

THE LORD'S PRAYER

by
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(Source: Vedanta and the West, March/April 1953)

Perhaps most people repeat the Lord's Prayer every day of their lives, but this prayer is not as simple as it appears to be. It is aphoristic, and if we take it literally, we do not get its significance. It has such deep meaning behind it that it can be understood only by those who practice spiritual disciplines, Christ therefore taught the Lord's Prayer to a select few, his intimate disciples, who already knew the methods of prayer and meditation. As the disciples heard the prayer, it reminded them step by step of the discipline.

The Lord's Prayer begins: '**OUR FATHER**'.— When we come to the teachings of Christ, we find that he emphasised bhakti yoga, the path of devotion, The impersonal God is too much of an abstraction to be loved, so Christ taught his disciples to worship God as a personal being. He reiterated the first commandment of the Jews: "Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind and wil all thy might". In order that we can love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, we have to consider him as our very own. And in order that we can consider him as our very own we have to enter into a relationship with him. Now this idea of entering into a relationship with God has a deep philosophical implication. In every human heart there is the desire to love and be loved, and we try to fulfil that desire in our human relationships. We want the love of a father, a friend, a sweetheart, but it is really a desire for God and nothing else. That is why ultimately in our human relationships we feel lonesome, in spite of all kinds of love we may have because

we are hugging the shadows.

The great sage Yagnavalkya truly taught his wife Maitreyi: "The husband loves the wife, not for the sake of the wife, but for the sake of the Self, God, that is in the wife. The wife loves the husband not for the sake of the husband, but for the sake of the Self. The son loves the father and the father loves the son, not for the sake of the father or for the sake of the son, but for the sake of the Self". That is the truth we have to recognize. That great love attracts us, but we misread it. And to read that love truly, and to find fulfilments of the desire for love which is within each human heart, is to turn that love towards God, who is love. As there are expressions of love on the human plane, the same expressions of love exist on the divine plane - the love of a child for his father or mother, or of a servant for his master, or of friends, or the affection of a father or mother for the son, or the sweet relationship between husband and wife. Now we find this same idea of different relationships not only in the teachings of the great devotees of India, but also in the teachings of this great devotee Christ. In this Prayer he teaches us to regard God as our father. As soon as we take this relationship, the awe which separates us is gone. There is no longer the thought that God is great, that he is the creator of this universe. His creation and his glories do not mean anything to him. In ignorance we are caught by the glamour of the creation and we forget the creator. We must approach God in a simple manner because again, he is simple. Let us regard him as our own father, immediately there is an intimate relationship. In a simple manner we come into our Father's presence. The father loves the son; the son may be wayward, but the father does not discard him. He continues to love his son. In the same way whatever we may be, God continues to love and attract us. And that is what Christ

teaches when he utters these two words "Our Father".

"WHICH ART",— What proofs are there for God? You find philosophers, theologians and scientists giving proofs for the existence of God. On the other hand after you have read all the proofs for the existence of God, you can discard all their logic and arguments by a different logic. Why is it not possible to prove the existence of God by logical reason? Because before you can prove anything you have to exist. You do not need any logic to prove your own existence, and your true being, your self, is no other than God.

When you come to a Christ, or any God-Man, the question whether God exists or not does not arise; in his presence all doubts cease. I know from my own experience with holy men that not only could you feel the presence of God in such an atmosphere, but you felt that God could be realised easily, that he was like a fruit in the palm of your hand. In the presence of such illumined souls, who have known and realised God, who have reached their union with God, you feel that "which art".

The real proof is not to be had from the scriptures, scriptural authorities, or even from the lips of the teacher. The philosophy of Vedanta has always insisted that God is not an idea, not a conception, but that he is the Reality. He is realizable, and when you realise that truth, when you see that Reality, then you have the real proof. In the Upanishads the great sage says: "I have known that reality, I have gone beyond darkness. You also, having known that truth, go beyond darkness and attain to immortality."

