PRAYER

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What is Prayer?

The word “prayer” has its origin in the roots viz preier, prior, procari, prex meaning to request (Quest=Longing)

The Sanskrit equivalent of prayer is Prathana has same meaning(Prakarshena Arthayate Yasyam Sa Prarthana) i.e.an intensive longing. Thus the concept of prayer cuts across the boundaries of Languages, Countries, religions etc. The most authoritative definition of prayer has come from Teresa of Avila, the 16th Century Spanish mystic:

“Prayer is an intimate friendship, a frequent conversation held alone with the Beloved i.e. God. “According to encyclopedia Britannica “Prayer is a Spiritual outburst in a desire to enter into contact with the sacred or holy.”

Prayer is nothing else but an intense longing of the heart. You may express yourself through the lips; you may express yourself in the private closet or in the public; but to be genuine, the expression must come from the deepest recesses of the heart.

There is an eternal struggle raging in man's breast between the powers of darkness and of light, and who has not the sheet-anchor of prayer to rely upon will be a victim to the powers of darkness.

Begin, therefore, your day with prayer, and make it so soulful that it may remain with you until the evening. Close the day with prayer so that you may have a peaceful night free from dreams and nightmares.

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Whether we engage in a formal religious practice or not, prayer is a vital aspect of a spiritual life. Recovering addicts are intimate with the Serenity Prayer, but many of us also recite other prayers or chants taken from our favourite spiritual texts. These are often said out loud in groups, whether at meetings or places of worship. However, the spontaneous talks we have with our higher power when alone are often the most beneficial types of prayers for our spiritual evolution.

There are several different types of prayers we can use to strengthen the spirit during hard times. Prayers of thanksgiving are those in which we express gratitude for our blessings. Giving thanks is a great way to start off the day as well as gain a shift in perspective when we feel as if nothing is going our way. Prayers of petition, in which we ask for divine help and guidance, are also common. Once we ask for what we want, we can engage in receptive prayer, in which we sit back and accept what happens to us. We may not get exactly what we asked for, but we can bathe in the divine presence of our loving higher power, feeling peaceful and trusting that we will receive

exactly what we need for our growth and development. In this receptive, meditative state, we are also more open to seeing new ways of solving our problems.

Rational of Prayer:

Man has been endowed by nature with an ability to achieve whatever he wishes. Gita says: “Yat shradhah Sa eve sah” i.e. you will become the one, you long for sincerely. We know an old adage - “Man is what he thinks” Bible speaks of the same things: “Ask and it shall be given unto you Seek, and ye shall find, Knock, and it shall be opened unto you (*Math. 77 and Luke 11.9, The Bible*)

Prayer Brings out inherent and dormant spiritual powers of man. No wonder, when prayer becomes dominating and manipulative in its intent, it becomes magic. On the other hand a tremendous power of Godiness will be at your be at your disposal when you prepare yourself for the same, by surrendering yourself to God. Gita has the message of “Uddharet Atmana Atmanam” i.e. “uplift (improve) your self all by yourself”. Man should realize that he is master of all power and that theses powers should be utilized for divine purposes only. Prayer, therefore, is not begging, but the way to invoke one's own powers for the divine purpose. Surely, “God helps those who help themselves”.

Ways/ Methods Used in Prayers:

I. Petition:

- The great Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore writes “Grant me O'Lord, the courage to withstand sorrow and affliction in life.”
- “Swasti Pantham Anucharema Suryachandramasaviva”
(*O'God, endowe us with grace so that we should tread the path of welfare, just like the moon and the sun.*)

Teacher and taught pray together:

Om Sahanavavatu	Let (God) protect both of us together.
Sahanau bhunaktu	Let (God) save both of us together.
Sahaviryam Karvavahai	Let both of us put our efforts together.
Tejasvinavadhitamastu	Let the learning of us both, be eluminous.
Ma Vidvishavahai	Let us not nurture antipathy towards each other.
Asato ma Sadgamaya	Lead me O'God From falsehood to the truth.
Tamaso ma Jyotirgamaya	Lead me O'God from the darkness to the light.
Mrityorma amritam gamaya	Lead me O'God from death to immortality.

