creating a process wherein we are praying to God. Sometimes, we human beings get so distracted in this world that we forget to pray. Therefore, whether praying to God before we eat or praying before we get off from our bed in the morning or praying before we sleep in the night, these are great ways to make it a habit to pray frequently.

19. If God doesn't answer prayers, then why should we pray?

Ans: Prayer is not a scheme or method to fulfil our desires or wishes. When we pray, we connect and communicate with the Creator. We may seek in entreaty what we wish, but we must trust in Divine providence. He knows best what is good for us. God has created the Law of Karma that answers our actions with appropriate reactions. However, praying gives us the grace and the right thoughts so that our actions are good and therefore, our future destiny is better. Praying to God makes us better human beings, which eventually makes us achieve what we dream of.

20. Which God should we pray to?

Ans: We may pray to any God to begin with. Religion is only a kindergarten to spirituality. Ultimately, we must realize that God is one. God is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient. God is the very life that is within us. Therefore, it doesn't matter which God we pray to as long as we pray sincerely. We will build a strong connection with God which will ultimately takes us in quest of God.

21. If God is within, then why should we pray to a God that is outside?

Ans: Those who pray to a God outside do so because they do not realize that God is within. Therefore, we may need to have a name and form of the Divine because as children, it is difficult to comprehend a God that is formless. Slowly and steadily, as we evolve on our spiritual journey, we realize God's Divine presence within us. Thereafter, there is no need to pray to a God, with name and form, that is outside. Some, however, even after realization, continue to follow the old methods of praying they were initially taught. But since they have evolved on their spiritual journey after the realization of the Truth, they no longer 'pray to' but rather 'pray through' their God that they believed in. They pray to the omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent Divine Power 'through' their God with a name and form.

22. Why is it that some people don't pray to God?

Ans: As we grow up, our family, our society, our friends inculcate in us values and belief-systems that either make us believers or atheists. If we are born in a family of atheists, then chances are we grow up to be atheists. These days there are many agnostics. They are not sure of the existence of God. However, the majority of humanity prays to God.

23. Why do people who pray still suffer?

Ans: We suffer because of our own actions. These may be actions of the present or of the past. If not of a distant past, it may be even due to the actions of some previous birth. God has constituted several Universal Laws. One such law is the Law of Karma. The Law states, 'As you sow, so shall you reap.' Therefore, we are only settling our own past actions. In fact, prayer can help us overcome this suffering and improve our future too, as it is the best seed that we can plant.

24. Why is religion important for prayer?

Ans: Religion teaches us about God when we are growing up. It builds our relationship with God. It teaches us to pray. Unfortunately, it is only a kindergarten. It teaches us the ABC of God and prayer. To graduate, we need the university of spirituality.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

AiR – *Atman* in Ravi, is an embodied Soul whose only mission in life is to help people realize the Truth. He was born in Bangalore on October 15, 1966. At a very young age, Ravi V. Melwani mastered the craft of business and became a very successful businessman who revolutionized retailing in India with the stores KidsKemp, Big KidsKemp, and Kemp Fort.

After making millions, he realized that life is not just about making money. He shut down his business at the age of 40, transformed his life from Ravi V. Melwani to RVM, living by the RVM philosophy – Rejoice, Value Life, and Make a Difference. He started doing H.I.S. work – Humanitarian, Inspirational and Spiritual work. His mission was to 'Make a Difference' in this world before his journey was over.

As a part of the humanitarian initiative, a charitable hospital and charitable homes were set up with an aim to provide free medical treatment and care to the poor, destitute, and needy. Today, over 600 homeless and suffering people are served and cared for in destitute homes and provided with free shelter, food, clothing, and medical care.

A School of Inspiration was set up that inspired the lives of many people through motivating talks, inspirational books

and videos, and thought-provoking quotes.

A Shiva Temple was built in the year 1995 in Bangalore, which is now known as the Shivoham Shiva Temple. AiR now believes that religion is just a kindergarten of Spirituality, and we all have to go beyond religion to truly realize God.

One day, his Guru provoked him to introspect: What is the purpose of life? Is life just meant to seek pleasures and to live and die without any purpose? What happens after death? Will we be reborn? Where is God? Several questions like these took him on a quest, a search for the Truth. He gave up his life of Achievement and Fulfilment in search of the final peak of life: Enlightenment.

After a few years of intense search in retreat, deep in the mountains, he realized that we are not this Body. We are the Soul, the *Atman*. He changed his name to AiR –*Atman* in Ravi. He metamorphosed to AiR and gave up his entire life as RVM and started living as an instrument of God doing His Divine Will. This led to several Realizations that formed his new mission of life – to help people Realize the Truth.