"IN HEAVEN".— Where do we find God? Where is heaven? Each individual carries both heaven and earth within him. What is earth? Earth is experience of name and form. We are within ignorance, and in ignorance we see this world appear-

ance, within the bounds of time, space and causation. Psychologically it has been pointed out how the Self within, that pure consciousness, is covered by ignorance. What is this ignorance? It is the sense of ego, the sense of individuality or separateness, arising from the identification of the Self with the body, mind, or senses. This ignorance has two aspects: it covers the Reality, and it creates something new. So through ignorance the heaven within, the divine Self, remains hidden and there is created instead an earth - a false self - and thus do we experience through the senses this world appearance.

How can we find heaven? Let us look to the teachings of Jesus. "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God". One has to be born in spirit, The moment you are born in spirit you have entered heaven, and there God is. Buddha calls this "awakening". He compares earth and heaven, samsara and nirvana, to sleep and awakening. In the Upanishads we find more psychological detail about that. We read that there are three states of consciousness, waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep. Normally, man dwells within these three states, but there is "turiya", the Fourth. The three states can be likened to the state of sleep compared to that awakening, that turiya, which is the state of transcendental consciousness. In every individual there is the capacity to be awakened into "turiya". Transcend the limits of the mind, senses, and body, reach the pure consciousness within, and you are born in spirit and have found heaven.

'HALLOWED BE THY NAME'.— There arises a question in the heart of every spiritual aspirant: "I have not seen God. How can I love him?" And the answer has been given. There is a bridge between the known and the unknown, and in philosophical language this bridge has been called the Logos by the Greeks, the Word by St. John, and the Sphota by the Hindus. In the Gospel according to St. John we read: "In the

beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God". In the Vedas we read: "In the beginning was Brahman (God) . His second was Word. Word is Brahman.". In every religion we find a great emphasis laid upon this medium, the Logos that is one with God. According to yoga psychology the very repetition of the holy name of the Lord leads to illumination. It bridges the chasm between our sense-universe and the divine beyond.

What the Hindus call Japam, chanting the name of the Lord, is a great spiritual discipline in itself.. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that the holy name is like a rope; hold fast to it, and it will take you to God. With the help of the rope, which is something definite and concrete, we reach the eternal, inexpressible Reality.

"THY KINGDOM COME".— Christ teaches a great secret here. As you go to pray and meditate, you must try to feel, even in your ignorance, that "Thy kingdom come". In other words feel the presence of God everywhere. It is the universal truth that God is, and if he is, he must be omnipresent. In the Upanisads we read, "Brahman is before, Brahman is behind, Brahman extends to the right, Brahman extends to the left, Brahman is above, Brahman is below, Brahman is all, and Brahman is supreme." Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "When you pray to Father, 'O Father, come unto me', you have not yet begun to pray. And the great seer-philosopher Shankara pointed out that "Our perception of the universe is a continuous perception of Brahman, though the ignorant is not aware of this." Indeed the universe is nothing but Brahman. With physical eyes we see only a physical universe, Transform your physical eyes into the eyes of the spirit, and with a tranquil heart see God everywhere. We live, move, and have our being in him every moment. At least when we go to pray and meditate, let us try to recognise this truth and

feel his living presence. Realise in your heart of hearts: "Thy kingdom come".

There is a spiritual discipline in Hindu ritualistic worship called the purification of the elements. The principle is that as you sit for worship, you try to feel that the whole universe and with it your body, your mind, your senses, your intellect, and your ego are gradually dissolved into the final cause, And that final cause is God. Again try to feel that out of him comes this whole universe; you are getting, as it were, a new body, a new mind, new senses, and a new universe. And you and the whole universe are pure consciousness; everything is made of spirit. You are God and you are worshipping God. This is what Christ refers to when he says, "Thy kingdom come".

"THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN".— At the moment when you see God everywhere, earth and heaven have become united, earth has been transformed into heaven, and it is His will that is done.

One can really do the will of God only after one has known him. We forget that. My master told me once that he was always guided by the will of God. I questioned him: "Do you do the will of God as I may think or feel that I am doing his will, when actually I am only following my own inclinations and attributing them to God's will?" He said, "No, it is not the same". Then I asked: "Do you see him and then he tells you what to do?" He answered: "Yes, I see him, I talk to him. That is how I know what he wills". And that is how anyone can do the will of God. When the ego, when the desires and cravings are completely wiped out, then only the will of God reflects upon you.

"GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD".— This daily bread is divine grace. Our master taught us: "There is the grace of God, pray that that grace may be revealed to you'. And Christ says: "Give us this day our daily bread". May that grace be revealed unto me, not tomorrow, not after this body is gone, but this moment. It is a great truth to learn that God may be revealed to us at any time, That grace is there; at any moment the screen covering it may be removed. Most of us think that we are weak and impure, that we have to acquire certain merits, that we have to pray and purify ourselves, that we have to be worthy of God, and then alone God can be revealed to us. But it is not possible for a human being through any effort to deserve the grace of God. Does this mean we should not make any self-effort? No, self-effort and spiritual disciplines are necessary in order that we may know and believe in his grace.

My master often repeated a saying: "There is the grace of God, there is the grace of the Guru, there is the grace of the devotee of God, but for the grace of one a man may be ruined. What is the grace of the one? The grace of our own mind". Self-effort is the grace of our own mind.

In the words of Sri Ramakrishna: "The breeze of grace is always blowing. Set your sail to catch that breeze." In your prayer and meditation you must be ready at every moment to have the revelation of God's grace, but at the same time persevere, have patience, and you are sure to attain that revelation.

"AND FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS".— This is a reference to what the Hindus and Buddhists call the law of Karma. This law of cause and effect teaches us that so long as we live within Karma there is no freedom. Within the law of Karma, the realm of the relative,

there is both good and evil, and we are always making debts. These debts really cannot be paid back. We need forgiveness, nothing else. Karma is finished when we attain illumination. In other words, it is the knowledge of God, the absolute, that gives us freedom from the law of Karma. So the Lord's Prayer says: "Forgive us our debts". May we not become entangled in more Karma.

Does this mean that we should give up work? No, but let us learn to act, not to pay debt to Karma, but as worship to God. When our work is worship, we are no longer within the bounds of karma.

"AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL".— It is difficult to understand how God can lead us into temptation. But is not this whole creation a temptation? In the story of the garden of Eden we read that Adam was made in the image of God. He was warned not to eat of the fruit of one tree. But he did not heed the warning, and as he ate of the fruit he saw both good and evil. What does that imply? This creation is really God; but we do not see God, we see the creation as this mental or physical universe because Adam, that God within us, has fallen, as it were, and been caught up in the sense of ego. The shadow we hug as ourselves is the ego, and with this ego we see and enjoy this manifest universe through the doors of the senses. So the Lord's Prayer says: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil". Deliver us from the evil of both good and evil, which may sound paradoxical. In this relative world there is good and there is evil, and as such, the world is evil because good is only temporary. It is but another side of the same page; when you take one, you must take the other.

There is a beautiful verse in the Bhagavad Gita which explains this prayer, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver

us from evil". Sri Krishna says; "How hard to break through this my maya, made of the gunas. But he who takes refuge in me only shall pass beyond maya". This maya is the creation, and we are caught up in it. Sri Ramakrishna used to say. "People love this creation. They do not inquire into the creator. They are caught up in his creation". If only we break through this maya, we shall find God, we shall find that bliss and that freedom. The ego, which has caused this creation, in a sense, will disappear, and we shall see God playing everywhere, if only we can take our refuge in him. Then what will be our experience? – "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen."



See: THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT
ACCORDING TO VEDANTA
by the same author.



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