II. Confession:

Affirmation of faith accepting one's short coming and undesirable acts in front of God.

This form of prayer is prevalent in major religions e.g. Jüdaism, Christianity Hinduism and Buddhism. Buddhism monks confess their, undesirable doing in front of public congregation two times every month.

III. Intercession:

Prayer for others, from Moses to God: “Pardon your people or remove me from the book of life.” Christ to God: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Saint Augustine did the same thing. Mahatma Gandhi in his last moments of life, “O God, forgive my killer.”

IV. *Praise and Thanks Giving:*

Pigmies of Africa: “Waka (God) you gave me this buffalo, this honey, this wine.” Meal-time prayer in many people are liked with the giving of an offering. In almost all religious this from of prayer is seen. Pranava Japa (Om Recitation) and stotras are nothing but the praise of the almighty.

V. *Ecstasy:*

In some religious sects the devotees sing and dance until they experience a “Divine Ecstasy.”

VI. *Adoration:*

In *Islam* simply adoration is emphasized. In sufi sect adoration of and conversation with Allah (God) is prevalent.

VII. *Invocation of Divinity:*

Oh God full of so many qualities, please do enter into my heart just like the cows entering the lush grass meadow.--*Rig Veda*

Psychology of prayer: altruism, compassion etc. Bring in man a peculiar kind of satisfaction and happiness. Also, the sublimity of nature invokes feeling of appreciation which in turn brings a feeling of inner blissfulness in us. This might have created an urge for greater blissfulness in primitive man (as we know that prayer has been prevalent from time immemorial) and thus prayers might have taken root in the human mind.

Ordinary man, however, inclines towards prayer because of 1. Fear of dangers 2. Fear of death 3. Fear of insecurity 4. intellectual curiosity 5. Limitations of his abilities etc.

Types of Prayer:

- I.** Personal: For personal gains and Personal Security.
- II.** Impersonal: Pure form of Prayer for common good with self-less ness.
- III.** Collective: Group prayer, mass in a church, Namaj in a mosque, Congregation at temples, or at places of pilgrim importance.

All types of prayer are normally in the following levels.

- I.** Daily
- II.** Occasion bound
- III.** Desire fulfilment
- IV.** Out of repentance

Benefits of Prayer:

- I.** It purifies heart In prayer, unknowingly we entertain serene and virtuous thought only. Constant thinking of noble thought may transform our thought in a positive direction.
- II.** In initial stages of prayer, repressed thoughts, wishes and emotions may come to the surface of the mind. These may find their way out gradually, cleansing our mind in the process. Prayer thus opens the gate of Mental Health.

- III.** In prayer we evoke, within us, vastness of thoughts and think of noble deeds. In process, we either postpone baser feelings or not nurture them out of proportion. We can even be totally free baser feelings, as our attention is towards prayer almost all the time.
- IV.** It makes way for Newer Learning in life. Since you slowly unlearn undesirable impressions.(thus) you prepare your mind to accept new things. In other words flexibility, in general approach of mind, starts emerging from within.
- V.** It brings power of concentration most easiest and natural way.
- VI.** Prayer brings about both chitta shuddhi and prana shuddhi: Thoughts (i.e. modifications of mind) and emotions are managed in a most natural way. As a result Manomaya Kosha is managed properly. This leads to proper functioning of body activities, because of which movement of prana within the body starts functioning in a normal way.
- VII.** In Gita, the religious scripture of Indian origin, the Bhakti Yoga (i.e. Devotional way of yoga sadhana) is considered most easy and effective way of all other ways (of yoga Sadhana). Truly, Prayer is most natural, spontaneous and effective way available to the common man to achieve Mental Health. Integration of personality and self realization can be achieved in due course of time, through prayer.
- VIII.** The benefits of prayer in recovery cannot be overstated. Connecting with spirit helps us feel less alone in the world, and prayers of gratitude remind us of the blessings we have gained by getting sober. When our emotions are all over the place, prayer can relieve stress and take us back to a calm, centred emotional state. Also, one of the best ways to learn humility is to get on our knees and pray often.

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