Since then, AiR's life has been dedicated to reaching out

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

and helping people to eradicate the ignorance that we live in. While the Truth is the Truth, our mind still resists from accepting it. Based on his realizations, AiR has published several books, written bhajans, blogs, quotes and poems and has taken up several other initiatives that can direct people towards the Truth like conducting AiR Spiritual Retreats and giving talks that help people evolve in their spiritual journey to realize the Truth. He is a TEDx speaker and is also invited to speak at several organizations like YPO (Young Presidents' Organization), Rotary Club, Lions Club, and at many corporates, schools, and colleges.

***Started with nothing
Became something...
Achieved everything
Only to realize we are nothing!***

BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR

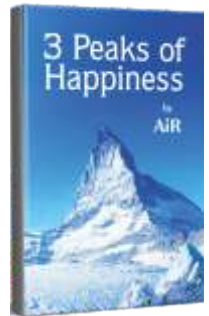
1. Talaash

Talaash means ‘search’ or a ‘quest’. This book by AiR recounts his own spiritual quest for the Ultimate Truth that led him to the realization that we are neither the body nor the mind, but the Divine Soul.



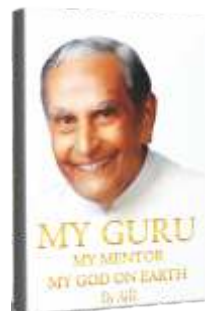
2. 3 Peaks of Happiness

This book talks about the universal quest of humanity—Happiness. It explains the ways through which people can reach the third peak of happiness—Enlightenment which lies beyond the two peaks of happiness—Achievement and Fulfilment. The third peak liberates us from the prisons of misery and sorrow and gives us eternal Joy and Bliss.



3. My Guru, My Mentor, My God on Earth

This book is AiR's tribute to his Guru, Dada J.P. Vaswani. AiR shares his experiences with Dada and how Dada's philosophy and teachings were instrumental in guiding him to



begin his spiritual quest and bringing about the transformation in him.

4. I will Never Die, Death is Not “The End”

In the journey of his life, AiR realized many truths. One of the truths is a revelation—we never die; Death is not the end but a bend to transcend. The body will die, but the one who lives in the body never dies.



5. Death is Not “The End.” Death is “Liberation”

The second book by AiR in the series of books on ‘Death’ touches upon the secret of *Kathopanishad* which talks about what happens after death. One of the two things can happen: if we think we are the Body and Mind as a doer, we are reborn, but if we realize that we are the Soul and not the body and mind, we are liberated to eternal joy and peace.



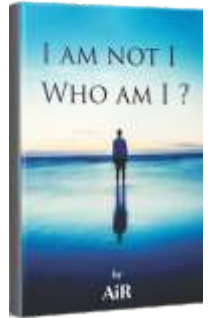
6. I Am Not I. Who am I?

This is an insightful book by AiR which talks of his quest and realization that we are not who we think we are. We

have a house but we are not the house. We have a car but we are not the car. Similarly, we have a body but we are not the body. Then, who are we?

7. The Mind is a Rascal

Can you believe that the mind is a rascal? You always thought that the mind is king—it is everything. But just try this. Sit quietly for an hour, and try to find the mind. Where is it? You will realize that the mind doesn't exist. This amazing book by AiR will teach us that the mind is our enemy. It is the one that makes us suffer. It is time to find the rascal and kill it. How do we do this—is revealed in the book.



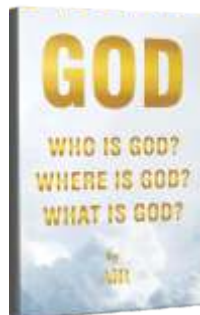
8. A Cosmic Drama

This book challenges the reader to explore the illusory nature of this world—whatever is happening in life is not real; it is nothing but a Cosmic Drama. If we understand this simple truth, we can enjoy the show called life.



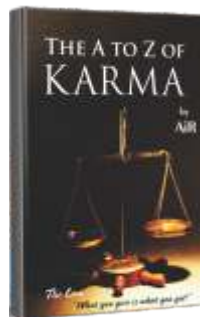
9. Who is God? Where is God? What is God?

Well, this might seem to be a simple set of questions but nobody really knows the answers. We all know that God exists. We pray to a God as per our Religion but what is the Truth about God? Has anybody seen God? Where is God? This simple book will change your perception and belief about God and bring you closer to the Power called God. It will help you realize God.



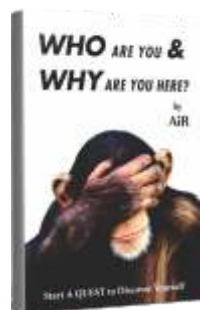
10. The A to Z of Karma

Most people are aware of the concept of Karma – the Universal Law that states, “What you give is what you get.” But not everybody knows the A to Z of Karma that we can actually transcend Karma, escape from it and achieve Liberation or Moksha. This book reveals the secret of eternal Joy and Peace—a life without any misery or suffering.



11. Who Are You and Why are You Here?

This is a simple book that prompts us to ask the right questions to discover the secret of our



life – who we are in reality and what the purpose of our life is. The answers to these questions hold the key to a purposeful, meaningful and blissful life.

12. The 4th Factor

Man thinks that his Karma controls everything and he can achieve anything through his efforts, equipment, and the method of his actions. But he is ignorant about something which is more powerful than Karma – the 4th factor. This is an informative book that makes the readers understand why things happen the way they happen and even if ten people use the same equipment and perform the same action, still, they never produce the same results, because apart from their own action, each person seems to be graced with another factor – the 4th factor that is beyond human comprehension and without its consent even the possible becomes impossible.



13. Be Happy in the NOW!

Every human being on earth wants to be happy. There is nobody who enjoys pain. People want to achieve Happiness but they fail



to realize that Happiness is the journey itself, not the destination. Then, what is the secret of eternal Joy, Bliss, and Peace? It is being Happy in the NOW. With this book, AiR hopes to inspire people to live life moment by moment, if they really want to be Happy.

14. Questions You Must Answer before you Die!

Most of us live and die but we don't ask the question—Why? We just exist! This book presents a series of important questions with answers that can guide us to the realization of the Truth and help us live with meaning, purpose, and joy.



15. Suffer No More

‘Suffer No More’ is a personal experience of overcoming anguish, anxiety, distress, and grief. It is an analysis of suffering, what causes it and how we can overcome it. While there is pain, we can do away with suffering. This book will tell us how!



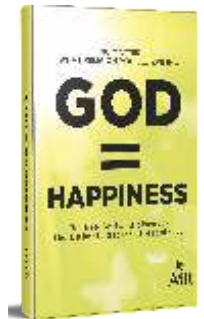
16. Success is not Happiness, Happiness is Success

People want to win because this makes them Happy, just as failure makes them miserable. This book explains how success does not bring happiness and how this belief is only an illusion. In fact, instead of chasing success, we should try to be happy! That is true success.



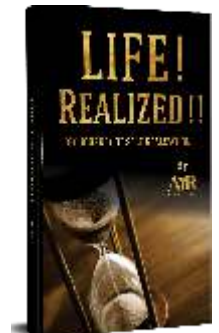
17. God = Happiness

In his quest to discover Truth and the purpose of life, the author realized that people didn't know where exactly to search for Happiness. This is a book that takes us far beyond religion to Realize the Truth about God and how God is Happiness.



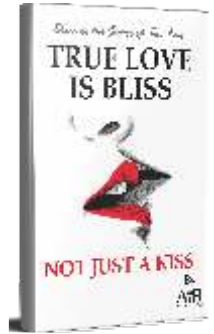
18. Life! Realized!!

This book is a personal reflection of the author on his several realizations about everything that matters in the journey of life—the realizations that he attained while on his quest for the Truth.



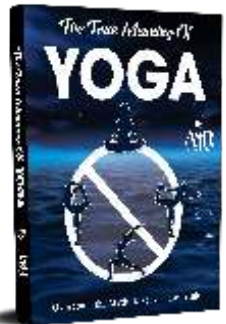
19. True Love is Bliss...Not Just a Kiss

It is sad that love which is the source of joy and happiness is not understood by the world. This book is an attempt to explore True Love that is beyond passion, romance, and kisses. True Love is White Divine Love from the Soul that manifests as the 7 colours of human love from the day we are born till the day we die.



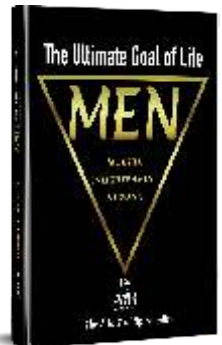
20. True Meaning of Yoga

Yoga, today, is primarily taught as a set of body postures and breathing exercises. But this is not true Yoga! Yoga, in reality, is a Union with the Divine. This book attempts to explain everything about Yoga, its meaning and significance, how it must be practised and how through Yoga, one can be liberated and experience Ultimate Divine Peace and Bliss.



21. The Ultimate Goal of Life, MEN – Moksha, Enlightenment, Nirvana

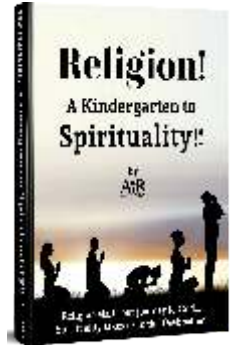
The three most tenable concepts—Moksha, Enlightenment, Nirvana are discussed in this



book that can help us reach our Ultimate Goal of Liberation and then Unification with the Divine.

22. Religion! A Kindergarten to Spirituality!!

This book discusses how Religion is only the first step towards God-Realization. We do not realize that Religion is only a Kindergarten, of which Spirituality is the University, and together they can lead us to God-realization.



23. Why Bad Things Can't Happen to Good People!

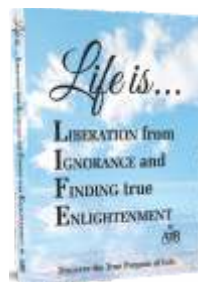
This book helps us understand that this world has been created by the Divine and it operates through certain Universal Laws that need no intervention by the Creator. Bad things can never happen to good people, just as apples can't grow on mango trees!



24. LIFE is...Liberation from Ignorance and Finding true Enlightenment

What is Life all about? Most people exist but they don't truly live. They just zoom from womb to tomb, and then life

is over. They don't stop to think about their life's true purpose. In the pursuit of happiness, success, and achievement, people don't realize that though they may gain a lot of these, they lose their most precious gift – life itself.



25. The Ladder to Heaven

While we pray to God calling God by different names, the vast majority of humanity believes in God and aspires to go to their God in heaven one day. It doesn't matter what our religion is, there is a way to reach God. There is a Ladder that can take us to heaven but we need to ascend the rungs of belief, prayer, faith, hope, trust and so on. This book is an effort to help genuine seekers of God to climb the Ladder to Heaven. It shows a step by step way to God-realization as we pass through self-realization, overcoming the ignorance that we live in.



26. FEAR- False Expectations Appearing Real

Through this book, the author wishes to help people change their paradigm and live with courage – that they should take appropriate precautions and not panic. The world has changed because of Coronavirus! But it's up to us

to live with FEAR or to live with FAITH. There is a difference between Fear and Danger but most of humanity lives with the constant fear of disease and death. For the first time ever, all the countries of the world have closed their borders and shut down their economies. Facts confirm that when compared to the Spanish flu, it is not as fatal a pandemic as the world thinks it to be. This book F E A R, will help readers overcome these tough times of the global pandemic.



27. Soul – We don't have a Soul... we are the Soul!

The Soul is mysterious. We are alive because of our Soul. But what exactly is the Soul? Where does it come from and where does it go? We cannot see the Soul, but we all believe that we have one. People talk about 'good' or 'bad' Souls, ghosts – spirits of the dead, heaven – hell, and the reincarnation of the 'Souls'. This book will help the genuine seekers of the truth to do some Soul searching and discover the ultimate truth about our most important aspect – our very own Soul. We will realize that we don't have a Soul...we are the Soul!



BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR

And Now...

28. But We Pray

Coming Soon...

29. 100 Diamond Quotes

30. Let go of your EGO and you will find GOD

If you have any questions on happiness, suffering, success, life, rebirth, liberation or anything related to spirituality, you can visit Ask AiR, ask your questions and AiR will answer them.


Email: air@air.ind.in

 +91 98451 55555

Please visit the following link

www.air.ind.in/ask_air/



Visit  Google play or Scan the QR Code
to download the AiR - Atman in Ravi App.
www.air.ind.in | air@air.ind.in

A.i.R.
AiR Institute of Realization
Ask Investigate Realize

BUT WE PRAY

We pray, but do we really know to whom we are praying? We say things to God, but do we really understand what we are saying?

I too prayed for over 40 years, only to realize one day that I had not realized the truth about God. God is not the statue that we pray to nor is God a saint. God is a Power, a Universal Power.

And what about our prayers? We recite from scriptures, we chant *mantras* and sing devotional songs, yet we hardly understand the meaning of our prayers. When will we stop performing rituals and following superstitions that make no sense? When will we contemplate the truth about God?

While we don't know who God is, where God is, what God is, we are absolutely sure God is. It is essential to pray, to communicate with God, but should we not realize the truth about God and then pray? Should we not make our prayers effective so that our communication with God works?

This book will unlock the door to true prayer as it will help us realize God, not in some temple, mosque or church but as we search for the truth, we will realize God in the temple of our heart.

by
AiR
Atman in Ravi

A.i.R.

AiR Institute of Realization
Ask Investigate Realize

Kemp Fort Mall, #97, Old Airport Road, Bangalore - 560017

📍 +91 98451 55555 | www.air.ind.in | air@air.ind.in